

Change of use of land to the storage of caravans/motor homes; creation of associated hardstanding by the importation of material; siting of four no. self-storage containers and use of part of site for storage of scaffolding materials (retrospective)

Castleview Nursery, Old Mead Road, Littlehampton

Mr M Amirpashaie

Planning Statement

Ref HAPL1019 / July 2017

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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 to the storage of caravans/motor homes; creation of associated hardstanding by the importation of material; siting of four no. self-storage containers and use of part of site for storage of scaffolding materials. The application seeks retrospective permission for the work which has been undertaken and has been requested by the Local Planning Authority.
- 1.2 Planning permission was originally granted in 2015 for the change of use of part of the existing nursery to the storage of caravans and/or motorhomes (LU/105/15). In considering that application, the Planning Officer reported to the Planning Committee that the proposed use would have little if any visual impact and the proposal would be consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework as it would support a prosperous rural economy and promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. The planning permission subsequently granted restricted the site to the storage of no more than 30 caravans and/or motorhomes.
- 1.3 Planning permission was then granted for an agricultural storage building and propagation unit to serve the ongoing nursery use which was taking place within the existing glasshouse on the site (LU/47/16).
- 1.4 Planning permission was granted in 2016 for the change of use of additional land from agriculture/horticulture to the storage of caravans/motorhomes and restricted the total number of caravans/motor homes on the site to 60. It is also granted permission to site a Portakabin for use as a site office and for security (LU/141/16).
- 1.5 The applicant has since increased the number of caravans/motor homes stored to around 90 which has included using land to the north of the approved area. To allow this change of use to occur, the land was levelled using a layer of clean hard core finished with road planings to provide a suitable surface to drive over. The topographical survey accompanying his application demonstrates that the land has been finished to a level surface

across the site to suit the intended use and has not been imported for any kind of waste operation or land raising exercise.

- 1.6 In response to enquiries by third parties, the applicant has sited four no. containers for use as self-storage. These are in place of four of the caravan storage pitches. A small area in the north-west corner of the site has been let to a scaffolding company for the storage of their scaffolding poles and equipment. The location of the various uses on the site is shown on the submitted site plan.

2. The Site and its Surroundings

- 2.1 The application site forms part of Castlevue Nursery which is situated at the western end of Old Mead Road. The land contains a glasshouse approximately 20 metres by 30 metres in extent located close to the eastern boundary. The caravan/motor home storage for which planning permission has already been granted takes place on land to the south and west of the glasshouse, extending northwards beyond the northern boundary of the building. The site is served by a private access drive from Old Mead Road with entrance gates in the south-east corner of the holding.
- 2.2 To the south and west of the nursery site a solar park has been constructed on land which was formerly landfill. To the east is Glenvilla Nursery separated from the application site along part of its boundary by means of a pollarded row of fir trees and the remainder by a trellis style fence.
- 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 for which for the most part have now ceased and the land has become abandoned.
- 2.4 The southern and western boundaries of the nursery 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. The northern boundary has been fenced with trellis style fencing and planting has

taken place on the outside which will further filter view and soften the rural edge.

- 2.5 Beyond the new fence a ditch marks the boundary of the applicant's land and to the north lies the Arun Valley with Arundel visible 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 seeks the regularisation of the following matters:

- The extension of the caravan/motor home storage area northwards from the boundary of that approved under the previous application LU/141/16 to allow for the storage of around an additional 30 caravans/motor homes.
- The formation of the hardstanding which has been formed to level the site and provide a suitable surface for the storage use.
- The use of a small area of land in the north-west corner of the site for the storage of scaffolding equipment.
- The siting of four no. containers for individual self-storage. One is sited on the extended area the subject of this application whilst the remaining three are on the part of the site where planning permission exists for caravan/motor home storage.

- 3.2 As mentioned in previous applications, the applicant has owned the land since July 2002 and has tried to maintain a horticultural use of the holding which has principally been undertaken in the existing glasshouse on the site. Unfortunately, he has recently lost his horticultural tenant who moved on to larger premises. The glasshouse is currently being advertised for rent on the website Garden Forum. He hopes to be able to find a new tenant and, along with the construction of the approved agricultural/horticultural buildings, secure the future of the horticultural use on the eastern side of the holding. The income from the caravan storage will enable investment in the horticultural part of the business however rent from that side of the business

will remain low due to the limited size of the glasshouse and returns that an occupier can achieve.

3.3 The income from the horticultural side of the business is therefore supplemented by the caravan storage. As mentioned in the previous application the applicant has found that, with the value of caravans and motorhomes stored on the site, it is essential for insurance purposes that the site achieves a security accreditation not only to secure an appropriate level of insurance but to attract business and compete with similar sites which are already accredited. The applicant therefore seeks to achieve accreditation through CaSSOA (the Caravan Storage and Site Owners' Association) with the provision of as many of the security features that he can provide to achieve a higher rating as possible. Two of the features that the applicant can provide to assist with is accreditation rating is the provision of an office for a warden during the day and a handler with guard dog at night. Planning permission has been granted for a Portakabin located at the entrance of the site which will provide this facility.

3.4 The applicant has found that the cost of providing the Portakabin, the need to pay for staff to provide 24-hour security and business rates for the premises will barely be covered by the income from the caravan storage and horticultural rent. It is for this reason that the caravan storage area has been increased. The land that has been surfaced and used for storage is poor grade agricultural land which was part of the former land fill site and would not be used for any horticultural use. Its use for caravan storage makes effective use of this remaining land.

