

Application No: 09/1746M
Location: WILMSLOW GARDEN CENTRE, MANCHESTER ROAD, WILMSLOW, CHESHIRE, SK9 2JN
Proposal: DEMOLITION/REMOVAL OF 382MSQUARE OF EXISTING CANOPIES AND STORAGE CONTAINERS, ERECTION OF 683MSQUARE OF OPEN-SIDED CANOPIES, ERECTION OF 312MSQUARE EXTENSION TO EXISTING COFFEE SHOP FOR ADDITIONAL SEATING AND AN EDUCATIONAL CLASSROOM; ALL IN ACCORDANCE WITH APPLICATION DRAWING NOS, C0809-03B, 05E, 07B, 09C, 10B AND 11A ALL FOR THE USE AS A GARDEN CENTRE.

For KLONDYKE GARDEN CENTRES GROUP LTD

Registered 17-Jun-2009
Policy Item No
Grid Reference 385380 382923

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

Approve subject to conditions

MAIN ISSUES

- Impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area and existing buildings,
- Whether it is appropriate development in the Green Belt or whether very special circumstances have been demonstrated.
- Impact on parking and highway safety.
- Impact on ecology, the existing trees and landscape.
- Any implications for the residential amenity of neighbouring properties.

Date Report Prepared: 20th August 2009

REASON FOR REPORT

The application site is in excess of 1,000 sq m and therefore is a major planning application to be determined by Committee.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The application site comprises a long-established garden centre occupying the southern part of the site and 11.2ha woodland on the northern part of the site. The existing garden centre comprises a shop of approximately 2,402m², an open-sided canopy of 401m², enclosed polytunnels of 300m², an open sales area of 6,242m² and a service yard of 480m².

The shop comprises five glasshouses clad in white polycarbonate roofs and glazed walls. The offices, toilets and coffee shop kitchen are located within two brick and tile clad buildings. The canopy is a white steel-framed

glasshouse with open sides and a white polycarbonate roof. There is car parking for 207 cars, including 9 accessible spaces.

The garden centre site is bounded to the east by Manchester Road, residential dwellings to the south, open fields to the west and the River Dean to the north. The land slopes down towards the River Dean but is highly screened by an area of woodland which is accessible by both customers of the garden centre as well as members of the public.

The application site is located within the North Cheshire Green Belt but it is bounded by a predominantly residential area to the south and east.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

This application seeks full planning permission for the demolition/removal of an existing canopy and storage containers and the erection of a new open-sided canopy and an extension to the existing coffee shop to provide additional seating and an educational classroom. In addition to these works, it is proposed to upgrade the woodland that occupies the northern part of the site and transform it into an attractive place for members of the public/customers to visit.

RELEVANT HISTORY

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 08/2739P | Demolition/removal of 458 square metres of existing canopies, walkway and storage containers, erection of 696 metres square of open-sided canopies, erection of 358 square metre extension to existing coffee shop for additional seating and an educational classroom.
Withdrawn 10/03/2009 |
| 02/2068P | A canopy in glasshouse, construction of part of an existing plant sales area, the levels of which are to be raised to provide a safe area with retaining walls, balustrades and access ramps
Approved with conditions 11/06/2002 |
| 02/0138P | Provision of canopy in glasshouse; construction over an existing external plant sales area with raised levels by provision of retaining walls, balustrades and disabled access ramps; and extension of existing sales and storage glasshouse
Refused 27/03/2002 |
| 01/2243P | Provision of a canopy in glasshouse; construction over an existing external plant sales area and extension of an existing sales and storage glasshouse
Withdrawn 07/11/2001 |
| 20240P | Continuation of use as garden centre with alterations to layout
Approved with conditions 31/10/1979 |

POLICIES

Regional Spatial Strategy

DP1 (Spatial Principles)

RDF4 (Green Belts)

EM1 (A) (Integrated Enhancement & Protection of the Region's Environmental Assets – Landscape)

