

Agenda Item A7	Committee Date 6 January 2014	Application Number 13/01099/FUL
Application Site Land Opposite 1 And 2 Farm View Ridge Lane (northern) Lancaster Lancashire		Proposal Installation of metal container, creation of hardstanding for parking, erection of four polytunnels and two compost toilets within wooden sheds associated with horticulture
Name of Applicant Ms Caroline Jackson		Name of Agent N/A
Decision Target Date 20 January 2014		Reason For Delay N/A
Case Officer		Mr Andrew Holden
Departure		N/A
Summary of Recommendation		Approve subject to conditions

(i) Procedural Matters

This development would normally be dealt with under the Scheme of Delegation. However, in this case, the applicant is an elected member of the City Council, Cllr Caroline Jackson (Bulk Ward) and as such the proposal must be determined by the Planning Committee.

1.0 The Site and its Surroundings

- 1.1 The application site is located to the south of Ridge Lane, a concrete road leading to pair of semi-detached houses and Ridge Farm to the north. Ridge Lane continues in a lesser form to serve agricultural land to the east. The application site comprises a triangular 5 acre arable field immediately to the south of ridge lane, part of larger land holding of the applicant formerly part of the Nightingale Hall Farm. The land is bounded by playing fields to Central High School to the west, Ridge Lane to the north and pastoral land to the east. The east and west boundaries are mature mixed thorn hedges, the boundary to Ridge Lane is currently a timber post and rail fence.
- 1.2 The site lies in a low lying area of the land which falls from the neighbouring school land with Newton Back on the west boundary. Land beyond to the east rises steeply to the grounds of Ridge Lea Hospital and the Young Offenders Institution. The land is allocated as Key Urban Landscape and a Woodland Opportunity Area within the Lancaster District Local Plan.

2.0 The Proposal

- 2.1 The application is seeking to provide a number of different elements to support an intensive use of the land for community horticulture. The use is considered not to require the benefit of planning consent but the scheme will involve the development of infrastructure to support community growing protects. It is that infrastructure which requires the benefit of planning permission. The application is seeking consent for the following: -

- The provision of a stone hardstanding area near the entrance off Ridge Lane, for up to six vehicles, measuring 20m.x 12m;
- The siting of a metal container (dark green) measuring 4m long x 2.1m wide x 2.1m high. The container will be enclosed by an open-sided, roofed timber structure measuring 9m long x 2.5m wide x 2.5m high, extending over and beyond the container to provide covered cycle storage. The container is to be used for secure tools and personal valuables;
- Four polytunnels are proposed in the centre of the field to provide growing spaces for sensitive plants and to extend the growing season, as well as providing for a covered learning/training space. The polytunnels area orientated north south and will sit side by side each measuring 18.3m in length, 5.5m wide and 2.7m high;
- A 3m access track is to run along the eastern boundary from the car park to the polytunnels;
- Two composting toilets within a small shed measuring 2m x 3m x 2.1m add coloured brown; The shed will be adapted to allow a disabled access to be provided;
- Erection of packing houses in the form of a wooden shed of similar dimension to the composting toilets to be finished in brown to be used for preparation of vegetables for home use or to sell locally.

2.2 In addition to the operational development listed above the applicant also proposes to provide areas of planting and a new hedgerow along the Ridge Lane boundary. Planting will include a series of shelter belts running north south along the western boundary and within the centre of the field. The planting will aid wind protection across the growing areas and provide screening for the area containing the polytunnels, packing shed and compost toilets. The hedgerow planting to Ridge Lane will provide screening to the container and hardstanding area.

2.3 Whilst not forming part of the planning application it is understood that it is the intention of the applicant to planting the remaining land ownership to the east and south of the application site with deciduous woodland trees in March 2014.

3.0 Site History

3.1 The site has no planning history. It is understood that the land originally formed part of the Nightingale Hall Farm ownership but now owned by the applicant.

