

Planning Reference No:	10/0643N
Application Address:	Land North West of Weston Lane, Crotia Mill Road, Weston , Crewe
Proposal:	Change of Use from Agricultural Land to Allotment Purposes for the Use of the Residents of Weston and Basford
Applicant:	Weston and Basford Parish Council, Malt Kiln Cottage, Englesea Brook Lane, Barthomley, Crewe, CW2 5QW
Application Type:	Full Planning
Grid Reference:	372487 352538
Ward:	Doddington
Earliest Determination Date:	24 th March 2010
Expiry Dated:	13 th May 2010
Date of Officer's Site Visit:	19 th March 2010
Date Report Prepared:	7 th April 2010
Constraints:	Wind Turbine Dev Consultation Area

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION:
APPROVE subject to conditions

MAIN ISSUES:

The key issues for members to consider in determining this application are

- Principle of development
- Impact on the character and appearance of the open countryside and green gap
- Impact on residential amenity
- Impact on ecology
- Highways and parking
- Impact on TPO trees

1. REASON FOR REFERRAL

This application is included on the agenda of the Southern Planning Committee as the site area is 1.214 hectares and is therefore a small-scale major development.

2. DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

3.

The application site lies within the open countryside and the Shavington/Weston/Crewe green gap immediately to the north west of the village of Weston. The existing access is taken off Mill Lane at the junction with Weston Lane. The site comprises of agricultural land which slopes away towards Basford Brook to the west. The eastern boundary is formed by a 1.5 metre hedge and the southern boundary with Weston Lane by a high 2 metre hedge with a number of mature trees within the hedge line which are protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). To the north is the A500 Shavington bypass.

There are also a number of TPO trees to the west within the area edged blue on the plan. This land will not form part of the proposed allotment site.

4. DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

Full planning permission is sought for the change of use of the land to allotment gardens comprising 30 plots each at 30 metres by 9 metres. The allotments are proposed as a community facility for the residents of Weston and Basford after a demand for such a facility was identified by the Parish Council in the preparation of its Parish Plan.

It is proposed to provide a communal storage building which will consist of a steel container clad with rustic timber and planted with a green roof. The storage container will be 6 metres in length, 3 metres wide and 3 metres high. It is also proposed to provide a poly tunnel measuring 4 metres wide by 16 metres in length and 2 metres in height. The communal buildings and parking area will be located along the site frontage adjacent to Weston Lane with the allotment plots to the north/north west.

A new access will be formed off Mill Lane with the existing access closed off. Parking will be provided for 8 cars with 6 standard spaces and 2 disabled bays.

5. RELEVANT HISTORY

No relevant planning history

6. POLICIES

Regional Spatial Strategy

DP1 Spatial Principles

DP7 Promote Environmental Quality

EM1 Natural Environment

Local Plan Policy

NE.2 (Open Countryside)

NE.4 (Green Gaps)

NE.5 (Nature Conservation and Habitats)

NE.9 (Protected Species)

BE.1 (Amenity)

BE.2 (Design Standards)

BE.3 (Access and Parking)

TRAN.9 (Car Parking Standards)

RT.6 (Recreational Uses in the Open Countryside)

CF.2 (Community Facilities)

Other Material Considerations

PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development

PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

PPS9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation

7. CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Highways:

The Strategic Highways and Transportation Manager has assessed this application and offers the following comments:

- No highways objections, subject to a condition requiring detailed drawings of access and parking arrangements before occupation.

Nature Conservation:

The Borough Council's Nature Conservation Officer does not object to this proposal. There are no significant ecological impacts associated with this development. The following conditions are recommended in accordance with the ecological report.

- The development should proceed in accordance with the recommendations of the Ecological Impact Assessment
- Prior to the commencement of any works between 1st March and 31st August in any year, a survey for the presence of nesting birds is required.

8. VIEWS OF THE PARISH COUNCIL:

Not applicable – The Parish Council is the applicant

9. OTHER REPRESENTATIONS:

No other representations have been received.

10. APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

The applicant has submitted a Design and Access Statement including an assessment of the site selection process. The contents can be summarised as below

- There is a positive demand for allotments in Weston and Basford identified through a questionnaire associated with preparation of parish plan
- Weston and Basford Allotment Group has been formed currently with 25 paid up members
- Most sites in Parish are owned by the Duchy of Lancaster or the Co-op who have no land available
- Other land owners have been approached but without success
- Allotments are a use totally appropriate to a rural area
- It is not the intention that sheds and other structures are scattered over the allotment site
- A suitably designed communal building and car park will be provided at the southern end of the site to integrate visually with the Fourways housing development.
- Consultation has taken place with the local authority prior to submission
- Consultation has taken place with residents at Fourways and positive feedback has been received.
- The site will be restricted to residents of the Weston and Basford Parish
- Part of the ethos behind this is as a community building exercise and ancillary to the main use there may be occasional community events
- The area edged blue will remain in its existing state as rough meadow land.
- The site will comprise 30 allotment plots each 30m x 9m
- The communal storage building will be clad with rustic timber and treated with an eco friendly roof.
- The development will visually integrate with the edge of the built up area of Weston village
- An area of wildflowers will enhance biodiversity and the area will also benefit from bulb planting and flower beds. Hedging/shrub species will be planted to screen the buildings and car park.
- Existing access will be relocated away from the dangerous junction of Cemetery Road and Whites Lane

- It is envisaged that the majority of people using the site will walk or cycle given the proximity of the site to the village centre.

An Ecological Impact Assessment prepared by Cheshire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) at Reaseheath College has also been received.

- The area where allotments will be sited is currently over-wintered stubble which has been colonised by naturally regenerating common arable weeds and grasses
- The field is surrounded by a hawthorn hedge on the southern and eastern sides and are tightly cut and unlikely to support many nesting birds
- A line of newly planted trees forms the western edge of the site and as long as a 2m buffer is retained from the edge of the canopy the trees will not be affected.
- The Cheshire rECOd database has been searched for protected and BAP species
- The development will not result in the loss of significant terrestrial habitat and the work will have a low impact on local populations of protected species
- A small amount of winter seed source for several farmland birds may be lost however there is adjacent farmland within the birds range which can be used.
- The surrounding hedges should be grown up and out to support nesting birds
- Before removing the section of hedge for the access it should be checked for nesting birds. Ideally it should be netted before the bird breeding season (1st March – 31st August)
- Where small gaps exist in the eastern boundary hedge new hedgerow trees could be established.
- A margin of 2 metres or more uncut at the edge of the field adjacent to the hedgerows should be considered to add habitat and benefit for a range of species.
- New tree planting should be native species and should be protected for the first couple of years.

11. OFFICER APPRAISAL

Principle of Development

The proposed development is located within the Green Gap and designated open countryside. Green gap policy seeks to ensure new buildings do not result in the erosion of the physical gap whilst policy NE.2 relating to open countryside seeks to protect the openness of the countryside for its own sake to protect the character and amenity of the countryside. Development should therefore be kept to a minimum.

Policy NE.4 states that where it can be demonstrated no suitable alternative location is available, it may justify a relaxation of the strict controls in the green gap. The applicant has provided information which shows that attempts have been made to acquire land within the vicinity, however no land is currently available or is likely to become available as it is subject to long term tenancy agreements. This land, whilst outside the settlement boundary is immediately adjacent to it.

Policy NE.2 allows for recreational uses in the countryside and it is considered that this proposal falls within that category, therefore provided it accords with other criteria and policies the principle of development is accepted.

Open Countryside and Green Gap

Allotments are considered an agricultural use and although the character and appearance is different to that of the intensive farming which shapes the modern countryside, it will visually harmonise with the rural character of the landscape by virtue of its quasi agricultural character.

The built development has been kept to a minimum and within close proximity to the opposing dwellings at Fourways, towards the Weston Lane frontage and therefore immediately adjacent to the built up area and the settlement of Weston. The allotment gardens will be located to the north/north west and in order to protect the openness of the countryside and prevent erosion of the green gap, if the committee are minded to approve the application a condition should be imposed to ensure no sheds or buildings are erected on the individual plots or within other areas. This will allow the authority strict control over any further development which may result in the erosion of the green gap.