4. Planning Policy

4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 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 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 existing rural businesses 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 Dealing first with the principle of the development, it is relevant that storage of caravans and motorhomes has been established on this site and accepted as being consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework as it supports a prosperous rural economy and promotes the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. The expansion of this use is therefore acceptable in policy terms but subject to considerations of landscape impact, highway safety and the amenities of neighbouring residential properties. This assessment is equally applicable to the storage containers and scaffolding equipment which are just alternative storage uses.
- 5.2 In terms of visual amenity, the site as a whole is well contained in landscape terms with a tall Leylandii screen on the southern and western boundaries which separate the development in Old Mead Road which has a more built-up character from the open agricultural land beyond (the solar farm whilst developed, has no significant height in this context). The northern boundary is defined by a ditch and has been fenced and landscaped to soften views although the closest footpath is some distance to the north. To the east there is open land to the north of the glasshouse on Glenville Nursey but

beyond that lies a caravan park with mobile homes extending to the equivalent northern boundary adjacent to the ditch. It is submitted therefore that the additional storage area does not result in any incursion into the open countryside.

- 5.3 Three of the containers are located close to the Leylandii screen on the western boundary and one is located well within the site. They are not therefore visible and certainly not discernible in the context of the caravan storage. The scaffolding storage takes place in the north-west corner of the site where poles are stored on racks and other items are at ground level. Again, this use is insignificant in landscape terms in the context of the wider caravan storage and is largely screened by the fence and ultimately the landscaping that has been planted.
- 5.4 The hard-surfaced area is integral to the overall use of the site for storage and being at ground level does not in itself have any visual impact. Given its landscape context as described above, it does not in our view impact on the rural character of the area.
- 5.5 It is therefore concluded that, in the context of the previous approvals and the particular characteristics of this site, the proposals will not impact on the rural character of the area. The development represents an appropriate diversification of the remaining undeveloped part of the site by utilising the unused land, supporting the horticultural use and enabling the caravan storage business to invest in security which will make it more profitable.
- 5.6 The Highway Authority raised no objection to the first application for caravan storage as it was considered that the movements would not have any significant impact on the operation of the access onto Lyminster Road which, it states, has good visibility. In the officer's report on the last application, it is stated that "The nature of the use is for storage whilst these are not in use, traffic movement would not be daily for all vehicles and it can be reasonably expected that on many days, traffic movements would be extremely low or nil. The maximum traffic movements associated with movement of all caravans/motorhomes on a single day would not be excessive in any event. There are some 43 dwellings with access to Old Mead Road and in addition

the existing nursery businesses. The vehicle movements associated with the site are comparatively limited.”

5.7 Whilst additional caravans result in additional movements, given the longer-term storage nature of the use those movements are likely to remain low. The same is true for self-storage containers which, by their nature, are used for longer term storage which limits the traffic movements. The scaffolding storage also only takes place when the equipment is not out on hire which is clearly a situation the operator wants to avoid. Again, the nature of the business means that movements are limited. As the uses are already operating, the applicant has been able to monitor the movements and in the 14 days prior to the submission of this application, there was an average of 12 movements per day (6 vehicles in and 6 out). This includes the movements associated with all the uses and is taken at a time when there is peak activity as occupiers are most likely to access their caravans during the summer months.

5.8 Finally, in terms of impact on residential amenity, the storage use itself, does not impact on the amenities of any neighbouring residential properties as the site is entirely separate from any adjoining properties. In terms of vehicle movements, it was concluded by the Planning Officer on the previous application that the nature of the vehicles is such that they are unlikely to give rise to the kind of noise generation that could be expected from commercial or goods vehicles. Indeed, the majority of movements will be private cars towing caravans and motor homes which will be slow moving due to the nature of the road. This proposal does introduce an element of commercial movement from the scaffolding storage but as detailed above, the movements are limited and have to be compared to the number of commercial vehicles that could access the site if the land was used for intensive horticultural purposes.

6. Local Validation Requirements

Foul and Surface Water Drainage

6.1 There is no foul drainage associated with this application. The surfacing has been undertaken in a porous material allowing surface water to drain.

Flood Risk

- 6.2 The northern and eastern boundaries of the application site lie on the edge of flood zone 2/3. The change of use does not increase flood risk as it does not change the vulnerability of the classification from less to more vulnerable. The Environment Agency has seen the details of the material used for the surfacing and no further information has been requested.

Land Engineering Works Statement

- 6.3 The local validation list requires a statement for all applications for engineering works where the operational site area exceeds 0.5ha and the change in levels at any point exceeds 0.3m. In this case, the site does not exceed 0.5ha so a statement has not been prepared. Nevertheless, the application is accompanied by a topographical survey which shows the current site levels and details have been submitted to the Environment Agency of the composition of imported materials and no concerns have been raised.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 It is therefore concluded that the principle of the caravan storage has been accepted on this site and the increase in the storage area will not have any harmful effects in terms of impact on the character of the area, highway safety or residential amenities. The new uses including self-storage containers and scaffolding storage are not represent materially different from caravan storage and equally, it is submitted, will have limited impact. The hard surfacing is incidental to the storage uses on the land and is not is in itself visually harmful.
- 7.2 The proposal complies with Paragraph 28 of the NPPF in that it assists in supporting a prosperous rural economy by promoting the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. Furthermore, no conflict with any policies of the Local plan has been identified.
- 7.3 In all the circumstances it is therefore considered that this application is Development Plan compliant and planning permission is requested on this basis.