4.0 Consultation Responses

4.1 The following responses have been received from statutory consultees:

Statutory Consultee	Response
County Highways	No objections – there is the potential for conflict between pedestrians and vehicles and a potential to relocate the access to the western side of the site. Potential for provision/dedication of land along the western boundary of the site to enable a right of way to be developed.
Environmental Health	No objections.
Tree Protection Officer	No objections - suggested conditions, provision of a detailed landscaping scheme, tree protection plan/method statement, no loss of hedgerows.
Ramblers	No comments received within the consultation period, late representations will be reported directly to the committee.
Public Realm Allotment Officer	Has identified that there is a high demand for community growing.

5.0 Neighbour Representations

5.1 A single letter has been received from the neighbouring Central High School commenting on the lack of scaled plans of the development or the purpose of the development.

A further letter has been received from LESS (Local & Effective Sustainable Solutions). LESS has

been working on the Ridge Estate for almost four years and worked closely with local residents to establish the allotment site on Ambleside Road. This has proved to be very successful, demonstrating the interest in food growing initiatives amongst the local community. Considers that the proposal will provide an accessible facility to promote and encourage food growing projects across the district. Without the minimal infrastructure included in this planning application it will be difficult to provide the desired opportunities to engage the local community in growing food at this site. LESS is pleased to be supporting this proposal and are working alongside the landowners to share our experiences locally and make this project a success.

6.0 Principal National and Development Plan Policies

6.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) indicates that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Paragraph 7 states that there are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental; and that these roles are mutually dependent and should be sought simultaneously through the planning system.

At the heart of the NPPF is a ***presumption in favour of sustainable development***. The following paragraphs of the NPPF are relevant to the determination of this proposal:

Paragraph 17 (Core Principles) sets out 12 core land-use planning principles which should underpin both plan-making and decision taking. The principles which are relevant to this application state that planning should: be genuinely plan-led; be supportive of sustainable economic development; seek high quality design and good standards of amenity for existing and future occupants of land and buildings; take account of different roles and character of different areas, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it; support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate and encourage the use of renewable resources; and contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

Section 4 (Promoting Sustainable Transport) - All developments that generate significant amounts of movement should be supported by a Transport Statement or Transport Assessment. Plans and decisions should take account of whether safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all people (Para. 32).

Plans should protect and exploit opportunities for the use of sustainable transport modes for the movement of goods or people. Therefore, developments should be located and designed where practical to:

- accommodate the efficient delivery of goods and supplies;
- give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements, and have access to high quality public transport facilities;
- create safe and secure layouts which minimise conflicts between traffic and cyclists or pedestrians, avoiding street clutter and where appropriate establishing home zones;
- incorporate facilities for charging plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles; and
- consider the needs of people with disabilities by all modes of transport (Para 35).

Section 7 (Requiring Good Design)- Confirms that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and is not indivisible from good planning (Para 56)

Section 8 (Promoting healthy communities)- Acknowledges the important role planning can play in facilitating and creating healthy, inclusive communities. Planning authorities should involve all sections of the community in planning decisions (Para 69). It also seeks to provide access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation. Assessments should quantify open, sport and recreation facilities in an area (par 74)

Determining Applications

Paragraph 196 – confirms that planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Framework is a material consideration in planning decisions.

6.2 Development Plan Weighting

Paragraph 215 of the NPPF advises that “*due weight should be given to relevant policies in existing (Development) Plans according to their degree of consistency with this Framework (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given)*”. In the Lancaster District, the Development Plan consists of the Lancaster District Core Strategy, and the Saved Policies of the Lancaster District Local Plan. Relevant policies of each document are referred to over the following pages.

6.3 Lancaster District Core Strategy

Policy **SC1** (Sustainable Development) – seeks to ensure that new development proposals are as sustainable as possible, minimise greenhouse gas emissions and are adaptable to the likely effects of Climate Change and sets out a range of criteria against which proposals should be assessed. Development should be located in areas where it is convenient to walk, cycle or travel by public transport between homes, workplaces, shops and other facilities, uses energy efficient design and construction practices, incorporates renewable energy technologies and is compatible with the character of the surrounding landscape.

Policy **SC5**: (Achieving Quality in Design) requires new development to be of a quality which reflects and enhances the positive characters of its surroundings, including the quality of the landscape, results in an improved appearance where conditions are unsatisfactory and complements and enhances public realm. The Council recognises the importance of environmental quality, both townscapes and natural landscapes, and seeks to work with developers to maintain and improve the quality of new development, particularly in Conservation Areas, the City Centre, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the rural areas.

