

Supporting Statement

Site – Land at Heathlands Road, Heathlands Farm, Wokingham

Proposal - Retention of timber building accommodating farm vending machine and associated gravel car parking area

Client – Hall Hunter Partnership (HHP)

Submitted information

In addition to this Supporting Statement and the following documents are submitted in support of the application:

- Location Plan
- Existing site plan
- Plan and Elevations
- Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

The Site and Proposal

The site lies within Heathlands Farm which is owned and operated by HHP. Heathlands Farm is a major producer of berries which are grown in polytunnels on the farm. The farm comprises about 50 hectares of polytunnels, cold storage barns and administrative offices for Hall Hunter. The farm produces about 400 tonnes of blueberries, 1,500 tonnes of Strawberries and 100 tonnes of raspberries annually, supplying many of the large supermarket chains. HHP are one of the largest berry producers in the country.

HHP set up a subsidiary known as Berry Makers in order to be able sell their products locally direct to the consumers. The proposal is to retain the vending machine as a retail outlet for their produce.

The site lies immediately adjacent to Heathlands Road and is accessed via the current access from Heathlands Farm onto Heathlands Road. The site sits behind a treed hedgerow which runs along the western boundary of the site. Photographs of the site can be found in **Appendix.1**.

The proposal seeks to retain the existing vending machine building and associated parking area and fencing. The application is for the retention of this operational development and does not seek to change the use of the land which remains in agricultural use as the goods sold are predominantly produced on Heathlands Farm without the overhead and staff costs of establishing a farm shop.

The development only requires planning permission due to the proximity of the car park and kiosk to the road.

The vending machine housed within the proposed building allows customers to purchase berries, honey and jams produced on the farm as well as eggs from a local farm. The vending machine has 32 lockers and is restocked up to twice a day with about 20-30 sales a day. Customers are able to park in the car park to make a purchase. The peak use of the vending machine tends to coincide with pick up and drop off at the school opposite.

The application is supported by the BNG Assessment. The BNG net gain required would be provided within Heathlands Farm. A new native hedge is proposed along the western boundary of the site.

Policy Compliance

Paragraph 88 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) seeks to promote the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas and support the diversification of agricultural businesses. Furthermore, paragraph 89 urges local planning authorities to support the needs of local business and communities beyond existing settlements.

Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy seeks to limit development in rural areas to that which contributes to diverse and sustainable countryside based enterprises.

The application seeks to diversify the farming operations at Heathlands farm and help address the demand from local residents for fresh produce direct from the farm. This would comply both with the NPPF and policy CP11

Policy CP23 of the Wokingham Core Strategy requires that new development is in character with the area and integrate with their surroundings.

The local area is semi-rural in character with several commercial businesses in close proximity. Immediately to the north of the site is Squires Garden Centre which is clearly visible from road. Immediately to the west of the site is the entrance to South Barns business park and Holme Grange School. In the context of these commercial uses, and the commercial operations at Heathlands Farm, the proposed use is characteristic and in keeping with the character of the area.

The use of the parking area is low-key and does not intrude or impact harmfully on the amenities of the area. This impact will be reduced further with the reinforcement of the native hedge on the western boundary of the site would enclose the site visually and reinforce the character of the road.

Policy TB18 of the Wokingham Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Local Plan seeks to encourage small rural retail in the countryside where the proposal is adjacent to the primary holding and ancillary to the existing use. The policy also requires that the development has no adverse impact on the viability and vitality of retail centres and shops in the locality.

The proposal is adjacent to the primary farm holding and would be small scale so would have no discernible impact on local shops.

Conclusions

It is considered that the proposal accords with National Planning policy set out in the NPPF and satisfies the requirements of the development plan. The presumption is therefore in favour of the retention of the development.

APPENIDIX.1 – SITE PHOTOGRAPHS



Photo.1 – Farm access from Heathlands Road



Photo.2 – Site access from internal farm road



Photo.3 – Access into car park



Photo.4 – Parking area



Photo.5 – Vending machine structure