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| No.1 | APPLICATION NO. | 2018/0869/FUL |
| | LOCATION | Land To The South Of Black-A-Moor Lane, Downholland, Lancashire |
| | PROPOSAL | Extension to existing glasshouse complex comprising plant growing areas; seeding/propagation, packaging and dispatch areas; ancillary storage, office and staff welfare facilities; and reconfigured service yard/parking areas. |
| | APPLICANT | Ivan Ambrose Ltd |
| | WARD | Aughton And Downholland |
| | PARISH | Downholland |
| | TARGET DATE | 27th November 2018 |

1.0 PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS

- 1.1 2011/1208/FUL WITHDRAWN - Erection of glasshouses together with associated yard area and workshop building. Alterations to existing vehicular accesses. Provision of car parking and one lorry park. Creation of pond and landscaping.
- 1.2 2012/1216/FUL GRANTED Erection of glasshouses for horticultural use.
- 1.3 2014/0859/CON APPROVE/REFUSE Approval of Details Reserved by Condition Nos. 3, 7, 10, 12 and 14 of planning permission 2012/1216/FUL relating to a scheme to demonstrate the noise level rating; a scheme detailing proposed lighting; details of boundary treatment; colours of the vertical wall cladding and a surface water drainage scheme.
- 1.4 2015/0275/FUL GRANTED Removal of Condition No. 4 and variation of Condition No. 3 of planning permission 2012/1216/FUL to read 'The rating level of noise from fixed plant shall not exceed 35dB(A) at 3 metres from the facade of the nearest residential building. All measurements and assessments shall be done in accordance with the methodology within BS4142.2014 Method for Rating and Assessing Industrial and Commercial Sound.' This noise level shall not be exceeded at any time.

2.0 CONSULTEE RESPONSES

- 2.1 MEAS (06.11.18) No Objections subject to conditions
- 2.2 Lead Local Flood Authority (24.09.18 & 11/02/19) No Objection subject to condition
- 2.3 LCC Highways (18.09.18) – No Objections
- 2.4 Environment Agency (21.09.18) - No Objections
- 2.5 Environmental Health (22.11.18) – No Objections subject to planning conditions

3.0 OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

- 3.1 I have received 3 letters of objection from neighbouring properties. Their concerns are summarised as follows:

Impact on the visual open aspects of Downholland planes as defined by LCC in their landscape assessment of the area;

Impact the openness of the green belt;
This commercial development is uncharacteristic in this predominately rural area;
Previous planning conditions relating to light and noise pollution have not been adhered to – creating a visible glow that can be seen for miles, also affecting wildlife;
Is the applicant proposing 20m high boundary hedges? This will change the character of the area and have a major impact upon the highway;
Further loss of grade 1 best and most versatile agricultural land;
Elevations of the proposed buildings materially affect the open aspects of Downholland;
Flooding in Altcar Lane has become a regular occurrence since the greenhouses were constructed;
Increased commercialised traffic using the roads impacting on children walking to school.

3.2 Parish Council (12.09.18) - Objects

Two storey office building in centre of site is not in keeping with the surrounding areas within the Green Belt;
Whilst we support the use of the land for agriculture an office building with a roof of this size should not be located on site;
Change from open texture stone to concrete surfacing is inappropriate;
The photographs contained in the impact assessment are selective and the site is visible to a much greater extent than is represented;
The existing site impact is mitigated by the 120m plus distance from the boundary, the proposal would remove this;
Artificial light emitted from the greenhouse in the evening throughout winter would create an artificially coloured halo which is widely visible;
Proximity to school and increased traffic is a concern.

4.0 **LOCAL PLAN ALLOCATION**

- 4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 DPD provide the policy framework against which the development proposals will be assessed.

The site is located within the Green Belt as designated in the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 DPD

West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 DPD

Policy GN1 – Settlement Boundaries
Policy GN3 – Criteria for Sustainable Development
Policy EC2 – The Rural Economy

Supplementary Planning Document 'Design Guide' (Jan.2008).

Supplementary Planning Document - Development in the Green Belt (October 2015)

5.0 **SUMMARY OF ISSUES**

The Site

- 5.1 The application site comprises of existing glasshouses which form part of a large agricultural business Ivan Ambrose Ltd. The applicants are a well-established specialist company (which also operate from other sites) producing bedding plants for major retailers and local garden centres and market traders. The application site consists of an area of land extending to 4.74 hectares, located on rural land off Altcar Lane close to its junction with Black-a-Moor Lane. Access to the site is off Black-a-Moor Lane. The area is

designated as Green Belt.

