

**Change of use of part of existing horticultural nursery to the
storage of caravans**

Castleview Nursery, Old Mead Road, Littlehampton

Mr M Amirpashaie

Planning Statement

Ref HAPL1019 / March 2015

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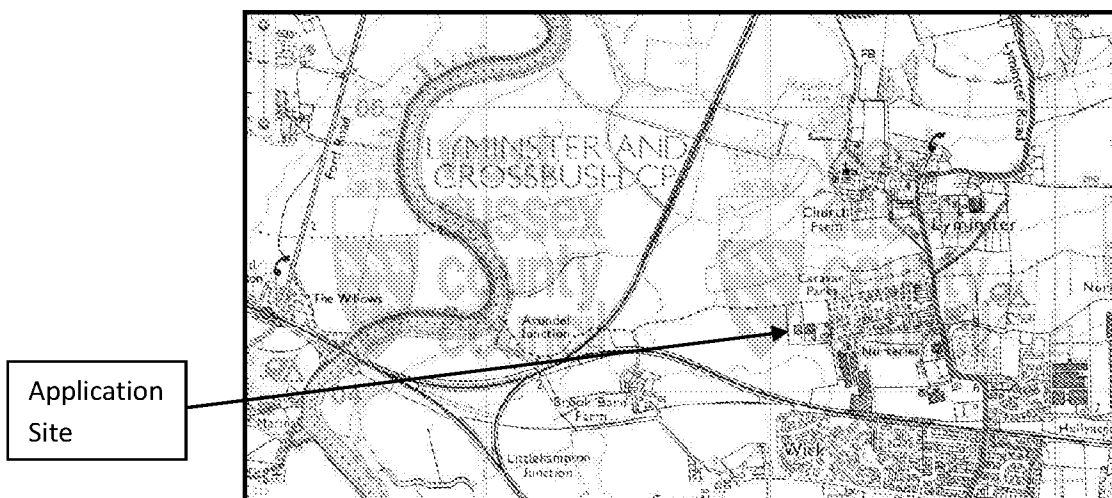
1. Background

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared on behalf of our client Mr Amirpashaie to accompany this planning application for the change of use of land from agriculture/horticulture to the storage of caravans.
- 1.2 Planning permission was previously refused in 2009 for this development. As the application was retrospective at that time, the Local Planning Authority served an enforcement notice and the subsequent appeal against the notice was dismissed. The enforcement notice was complied with and whilst the glasshouse on the site has continued to be used for horticultural purposes, the land the subject of the enforcement notice has remained unused as it is not suitable for any sort of agricultural/horticultural use.
- 1.3 Since the appeal decision there has been material changes in circumstances on the site to the extent that it is considered that the concerns of the Inspector in reaching his decision can be overcome. This application therefore seeks to address the comments in the decision letter and demonstrates that this is now a suitable site for the storage of caravans.

2. The Site and its Surroundings

- 2.1 The application site forms part of Castlevew Nursery which is situated at the western end of Old Mead Road. The nursery comprises a glasshouse approximately 20 metres by 30 metres in extent located close to the eastern boundary with open and unused land to the north, south and west. The application site comprises approximately 0.17 hectares of this land located to the south of the glasshouse and is largely hard surfaced. The site is served by a private access drive from Old Mead Road with entrance gates into the south east corner of the holding.

- 2.2 To the south and west of the application site the land is open land in agricultural use and it is understood that it, along with the application site, was formerly a landfill site. To the east is Glenvilla Nursery separated from the application site by means of a pollarded row of fir trees.
- 2.3 Further to the east is a residential property known as The Bungalow and beyond this to the north side of Old Mead Road, there is a residential caravan park and housing. To the south of Old Mead Road the land was in former use as horticultural nurseries which for the most part have now ceased and the land has become abandoned.
- 2.4 The southern and western boundaries of the application site are defined by wire fencing and a row of leylandii trees which have grown significantly over the last few years and now provide an effective screen around the site.
- 2.5 To the north and west of the site is the Arun Valley beyond which Arundel can be seen in the distance. There are no views of the application site in the context of the setting of Arundel as there are no footpaths located south of the site. In fact, the only public footpaths in the vicinity of the site are to the north in Lyminster and to the west being along the west bank of the River Arun some 650 metres away.