EM1 (B) (Integrated Enhancement & Protection of the Region's Environmental Assets - Natural Environment)

EM1 (D) (Integrated Enhancement & Protection of the Region's Environmental Assets - Trees, Woodlands and Forests)

Local Plan Policy

BE1 (Design Guidance)

GC1 (New Buildings)

NE7 (Woodlands)

NE11 (Nature Conservation)

DC1 (Design – New Build)

DC2 (Design – Extensions and Alterations)

DC3 (Amenity)

DC6 (Circulation and Access)

DC9 (Tree Protection)

Other Material Considerations

PPG2 – Green Belts

CONSIDERATIONS (External to Planning)

Highways: No objection, subject to conditions

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

One letter of representation was received from a neighbouring property that raised concerns that the proposed extension would be built forward of the existing building line; the design of the extension is not in keeping with the existing structure and would affect privacy; issues regarding highway safety due to an increase in traffic volumes and pedestrian safety; and queries why the coffee shop could not extend within the existing building. All other concerns are not material planning considerations.

APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION

A Supporting Statement and Woodland Access & Management Plan were submitted with the planning application. The Supporting Statement contains information on the application site, the background to the development proposals, the policy background, a Design and Access Statement, and a Transport Statement. Copies of the documents can be viewed in full on the application file.

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Principal of Development

The main issues in this application are the impact of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area and existing building, whether the proposed development is appropriate development in the Green Belt or whether very special circumstances have been demonstrated, the impact on parking and highway safety, nature conservation, existing trees and landscape, and any implications for the residential amenity of neighbouring properties.

Green Belt Policy

The application site is located within the North Cheshire Green Belt, adjacent to predominantly residential area. Development is contained within the existing garden centre site, on land that has been previously developed by the laying of hardstanding and the sale of goods, and it would not result in an encroachment into the Green Belt.

In order to protect the openness of the Green Belt only 'appropriate' development is permissible, unless very special circumstances exist. PPG2 and Local Plan Policy GC1 indicate that the proposed development is inappropriate development. Therefore planning permission will only be granted if very special circumstances can be demonstrated. The previously submitted application (Ref: 08/2739P) was withdrawn by the applicant as it was considered that insufficient information had been submitted to justify very special circumstances. Additional information has now been submitted with this application and is contained within the applicant's Supporting Statement. This is available on-line. In summary, the statement explains that;

The site's history and recent trading conditions. The supporting information explains that Wilmslow Garden Centre is a long established garden centre serving a local (i.e. within 5 mile radius) market. However, since 2004 sales at the garden centre have stagnated and, in real terms, have fallen. This decline is blamed on a lack of investment in this garden centre in particular and a drop in the trade in general.

In response the centre's new owners (Klondyke Garden Centres) have undertaken a 5-year business plan to address the problem areas identified. These were the physical layout and operation of the site (e.g. positioning of stock in relation to the exit, too many weather damaged plants, customers put off buying plants when they are not protected from inclement weather) and the future of the 1.1ha woodland.

The proposed canopy would partly cover an existing external area that is used for the display/sale of goods that would cover 683m² of a total sales area of 2397m². The size of the proposed canopy (683m²) has been dictated by what is to be stored beneath it.

The size of the proposed coffee shop is dictated by the number of covers required and the size of the kitchen/food preparation and servery area. The Supporting Statement provides detailed information in terms of hourly demand, length of customer stay and annual sales that is used to calculate

the required number of covers and hence the required amount of floor area. The calculations show that 156 covers are required and according to the Architects Metric Handbook this would equate to a requirement of 432m² (which includes seating, circulation space, kitchen, servery, queuing space etc). The size of the coffee shop proposed is actually slightly lower than the figure calculated at 417m². Once the applicants realised the amount of floorspace they required, they then examined where the coffee shop should be located.