The Proposal

- 5.2 This application seeks planning permission to extend the existing glasshouse complex. The development comprises of the following:

'L' shape extension to glasshouse measuring 137m by 110m which will be used for plant growing, seeding / propagation, packing and dispatch;

Two storey office / storage and staff building measuring 56m by 14.4m with a ridge height of 7.8m;

Concrete surfaced loading bay;

Textured surfaced car park.

- 5.3 The proposed buildings will be sited partially over an existing hard surfaced yard/car park area, and access to the site will remain as existing.

Background

- 5.4 The existing glasshouses on site are used for the growing of bedding plants for major national retailers, local garden centres and market traders. The business currently operates from two sites, the application site for plant growing and Pygons Hill in Lydiate which has growing glasshouse areas and also initial propagation areas (seeding/potting) and the main office/staff facilities.

- 5.5 The applicant states that the Pygons Hill site is limited in operational terms and the applicant wishes to consolidate much of its growing, propagation and ancillary packing and dispatch and administrative functions on to the application site to rationalise and modernise operations.

- 5.6 The applicant advises that the application site glasshouse growing areas incorporate the most up to date technology and operational practices for horticultural enterprise. In contrast Pygons Hill facilities are outdated and limited. Furthermore, the operation of a split site is inefficient and unsustainable as it generates traffic movements between the sites during the different stages of the growing process. Currently seeding and propagation takes places at Pygons Hill where seeds are grown to small plants (plugs). Those plugs are then re-potted for growing on and are transferred by road to the main glasshouse complex at Black-a-Moor Lane (application site). It is proposed to use the Pygons Hill site for the seeding and propagation process and then move the young plants (plugs) to the application site before they are re-potted into their final containers. The applicant states that the whole operation becomes more efficient and sustainable in the long term because it will reduce the number of vehicle movements between sites because plug plants can be transported in a higher density than when transported in final containers.

- 5.7 The proposed buildings would be used for a range of activities in connection with the planting and growing of seeds and flowers. They will include a production area where seeds are sown in growing trays and small plug/plants are re-sown for growing on and for the storage and distribution of produce. It will also allow for staff facilities and the operational running of the horticultural business from ancillary offices. I am aware from the previous planning application that the applicant is a significant producer of bedding plants and supplies large retail outlets and DIY stores from its base in Pygons Hill in Lydiate. The company has grown considerably over recent years due to the increase in popularity of home and garden DIY and the applicant has been unable to expand the Lydiate site due the size of the landholding. The supporting statement confirms that staffing levels fluctuate

seasonally and there will be 15 core staff which increase to 40 at peak times.

Assessment

Principle of Development - Green Belt

- 5.8 Within the NPPF Local Planning Authorities are encouraged to support economic growth in rural areas by taking a positive approach to new development. In order to maintain prosperous rural economies the sustainable growth of rural businesses should be supported and the development of agricultural businesses should be promoted. Therefore, the principle of this development is supported as advocated within the NPPF, subject to compliance with other policies.
- 5.9 The proposed glasshouse area would be used for horticultural purposes. The site has an existing commercial glasshouse which is used for plant growing. It is considered that the glasshouse is reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture and therefore does not represent inappropriate development in this location.
- 5.10 A two storey office and storage building is also proposed which would sit alongside the glasshouses. The floor plans for the office and storage building have been amended so that the overall office/administration and staff welfare facilities are reduced and consolidated over two floors to the front of the building with the rear portion of the building being left to full height to allow for racking systems to be introduced for storage of pots, trays, boxes and packaging. It is considered that ancillary offices and storage areas are also reasonably necessary for the purposes of horticulture and the development is therefore appropriate in the Green Belt.
- 5.11 The development also consists of engineering operations in respect of the car park and loading areas. The loading area with 3 parking bays will measure 40m by 35m and will be surfaced with concrete and the car park will create 28 parking spaces and will be surfaced with open texture grasscrete. These will both impact on the openness of the Green Belt because engineering operations are by definition development and openness relates to the absolute test of the presence or absence of the development. However, in assessing the harm the loading area would be sited close to the proposed development and would be screened on two sides by the glasshouses and by the existing screen planting which surrounds the site, therefore preserving the perception of openness of the site. A grasscrete car park is proposed adjacent to the reservoir and has been kept close to the buildings as possible in order to minimise its impact on the openness of the Green Belt. Due to its limited size and siting I am of the view that the car park will result in limited harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
- 5.12 For the reasons set out above, the glasshouses and office storage building are acceptable in principle and the development would have limited impact upon the openness of the Green Belt and would therefore comply with Policy GN1.