Policy **E1** (Environmental Capital) – The Council will safeguard and enhance the District's Environmental Capital by: protecting and enhancing nature conservation sites, landscapes of national importance, listed buildings, conservation areas and archaeological sites; protecting the North Lancashire Green Belt; resisting development which would have a detrimental effect on environmental quality and public amenity; identifying how habitats in urban and rural areas will be protected and, where possible, enhanced; and conserving and enhancing landscapes.

6.4 Lancaster District Local Plan - adopted April 2004 (saved policies)

Policy **E4** (Countryside Area) – Within the countryside, development will only be permitted where it is in scale and keeping with the character and natural beauty of the landscape; is appropriate to its surroundings in terms of siting, scale, design, materials, external appearance and landscaping; would not result in a significant adverse effect on nature conservation or geological interests; and makes satisfactory arrangements for access, servicing, cycle and car parking.

Policy **E31** (Key Urban Landscape) – identified key area of open land around Lancaster which make a contribution to the character of the City. These areas will be conserved and important features safeguarded. Development is only permitted which preserves the open nature of the area and its character/surroundings.

Policy **E27** (Woodland Opportunity Area) – seeks to encourage woodland planting on the edge of Lancaster, Morecambe and Heysham establishing new woodlands using predominantly native species ideally for public access and enhancement of nature conservation interests. Development which prejudices these aims will be resisted.

6.5 Emerging Local Plan Policies (Draft Development Management DPD - Autumn/Winter 2012)

The Council is in the mid-stages of preparation of an emerging Local Plan and has now produced a Publication version of the Development Management DPD. Policies in the emerging Local Plan are a material consideration. However, the degree of weight that can be afforded to these policies varies depending on stage of preparation of the emerging plan, the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies and the degree of consistency with the Framework (paragraph 216 of the NPPF). Limited weight can therefore be afforded to the following draft policies that received no significant objections at the Preferred Options stage and are relevant to this application.

Policy **DM25** – (Green Infrastructure) acknowledges the important role allotments and other food growing projects can play in both developing social cohesion, providing a source of leisure and exercise as well as a source of local grown food. The Council will support the provision of new allotment and other food growing places where the opportunities arise and a need is demonstrated.

7.0 Comment and Analysis

7.1 Background

The applicant and a fellow landowner have set up a charitable project, Claver Hill, with two main objectives:

- To promote education and training in growing fruit and vegetables for people of all ages, particularly local residents in Bulk Ward and wider Lancaster; and,
- Relief of poverty and ill health caused by unemployment or low income by providing space and support for people in Bulk Ward (and walking distance) for growing food and developing skills for employability.

An application is shortly to be made to the Charities Commission for charitable status at which time the application site will be given to the charity and managed by a trustee group.

7.2 In order to develop the concept, a limited amount of infrastructure is required to difficult to provide the desired opportunities to engage the local community in growing food at this site. The scale and type of development has been outlined in paragraph 2.1 of this report.

7.3 Operation of the scheme

The project is not intended to provide allotments for local residents, as these have been developed and are already available at Ambleside Road. Instead the field will be divided into 4 or 5 sections of half to one acre for use by community groups and projects to grow larger amounts of food for either sharing with the group or for the development of small enterprises selling directly to local people. In appearance the field is likely to take on the appearance of a market garden.

7.4 The scheme is likely to attract 6 to 12 people at any one time to the site, arriving mainly by foot or cycle. However, given the topography of the field, the project has been designed to cater for people with disabilities to participate in the activity. The provision of an access track from Ridge Lane to the polytunnel will aid accessibility throughout the site.

7.5 One working project has already been developed – The Spud Club. Local residents have paid for seed potatoes in order that they can grow a communal acre of vegetables in 2014. The produce is for their own use and to sell to other local residents. It is proposed to develop further projects in the future.

7.6 Planning Policy

The current application is seeking consent for the infrastructure associated with the intensification of the use of the land for horticulture. It is not considered that the land use has changed but will be more intensively used. The site is located within the Countryside Area as defined in the Lancaster Local District Local Plan. The area is also within a woodland opportunity area and forms part of the key urban landscape around Lancaster.