It is proposed to keep the coffee shop at the east end of the shop and to utilise all of the existing brick and tile building for the kitchen and catering staff toilets as this is the required size. It is brick built (unlike the main shop which is a glasshouse construction) which lends itself to a food storage, preparation and cooking environment (it has solid roof and walls which is better for creating a hygienic food environment). Part of the existing customer seating area is located in the brick building, as is the servery. The servery is too small and need to be extended in length by 3.5 metres. This would either have to be in the existing glasshouse or in an extension to the brick building. If it were in the existing glasshouse then the seating area would need to locate in the main shop. This would result in a reduction in sales space amounting to estimated lost sales of over £150,000 per annum. It is not possible to maintain the same product stocking levels with a smaller shop area (indeed the present shop area is too cramped). The alternative is to locate the servery in a new building and to relocate the seating into this building. The proposed building would be no bigger than the area required for the servery (56m²) and the 156 covers (253m²).

It is proposed to make available spare seating capacity at Wilmslow Garden Centre for outside organisations to use when the coffee shop demand is low on certain days of the week. The classroom will be an area of the coffee shop which can be sectioned off partly with a permanent glazed screen and partly by a retractable screen. The classroom will have available up to 30 chairs suitable for children and be available to school parties, horticultural societies, gardening clubs and other groups. The woodland is available to these parties (accompanied) to learn and observe wildlife and to return to the classroom to carry out projects on the experience. Adjacent to the classroom will be an educational garden that allows children to 'get their hands dirty' and to manage their own school allotment, together with practicing garden designs. An expression of interest has been received from a headteacher of a local school and the e-mail has included in the Supporting Statement.

The space vacated in the existing building by the relocation of the coffee shop would enable a better display of garden furniture to be accommodated and would enable wider customer aisles to be provided. Aisle widths ideally need to be 1.8 metres wide to allow two customers with trolleys to pass easily (which is currently not achieved). A further two checkouts will be needed to meet the increase in sales being targeted, requiring an additional 26m²; a larger information desk is also needed and more space at the shop entrance.

With over 28% of the garden centre being the 1.1.ha of woodland that is open to the public as a free recreational facility, it was decided to carry out an assessment of the woodland to establish what is there, whether it should continue to be open to the public and if so, what improvements, if any, could be undertaken. The Environmental Project Consulting Group were commissioned to undertake the work. The main conclusions of the study were:

- That the woodland is poorly managed and becoming overgrown with Hawthorn and Elder;
- There are large areas of hardcore thought to be the remains of the First World War Prisoner of War Camp;
- There is evidence of protected species;
- The woodland could be improved for public access including upgrading the existing paths, creating a picnic site, creation of a demonstration wildlife garden, creation of a new pond, creation of a badger sett and the provision of bird nesting and bat roosting boxes.

In the circumstances, it is considered that the applicant has provided sufficient information to justify very special circumstances; the proposed extensions would be located on an existing sales area of the garden centre and therefore they would not result in encroachment into the Green Belt; the scale and siting of the proposed buildings would not affect the openness of the Green Belt; the impact of the new buildings is off-set somewhat by the improvement of the woodland and the creation of educational gardens for schools and organisations to use; the proposed buildings would result in the removal of some existing unsightly metal containers and polytunnels that currently occupy the site. For these reasons, the proposed development is considered to comply with Green Belt policy.

Highways

There are no Highway objections to the proposals contained within this application since a significant amount of the proposal is a reconfiguration of the site and the increase in the size of the coffee shop/restaurant will have a degree of double counting in respect of the garden centre patrons.

In terms of the parking, it could be argued that the number of spaces exceeds the interim parking standards approved by the former County Highway Authority if only the covered retail element of the garden centre was included. However, if the total of the open sales area with the covered area is accumulated then the parking falls below the maximums set out in local and national guidance. In addition consideration has been given to the estimated traffic levels visiting the development and given that the development is served by public transport, 212 spaces is considered to be an acceptable figure, given the fluctuating demand, both in terms of season and weekly patterns plus the envisaged reduction in car trips through to 2013.