Design / Visual Amenity and Landscape Impact

- 5.13 Whilst there would be a slight increase in height to a small section of the glasshouse, the vast majority of the glasshouse would mirror the height of the existing glasshouses. Whilst taller than the glasshouses, the proposed office and storage building has been designed to reflect a typical agricultural building and will be constructed from heritage green steel sheeting with goosewing grey steel sheet roof. The design of the buildings is typical of agricultural buildings of this nature and is considered acceptable in principle.
- 5.14 The proposal involves the development of a substantial area of agricultural land and will

be visible in the immediate landscape from Black-a-Moor Lane and Altcar Lane and across the wider landscape from the A5147 which is the main road between Lydiate and Scarisbrick due to the nature of the open, flat, low lying, and arable landscape. The site is within the West Lancashire Borough Council's Landscape Character Area 2A. To assess the overall impact of the development, the applicant has carried out a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) which includes photographs from 7 locations with short to medium range views. The selected viewpoints are intended to provide an assessment of visual impact across a range of receptors.

- 5.15 The applicant is of the opinion that views from the proposed development from the surrounding area will be limited and that the proposed development will be rarely seen from the road. However, I do not necessarily concur with this view as the existing development is visible from Black-a-Moor Lane when travelling towards the site from the east so the proposed development will be visible from certain vantage points.
- 5.16 The landscaping scheme planted as part of the previous application reference 2011/1208/FUL is establishing itself well. The native hedgerow is now fully grown and now screens the inner site when viewed from Black-a-Moor Lane and immediately around the boundary of the site from Altcar Lane. When viewed from further afield the existing glasshouses become more apparent, especially when viewed from the higher part of Altcar Lane where it meets Delph Lane. Also, the site is visible from various locations along Delph Lane, although it does blend in with the wider landscape. It is expected that as and when this tree planting becomes more established it will aid the screening and limit the impact of the glasshouses on the wider landscape, especially from a wider distance. It is considered that the landscaping scheme will help to mitigate the impacts of the development.
- 5.17 Therefore, taking the above into consideration, the development would have limited impact upon the landscape and visual amenity of the Green Belt and would therefore comply with Policy GN3 in the Local Plan.

Impact on Highways

- 5.18 There is an existing established access on to Black-A-Moor Lane which will remain. The applicant anticipates that there will be between 4-8 goods vehicle movements per day and 10-18 staff vehicle movements per day. The Highway Authority has been consulted and have raised no objection as they are of the opinion that the proposed development would have a negligible impact on highway safety and highway capacity within the immediate vicinity of the site.

Impact upon Residential Amenity

- 5.19 This is an established site and the proposed development will be sited adjacent to existing glasshouses. There are residential properties to the north east and west of the application site, the closest being 115 metres away from the site. A number of objections to the development have been raised by the surrounding neighbours mainly concentrating on the impact on the Green Belt/character of area, highway safety, increase in noise/impact on residential amenity and loss of agricultural land.
- 5.20 There is an existing fixed plant area within the existing glasshouse building which incorporates all of the heating and climate control plant and equipment for the growing operations. This plant will also serve the glasshouse extensions/growing areas. Internally heating, lighting and irrigation equipment will reflect that currently found within the existing glasshouses. Previous planning permissions on the site have had a condition imposed to restrict the level of noise from fixed plant. Other issues relating to lights and hours of

operation can also be controlled by planning conditions. There are facilities for vehicles to be loaded directly from the glasshouse to the goods vehicle at a loading bay avoiding noise from movements of fork lift trucks. Environmental Health have been consulted and are of the view that noise from daytime activity within the glasshouses is unlikely to be noticeable above background noise at the nearest residential properties and the new arrangement forms a barrier between the new loading area and the nearest houses which is beneficial. Overall, Environmental Health have raised no objections. Therefore, I consider that the proposed development, subject to the conditions would not result in a detrimental loss of residential amenity to any neighbouring properties.

Impact on Ecology

- 5.21 The application site is located in an area (known as an Impact Risk Zone) which could have the potential to support qualifying features within or in close proximity to the designated sites of the Ribble and Alt Estuaries, Mersey Estuary and Martin Mere SPA, Ramsar and SSSI site.
- 5.22 An Ecological Survey and Assessment (including Wintering Birds) has been submitted as part of the application. MEAS have been consulted and advise that construction and operation of the site will have no likely significant effect on the European protected sites as habitats on site are sub optimal or non-breeding birds and there was no survey evidence to indicate that the site and wider study zone are being used as a high tide roost by qualifying features of the European sites.
- 5.23 MEAS also conclude that the Council does not need to consider the proposals against the three tests in the Habitat Regulations with regards bats and great crested newts as no evidence of bats or great crested newts use or presence was found on site and that the habitats on site are unsuitable for use by either species.