3. The Application Proposal

- 3.1 The application proposes the use of part of the land at the nursery for the storage of caravans. The site lends itself to this particular use as it is mostly hard surfaced and being of poor grade the land is unsuitable for any other agricultural use. No permanent works are required to accommodate the caravans and therefore the use is one which would not have any permanent impact on the landscape should it cease in the future. It is anticipated that the site could accommodate up to 30 caravans for longer-term storage.
- 3.2 The applicant has owned the land since July 2002. The applicant ran the site as a commercial nursery producing bedding plants, shrubs and hanging baskets. Profit and Loss Accounts exist for the years 2003-2006 during which only two years were in profit (a maximum of £2,429) and two years were in loss (maximum of £1,124). These figures do not include the build costs of the glass house of around £15,000 and the initial purchase of the land which were funded by the applicant. Whilst planning permission had been granted for a larger glass house on the holding the business did not justify the additional cost involved and the scale of the operation would still not be sufficient to compete with much larger growers in the vicinity. The applicant decided therefore to cease trading.
- 3.3 The applicant did not have a wish to see the glass house falling into disrepair and become unsightly and therefore he decided to rent it out at a nominal rent of £200 per month plus £20 for electricity and water as there is little profit to be made from the horticultural use. This barely covers the costs particularly as the applicant carries out all the maintenance. The building has been rented out to an individual growing shrubs on a commercial basis supplemental to their business situated elsewhere.
- 3.4 The storage of caravans which took place from around 2009 and was the subject of the Enforcement Notice was therefore an important income stream from the land. It is for this reason that the applicant wants the proposal reconsidered particularly given the screening of the site which has now grown up and the justification for

supporting the limited horticultural use of the land which is capable of being carried out on this site.

4. Planning Policy

- 4.1 Since the appeal decision the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has been published which sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. Paragraph 28 deals with supporting a prosperous rural economy and states that to promote a strong rural economy, local and neighbourhood plans should, amongst other matters, promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses. This reflects the Government's intention to achieve sustainable development which includes the three dimensions of economic, social and environmental roles. Paragraph 8 acknowledges that these roles should not be undertaken in isolation because they are mutually dependent. Economic growth can secure higher social and environmental standards. It is submitted that this proposal can be seen as meeting this objective provided there is no harm to the character of the area.
- 4.2 Local development plan policies are contained within the Arun District Local Plan 2003. Saved policy GEN2 deals with the built up area boundaries and states that outside such areas development will not be permitted unless it is consistent with other local plan policies. Policy GEN3 sets out the criteria against which new development in the countryside will be assessed and confirms that development will not be permitted unless it complies with one of the five criteria specified. Criterion (iii) relates to diversification of the rural economy which confirms that development which supports existing rural businesses can be acceptable in countryside locations.
- 4.3 On the proposals map the site is located within Area 3: the setting of Arundel and Area 10: strategic gaps. With regard to the setting of Arundel, Policy Area 3 does not permit development which would adversely affect the use of Arundel or its special setting. In particular, development will not be permitted which would adversely affect the long distance views of Arundel Castle or Arundel Cathedral. The site is located

close to the eastern edge of Area 3 close to existing development in and around Old Mead Road. The setting of Arundel can only be affected by any caravan storage on this site if viewed from further south. Within Area 3, there are no public footpaths to the south of the application site and the only public views will be from the railway line. Views from this direction are, however, obscured by the landscaping which has grown up around the southern boundary of the site and therefore there would be no conflict with Policy Area 3. Furthermore the site is now also screened from the west and any distant views from the public footpath on the west side of the River Arun. Moreover the proposed development would be located at the western end of Old Mead Road where there is a significant amount of built development including an existing caravan park and the site is not visually isolated in this respect.