7.7 Policy E4 seeks to ensure development in the countryside is at a scale and in keeping with the character of the landscape. The proposal seeks to develop only the minimum infrastructure required to enable the project to fully develop. The applicant has recognised that the proposal will have the potential to be visible from neighbouring properties and from a more elevated position of Crag Road. An extensive tree and hedgerow planting scheme is proposed to help mitigate the impact of the development whilst providing a shelter belt for the growing areas. A new hedgerow is to be planted along the northern boundary of the site with Ridge Lane. Precise details of the planting species and maintenance can be controlled by condition but it is considered that the provision of a mixed thorn hedgerow will, over time, aid the screening of the container and car park/hardstanding. Tree planting along the western boundary and within the field will further aid screening.

- 7.8 The retention of the area for horticultural use is considered to safeguard the open nature and use of the land as prescribed by its allocation as Key Urban Landscape. Whilst the development will involve the introduction of some structures to service the land, it is considered that subject to suitable conditions to control the external appearances of the buildings, along with the provision of landscaping, the open nature and characteristics of the land will be maintained.
- 7.9 The site also falls within the Woodland Opportunity Area drawn around the eastern side of Lancaster. The main land use does not change and will remain in agriculture, although more intensive managed than the previous pastoral land. The application does however, provide an opportunity for tree planting. The main functions of these will be shelter and in the longer term screening but it is considered that the development will aid the ambitions of the policy to establish addition tree planting on the edges of the main urban areas.
- 7.10 Other matters
- Foul and surface water – the application seeks to introduce two composting toilets within the scheme. This approach is understood to have been successfully introduced in the neighbouring Ambleside Road allotment in addition to Torrisholme Road. The waste is allowed to rot down into usable compost to feed established trees and shrubs. Any foul water will be directed into the adjoining comfrey bed to be broken down. The areas are well away from the main growing site.
- 7.11 The area has no flood risk history and it is anticipated that the surface water run off will not change from the site. The field naturally drains into a drain running between the western plot boundary and Central High School playing field. Surface water from all the roofs will be harvested for watering crops, water from the poly tunnels is to be directed into a storage tank sunk within the poly tunnel and again used for watering crops.
- 7.12 Biodiversity – it is considered that that development will provide an opportunity to increase the biodiversity of the area. The field is currently made over to pasture with poorly maintained hedgerow to some of the boundaries. The proposals will seek the introduction of significant areas of tree planting hedgerow planting and maintenance along with the provision of specific meadow planting. Subject to suitable condition to agree the landscaping scheme and its future maintenance, the development is considered to aid biodiversity of the area.
- 7.13 Public footpath route - In responding to the application, the highway authority wish to see the creation of a pedestrian/cycle link between Quernmore Road and Ridge Lane. The long term goal of creating an area of community woodland adjacent Newton Beck and its boundary with the Royal Grammar School war memorial field would be an opportunity to progress such matters. It has been acknowledged by the Highway Authority representatives that this desired link could not be reasonably addressed through the planning process but it is understood that ongoing discussions between the interested parties and the applicant have taken place with a view to progressing matters.

8.0 Planning Obligations

8.1 N/A.

9.0 Conclusions

- 9.1 The development and use of the field is considered to raise an opportunity to provide a much needed facility for the local area. Subject to appropriate conditions to control the use of the facilities and minimise the visual impact of the proposed infrastructure, the application can be supported.

Recommendation

That Planning Permission **BE GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

1. Standard 3 year time limit
2. Development to be built in accordance with approved plans
3. Use of the hardstanding and parking area in association with Claver Hill field only
4. Hours of Construction
5. Provision of a detailed tree/hedgerow planting scheme

6. Tree protection plan/method statement
7. No loss of hedgerows
8. Precise colours of the external finishes o the container, sheds and open sided roof to be agreed

Human Rights Act

This recommendation has been reached after consideration of the provisions of The Human Rights Act. Unless otherwise stated in this report, the issues arising do not appear to be of such magnitude to override the responsibility of the City Council to regulate land use for the benefit of the community as a whole, in accordance with national law.

Background Papers

None