However, in light of Government Guidance on Inclusive mobility, there is a shortfall in spaces for disabled persons. The guidance states that for car parks associated with shopping, leisure and recreational facilities including areas open to the public there should be a minimum of one space per

employee who is a disabled motorist plus 6% of the total capacity for visiting disabled motorists. In this instance the provision should be 12. This is a matter that can be dealt with by way of condition.

Cycle Spaces should equate to 1 per 300 sqm which for the revised covered section of the development is 9 spaces. The applicant is providing 10 spaces. The applicant is also supporting this use by providing shower and changing facilities for staff members. The Highway Department will require the cycle parking to be split between short stay for visitors and long stay for staff members.

In view of the fact that peak visits to the site are outside of the main peak highway flows the Highway Engineer does not have any concerns in respect of traffic generation to the site and impact on the adjacent highway network.

Design

The proposed canopy would be open-sided and would be built of a white powder coated steel frame and a clear polythene roof. It would be attached to the western side elevation of the existing garden centre building and would comprise two bays that measure 10.5 metres by 32.2 metres. The roof of the canopies would be curved and they would have an eaves height of 3 metres and an overall height of 5 metres. The canopy would be one metre lower than the existing garden centre building. This type of structure is a common feature of garden centres and is of a lightweight design.

The proposed café extension would be attached to the northern elevation of the existing café building and would extend across an existing outdoor plant sale/display area and partly across an existing covered sales area. The proposed extension would be clad in timber and have a grey tiles roof (although these materials could be conditioned to be submitted should Members consider that different materials would be more appropriate). The building would have a hipped roof, would have an eaves height of 2.7 metres and a ridge height of 5 metres. It would be approximately 0.7 metres lower than the existing building. This building has been re-sited since the previous submission (Ref: 08/2739M) so that it is located further away from Manchester Road.

The existing buildings at the garden centre comprise a variety of designs, heights and materials and therefore it is not considered that either building would have a detrimental affect on the overall appearance of the site. Due to the height and density of the existing boundary treatments and due to the scale and siting of the proposed buildings, it is not considered that they would be highly conspicuous or detrimental to the character or appearance of the surrounding area.

Amenity

The application site is bounded by residential properties to the southern boundary and on the opposite side of Manchester Road to the east of the site. No objections have been raised by the properties to the south of the site but

one letter of objection was received by a resident from a property on the opposite side of Manchester Road.

The area on which the proposed canopy would be sited is an area that is currently used for the external display of goods associated with the garden centre. The property most affected by this building would be No. 21 Sefton Drive to the south of the application site. The neighbouring property would be sited approximately 22.5 metres from the proposed canopy and a number of trees, hedges and shrubs would largely screen the proposed building from view. As the area is already used for the display/sale of goods, it is not considered that there are any additional impacts on the amenity of this property arising from the associated development.

The proposed extension to the existing café would be largely screened from the residential property to the south of the application site (No. 145 Manchester Road) as it would be positioned behind the existing buildings of the garden centre and would have a lower ridge height. A resident on the opposite side of Manchester Road has raised concerns that the proposed café extension would be detrimental to their privacy. The resident's property would not directly face towards the proposed extension; would be sited approximately 55 metres from it; and the proposed extension would be largely screened by a broad strip of mature shrubs and trees along the eastern boundary. The application also shows that new planting will be positioned along the boundary with Manchester Road, further reducing the prominence of the structure.

Due to the siting and scale of the proposed buildings, the existing and proposed boundary treatments, and the siting of the existing dwellings it is not considered that the proposed extensions would be detrimental to neighbouring amenity.

Landscaping

The developer has considered the landscape context with trees defining the car park area and shrub beds providing privacy and screening. A detailed planting plan is required that demonstrates the type and size of planting that has been chosen, how it will be planted and maintained to ensure good establishment. Screen planting to Manchester Road is welcomed because it creates a pleasant 'garden' area for visitors. It is recommended that this is continued around the side of the grass area to provide screening for the neighbouring bungalow. This will provide additional privacy and envelop this space for visitors.