4.4 With regard to strategic gaps, Policy Area 10 seeks to prevent coalescence and retain the separate identity and amenity of settlements. It requires development to be consistent with other policies of the development plan to not compromise the objectives and fundamental integrity of the gap and the long-term enhancement of the landscape, amenity and conservation value within the gap. It is submitted therefore that the gap policy does not preclude development provided it is compliant with other policies and does not undermine the gap. It has been demonstrated above, that the proposal represents diversification of an existing rural business and given its particular location on the eastern edge of the gap close to existing built development, the proposal would not undermine the purpose of Policy Area 10.

4.5 The Arun District Local Plan 2011-2031 was submitted to the Secretary of State in January 2015. The emerging policies are similar to the current saved policies insofar as the application site falls within an area designated for the setting of Arundel and the Arundel to Littlehampton Gap which is no longer referred to as a strategic gap.

5. Planning Assessment

5.1 It is considered that the main issue in this case is whether there have been material changes in circumstances on the site or its surroundings or in planning policy that

would justify a decision at variance with the appeal decision in October 2010. In that decision, the Inspector identified the effect of the use on the character and appearance of the area as the main issue for determination.

- 5.2 With particular regard to the landscape impact, the Inspector stated that the caravans were highly visible from the railway line, the public footpath and the end of Old Mead Road. It is these views that the Inspector considered would result in an adverse impact on the landscape thereby affecting the views of Arundel and the strategic gap. Since that time however the landscaping has reached an effective height and screen the site from both the railway line and the public footpath to the west of the River Arun. The views from the end of Old Mead Road are not public views as it is a private access road at the entrance to the site and in any event, from this location any development on the site appears as an extension to the ribbon development along the north side of Old Mead Road including an existing mobile home park.
- 5.3 It is further noted that an application for a solar energy park including the installation of solar panels, security fencing, transformer housing, access under the associated works has been submitted on the adjoining land. This site is also located within the gap and Area 3 which seeks to protect the setting of Arundel Castle. It is noted that no statutory consultees have objected to this proposal on landscape impact grounds and the proposal will incorporate additional landscaping which will enhance the landscape setting of the locality. Furthermore, if permitted, the application site will be bounded by development and could not be seen as an isolated form of development.
- 5.4 In paragraph 6 of the Inspector's decision letter, the Inspector comments that he did not have the information on the economic benefit of the caravan storage and as such he gives the landscape impact of the proposal more weight. We have now however provided more information demonstrating the small profit in only two of the four operating years that the nursery generated. Given the small scale of the glass house it is readily apparent that margins will be tight on any growing enterprise and as such, to maintain some sort of use and maintenance of the building it is rented out for only a nominal rent. The remaining land cannot be put into productive use given the

amount of hard standing and the poor quality of the land and therefore the storage provides a level of income from the land. This enables the applicant to allow the low key horticultural use be maintained which at least has some economic benefit to the occupiers and is an appropriate rural activity. It is submitted that this new information weighs in favour of the development and helps offset any visual harm arising from the proposal.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 It is therefore concluded that there has been material change in circumstances since the appeal decision in 2010 which now justifies approval of the application. The landscaping around the site has grown up shielding it from the views referred to by the Inspector particularly from the south and west. It is has also now been demonstrated that this use will provide an income from the land which can be used for very little else and enables the applicant to rent out the existing glass house to keep it in productive use as otherwise it would fall into disrepair.
- 6.2 It is submitted therefore that the proposal no longer conflicts with policies Area 3 and Area 10 of the Local Plan. Furthermore, if permitted, the solar park will result in additional landscaping to the south-west of the application site and form development further into the strategic gap than the application site currently proposes.
- 6.3 In all these circumstances it is therefore considered that approval is now justified and planning permission is requested on this basis.