

<b>DECISION DATE</b> 13 November 2006	<b>APPLICATION NO.</b> 06/00915/FUL A12	<b>PLANNING COMMITTEE:</b> 13 November 2006
<b>DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED</b>  ERECTION OF AN EXTENSION TO PREVIOUSLY APPROVED WATER BOTTLING PLANT		<b>SITE ADDRESS</b>  FAR LODGE BAY HORSE ROAD QUERNMORE LANCASTER LANCASHIRE LA2 9EF
<b>APPLICANT:</b>  Mr David Gardner Far Lodge Bay Horse Road Quernmore Lancaster Lancashire LA2 9EF		<b>AGENT:</b>  Graham Anthony Associates

#### REASON FOR DELAY

None.

#### PARISH NOTIFICATION

**Quernmore Parish Council** - Has no objection to the proposal.

#### LAND USE ALLOCATION/DEPARTURE

The land is designated as a Countryside Area in the Lancaster District Local Plan 1996-2006. It also lies within the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The nearby farmhouse is a Grade II Listed Building.

#### STATUTORY CONSULTATIONS

**United Utilities** - No objections and no comments to make.

**County Highways** - No objections but request that the 3m wide access track has 3 passing places, because the site also serves holiday cottages. The bell-mouth junction is loose stone and requires resurfacing

**Environmental Health Services** - No objections and no comments to make.

**Environment Agency** - Views awaited.

#### OTHER OBSERVATIONS RECEIVED

None.

## **REPORT**

### **The Site and its Surroundings**

Far Lodge is a working farm situated approximately 600m due south of St Peter's Church and Quernmore Primary School. It comprises a range of traditional and modern buildings that are relatively tightly contained as a group of structures. The site is accessed via Caton/Bay Horse Road and has a wide, unmarked and unsurfaced vehicular entrance.

The landscape is undulating although the general slope of the land runs from east down to the west at this point. There are sporadic groups of semi-mature trees in the locality, which forms part of the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

### **Planning History**

The farm extends to approximately 100 acres and is concerned with milk production.

In 1999 planning permission was granted for the conversion of a barn to two holiday cottages (Reference: 99/00304/CU).

However the income raised from the cottages was deemed insufficient to offset the losses that may be caused due to the Common Agricultural Policy reforms, and therefore it was envisaged that a further supporting, diversification project would help to prevent the agricultural enterprise from becoming unviable.

In 2004 a planning application was submitted for a water bottling plant, comprising of one rectangular, portal-framed building located north-east of the farm buildings (Reference: 04/01253/FUL). The building measured 29.7m by 20m, providing a floor area of 594 square metres, not including the small attached pump room. This application was withdrawn because of concerns regarding the scale of such a building within the protected AONB landscape.

Following discussion a second application was submitted in 2005 (Reference 05/00651/FUL). The building was similar in design and shape, but had been reduced to 20.57m by 15.57m, providing a floor area of 320 square metres. The building was shallow-pitched and measured 5.7m in height. It was finished in a two-tone green colour with a brown brick plinth.

The application was brought before Members in August 2005 and it was determined that the building would be acceptable because of the appropriate extent of the land excavation (to site part of the building below the existing ground level of the sloping field), and because of increased tree planting around the site. Planning permission was granted on this basis.

There was a concern that the structure was sited too far away from the collection of existing farm buildings. However the location of the water spring dictated the position of the new building.

The applicant is currently in the process of implementing the existing consent.

### **The Current Proposal**

In June 2006 the applicant wrote to the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to request an extension to the building. This was required for additional toilet and reception space, office space, a restroom/cafeteria for staff and a chemical storage area. The LPA responded by expressing some concerns regarding the assimilation of this larger building into the landscape, and suggested that existing farm buildings may be appropriate locations for the administrative functions.

Notwithstanding that response the applicant submitted this application in September 2006 and the plans propose two main amendments, namely: -

- An extension to the building which would result in dimensions of 28.57m by 15.57m (445 square metres);
- A re-positioning of the building approximately 10m further to the east.

The plans also show two stainless steel tanks sited outside the building on the eastern elevation. These tanks appeared on the previous submission but a planning condition was imposed requiring them to be covered or sited internally, in a position to be agreed.

The applicant concludes that the building "is not of a sufficient size for the business to become viable".

### **Assessment of the Proposal**

The applicant states that the principle of development has been established. It is correct to say that water bottling has already been deemed to be an acceptable diversification use at this farm. The Council has been supportive in granting permission for this enterprise but has balanced that support against landscape impact concerns, hence the restrictions on building size.