The existing paths within the woodland are slippery and the steps are in poor repair or none existent. A detailed plan showing where the new paths will be located and the structure of these paths is required. It is suggested that paths should be no wider than 1200mm to allow passing but not too wide to be intrusive and damaging to the woodland. A grit stone surface would be considered appropriate as it is hard wearing and has a complimentary pH for the area. Some work to the trees may be required if the applicant is to encourage visitors into the woodland as part of the education centre.

The existing planting could be enhanced to the entrance of the site by additional shrubs, to compliment the new development and promote the regeneration of the site.

The Landscape Officer recommends that conditions in respect of the submission of a landscaping scheme, the implementation of the approved landscaping scheme, additional information in respect of the woodland paths, and the submission of a woodland management plan would satisfy the above concerns.

Trees

The proposed demolition of existing canopies and removal of storage containers and the erection of a new open-sided canopy and extension to the existing coffee shop will not impact upon any existing trees within the application site. An existing Cypress hedge which forms the boundary between the sales area and the car park will be retained. The slight reconfiguration of the car park, increasing from the existing 209 spaces to 212 spaces will not impact upon any existing trees within the site. The proposed planting within the car park is welcomed.

The Forestry Officer has carried out an initial evaluation of the woodland to the northern boundary of the application site which abuts the River Dean. Generally, he concurs with the findings of the submitted report supplied by *'The Environmental Project Consulting Group'* in support of this application. The report sets out proposals for improved public access into the woodland, upgrading the existing pathway network, incorporating a picnic site and providing interpretive information for a new pond and other nature conservation improvements.

The improved access into the woodland site carries with it certain responsibilities and a 'duty of care' on the owner. It is evident that there are trees within the site which have suffered from wind damage in the past and there is evidence of one Crack Willow that has fallen onto the adjacent highway relatively recently. It is suggested that, whilst the issue of tree safety is not within the remit of this planning application, the applicant should be advised to carry out a risk assessment on the woodland which will then inform any improvements to public access being considered.

Ecology

There are not considered to be any major issues associated with the redevelopment of the garden centre and the proposed works in the adjacent woodland. Overall, the proposed upgrading of the paths in the woodland together with the proposed wildlife interpretation and habitat creation is welcomed and should lead to an overall gain for nature conservation.