Flood Risk Issues

- 5.24 A Flood Risk and Drainage Strategy has been submitted to accompany the application due to the size of the site exceeding 1 hectare. The document acknowledges that the proposed development will increase impermeable areas at the site and that all surface water from the roofs of the proposed buildings will be harvested/collected for storage within an existing reservoir on site. Water from this reservoir will be utilised to provide internal irrigation within the growing areas in the glasshouses. Surface water will penetrate through the open ground beneath the growing areas. Information has been submitted to confirm that the existing site drainage reservoir has sufficient capacity to take the additional surface water. The Lead Local Flood Authority has been consulted and has raised no objection to the proposal. Therefore, I am satisfied that the development will not increase flood risk in the vicinity of the site.

Conclusion

- 5.25 The proposal satisfactorily meets the requirements of the NPPF and Policies GN1 and GN3 of the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 DPD and is recommended for approval.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 That planning permission be GRANTED subject to the following conditions:

Conditions

1. The development must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission.
2. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with details shown on the following plans:-
Plan reference Site Location Plan, 728/01A and 728/02A, received by the Local Planning Authority on 10th August 2018.
Plan reference 728/08C, 728/05C, 728/06C and 728/07C received by the Local Planning Authority on 26th November 2018.
3. All external elevations and roofing materials shall be as detailed in section 7 of the application form received 10th August 2018. If the applicant or developer has any doubts as to whether the proposed materials are acceptable they should check with the Local Planning Authority before commencement of the building works.
4. The rating level of noise from fixed plant shall not exceed 35dB(A) at 3 metres from the facade of the nearest residential building. All measurements and assessments shall be done in accordance with the methodology within BS4142:2014 Method for Rating and Assessing Industrial and Commercial Sound. This noise level shall not be exceeded at any time.
5. The movement of delivery vehicles and the loading and unloading of vehicles shall not take place outside the hours of 07.00 and 19.00 Monday to Friday, 08.00 and 18.00 Saturday with none at any time on Sunday/ Public Bank Holidays. Outside these hours only access to and from the site shall be permitted.
6. Any sound produced by reversing alarms or indicators of any fork-lift truck or other on-site vehicles (other than delivery vehicles) shall not be clearly distinguishable above background noise at the boundary of any of the nearby residential premises.
7. No artificial lighting shall be installed within the glasshouses until a scheme detailing the proposed lighting to be installed is submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All lighting shall be installed and maintained in accordance with the agreed scheme.
8. The development permitted by this planning permission shall be carried out in accordance with the approved surface water drainage scheme (as shown on PSA Design, drawing reference D2952-D-01, dated 22 January 2018). The surface water drainage scheme shall be fully implemented prior to development completion and in accordance with the timing / phasing arrangements embodied within the scheme, or within any other period as may subsequently be agreed, in writing, by the local planning authority. The surface water drainage scheme shall be managed and maintained thereafter in accordance with the arrangements outlined in the General Maintenance Schedule included in Appendix E of the Drainage Statement ref. D2952/PAS dated 22 January 2019.

Reasons

1. Required to be imposed pursuant to Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
2. For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure compliance with the provisions of Policy GN3 in the adopted West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 Development Plan Document.
3. To ensure that the external appearance of the building(s) is satisfactory and that the development therefore complies with the provisions of Policy GN3 in the adopted West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 Development Plan Document.
4. To safeguard the amenity of adjacent properties and the area generally and so comply with the provisions of Policy GN3 in the adopted West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 Development Plan Document.
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7. To safeguard the amenity of adjacent properties and the area generally and so comply with the provisions of Policy GN3 in the adopted West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 Development Plan Document.
8. To ensure that the site is properly drained in the interest of local amenity and that the development, therefore, complies with the provisions of Policies GN3 & IF3 in the adopted West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 Development Plan Document.

Reason for Approval

1. The Local Planning Authority has considered the proposed development in the context of the Development Plan including, in particular, the following Policy/Policies in the adopted West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 Development Plan Document:
Policy GN1 - Settlement Boundaries
Policy GN3 - Criteria for Sustainable Development
Policy EC2 - The Rural Economy
together with Supplementary Planning Guidance and all relevant material considerations. The Local Planning Authority considers that the proposal complies with the relevant Policy criteria and is acceptable in the context of all relevant material considerations as set out in the Officer's Report. This report can be viewed or a copy provided on request to the Local Planning Authority.