The design of the building, (being a green, portal-framed, pitched roof structure) is also appropriate in the rural landscape.

The vehicular delivery movements do not change and therefore there are no highway objections, subject to the imposition of the original planning conditions and the provision of three new passing places on the access track.

However the arguments in favour of this 8m extension to the length of the building are not convincing.

The applicant maintains that the land excavation would hide the depth of the building by 3m. However the cumulative impact of repositioning the building 10m to the east and making the structure longer is that further excavation work and additional landscaping is necessary in an attempt to screen the building. Given that the access to the building is now proposed to be setback and that the predominant views of the building will be from elevated positions to the west, the LPA considers that the building will still be considerably more visible than the structure previously approved.

The setback has been created to allow additional parking and a service area to the front. Although not precisely indicated on the site plan, there are concerns that this parking area would unnecessarily add to the urbanisation of this part of the complex. A parking area was permitted here on the previous consent, but this was located much closer to the access road and views of the area would have been more limited.

The applicant then advises that additional landscaping would be provided, whilst the mounding would rise to 7.5m above ground level. This differs from the approved plans, which state that the moundings to the side would rise to a height of approximately 2m, whilst the land at the rear would be excavated to a maximum depth of 3.1m. The fact that further earth-moving and mounding is required to facilitate this larger building is inconsistent with national and local planning policies.

Planning Policy Statement 7, 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas' advises that AONB's are nationally-designated areas which enjoy similar protections as National Parks, and as such they have the 'highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty'. The conservation of this area of countryside should be given "great weight" in development control decisions.

Lancaster District Local Plan Policy E3 advises that development that would either directly or indirectly have a significant adverse effect upon the AONB character or harm its landscape quality or features of geological importance will not be permitted. The Policy also stipulates that development must be appropriate in scale.

### **Supporting Information**

At the time of compiling this report the application has failed to adequately consider the AONB implications of extending the building. It also does not assess the existing buildings at the farm to investigate whether there is potential for accommodating some of the proposed administrative functions within the existing complex.

The elevational plans do not illustrate the levels of excavation referred to in the supporting statement, and whilst the site plan gives an indication of land levels this is not particularly helpful in assessing the depth of land at particular points.

The internal layout drawing fails to indicate where the additional office and storage areas would be accommodated. Where the applicant is arguing a case for additional space, this information is considered important.

### **Impact Upon the Business**

The applicant has discovered that the building is too small to facilitate the business now proposed. However the LPA is of the view that this investigation into viability was undertaken during consideration of the 2005 consent. The applicant advised at the time that a 300 square metre building would produce an output of 2000 litres per day. Warehousing would occur off-site, thus limiting the need for space.

There is no detailed financial analysis to suggest that the building currently approved cannot accommodate a water bottling plant business.

### **Conclusion**

This proposal is inappropriate in the AONB because of the chain of events that occur as a result of the addition to the building. By extending and setting-back the structure further excavation of land is required; by making it longer more screen mounding is required; by providing more mounding the landform around the building becomes more artificially obvious in appearance.

The existing approved scheme excavates an appropriate amount of land and provides a building located closer to the access track. This building now proposed would measure almost 20m from the access track and would be visually conspicuous, especially from elevated positions to the west.

The LPA concludes that the proposals would have an adverse impact upon the character and appearance of the AONB. The absence of additional information to support the applicant's case is a secondary reason for recommending refusal of this application.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

It is recognised that a recommendation of refusal may result in an interference with the applicant's right to develop their land in accordance with the Human Rights Act. However, on the facts of this case it is considered both necessary and proportionate to control development in the public interest in light of the concerns set out in this report and for the stated reasons.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That **PLANNING PERMISSION BE REFUSED** for the following reasons:

1. The proposal would extend the previously approved building to provide an additional 125 square metres of floorspace. It would also require the setting back of the building by a further (approximate) 10m to the east, thus requiring additional land excavation and screen mounding. The cumulative impact of these alterations would be excessive and would have a detrimental effect upon the scenic character and appearance of the natural landscape. As a consequence the proposal is contrary to Planning Policy Statement 7, 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas' and Lancaster District Local Plan Policy E3, 'Development affecting Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty'.
2. The application does not provide accurate drawings illustrating the precise land excavation amendments, nor does it contain a detailed viability appraisal based upon the size of the approved building. The application also fails to provide an assessment of the suitability of the existing farm buildings for accommodating the additional uses now being proposed. In the absence of the necessary supporting information to justify the scheme, the applicant has failed to demonstrate an exception should be made to normal policy and the proposal is therefore considered unacceptable in this sensitive and protected landscape.