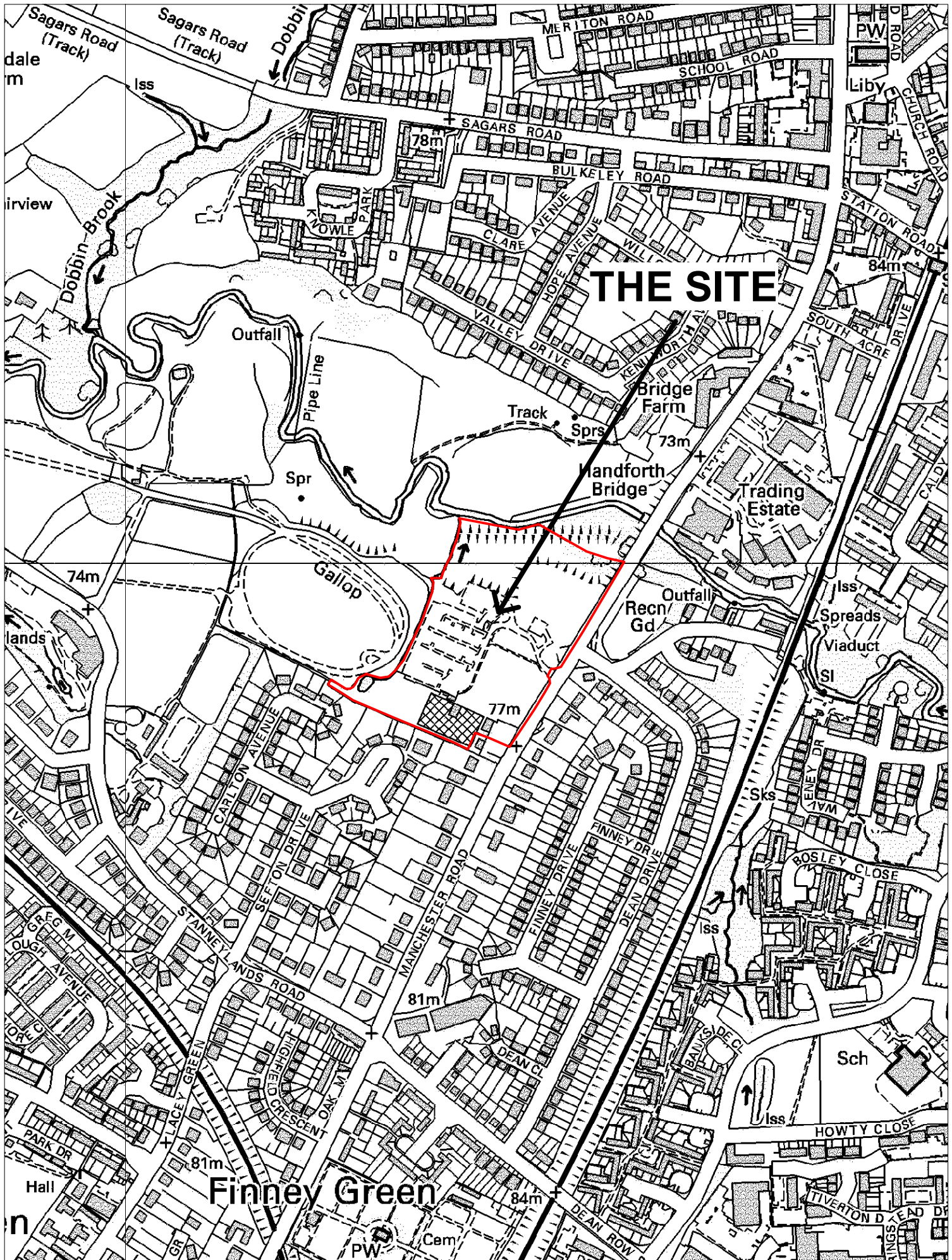
Whilst badgers are active at this site there does not appear to be an active sett present. As badgers can excavate a sett within a short time period it is recommended that a further survey should take place immediately before work starts on site. In this instance, the survey can be conditioned.

A new pond is proposed within the woodland. This is welcomed and will make a valuable contribution to Local and UK Biodiversity Action Plan targets. To ensure that the nature conservation value of the new pond is maximised the design of the pond should be agreed with the LPA prior to the commencement of development. This can be dealt with by means of a suitable planning condition.

There are likely to be nesting birds on site. Therefore the standard breeding bird condition is recommended in order to protect them if works are undertaken between 1st March and 31st August in any year.

CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION

For the reasons explained, it is considered that the applicants have now sufficiently demonstrated the very special circumstances required in order that this development might be considered for approval. The garden centre has lacked investment. Thorough studies have been conducted to identify and arrest the drop in trade. This proposal takes these recommendations and applies them so that the scale, design and location of what is proposed is not excessive and will not harm the Green Belt. Planning permission should be granted.



09/1746M - WILMSLOW GARDEN CENTRE, MANCHESTER ROAD, WILMSLOW, CHESHIRE

N.G.R. - 385,320 - 382,910

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Application for **Full Planning**

RECOMMENDATION : Approve subject to following conditions

1. A03FP - Commencement of development (3 years)
2. A04HP - Provision of cycle parking
3. A06NC - Protection for breeding birds
4. A01LS - Landscaping - submission of details
5. A04LS - Landscaping (implementation)
6. A10LS - Additional landscaping details required
7. A16LS - Submission of landscape/woodland management plan
8. A06EX - Materials as application
9. Parking Provision (including disabled spaces)
10. Short-stay/visitor cycle parking
11. Creation of Pond
12. Badger Survey