Ecology

The submitted Ecological Impact Assessment concludes that the development will not result in the loss of important terrestrial habitat and the development will have a low impact on any protected species. The Council's Nature Conservation Officer has viewed the report and is satisfied there will be no significant ecological impacts.

The Ecological Impact Assessment makes a number of recommendations for mitigation and improvements of habitat quality. If the committee is minded to approve the application a condition should be imposed to ensure these are carried out. A condition should also be imposed to ensure that immediately prior to the commencement of development between the period 1st March 31st August a survey for the presence of nesting birds should be carried out. This will ensure that any works do not disturb nesting birds which are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Design

The proposal includes the erection of a communal storage building, a polytunnel and a car park and access road.

The communal storage building will consist of a steel container to be clad in timber. A steel container is proposed in order to maximise security, however the cladding will lessen any negative visual impacts of the structure and allow the container to harmonise with the surroundings. It is also proposed to provide a green roof which will help blend the storage building into the surroundings. The container is proposed is of a standard size, 6 metres in length by 3 metres wide and 3 metres high. At this size the bulk and mass of the container is kept to a minimum whilst providing sufficient storage of tools and equipment for the occupiers of the allotment plots. The container will be sited close to the existing built form and screened by the proposed planting. It will be a low level structure and therefore it is considered that it will not result in the erosion of the gap between built up areas nor will it adversely affect the character of the landscape.

The proposed polytunnel will be steel framed with plastic sheeting, as per the standard design and appearance for such structures. Polytunnels are features which are often seen in the rural landscape as they serve an agricultural purpose. However they can be large and contribute to the erosion of the openness of the countryside. Given that this proposal includes only one polytunnel at 16 metres by 4 metres and 3 metres high, it is unlikely to result in a significant detrimental impact on the surroundings and would not be of a scale, bulk and massing which would result in the erosion of the green gap.

A track will be formed from the new access to the car parking area which will be located adjacent to the site frontage. The car park will have a porous hardcore surface. This will appear appropriate in the countryside setting and the size of the car parking area has been kept to a minimum.

Screen planting is proposed along the front boundary and the boundary of Mill Lane to the new access. This will help to screen the site and particularly the communal area consisting of the storage building, polytunnel and car park. If the committee is minded to approve the application a condition should be imposed to require details of the proposed planting to ensure the screening is sufficient and species appropriate for the rural location.

Amenity

The nearest residential properties are facing onto the site located at Fourways on the opposite side of Weston Lane. The use of the land as allotments is likely to generate some noise and disturbance however this will be minimal as the allotment plots are approximately 70 metres from the nearest dwellings. The communal area including the car park and storage buildings is closer to the properties however the scale of the site and use as allotments is unlikely to generate significant vehicle movements or noise and disturbance to the detriment of the enjoyment of the properties at Fourways.

Highways and Parking

The proposal includes the provision of 6 parking bays and 2 disabled parking bays. It is intended that the allotments will be a community facility and therefore it is hoped people will access the site via means other than motor vehicles. The site is outside the village of Weston and therefore may encourage the use of the motorcar however it is located immediately adjacent to the village and within walking/cycling distance. Furthermore no Highways objections have been raised.

The new access will be formed off Mill Lane approximately 40 metres from the junction of Mill Lane, Whites Lane/Weston Lane and Cemetery Road. The existing access is at the junction so the closing of this access should be ensured by condition should the application be approved in order to avoid any detrimental impact on highway safety. The new access will provide safer access and egress arrangements than the existing location.

Should the committee be minded to approve the application a condition should be attached to require detailed drawings of the new access and the car park to ensure they do not result in any detrimental impact on highway safety.

Trees

The TPO trees along the site frontage will be retained and further planting added to screen the car park and storage buildings. However should permission be granted it is important to ensure the trees are not damaged by any construction vehicles brought on to the site. A condition should therefore be imposed to require protective fencing to be erected to protect the trees from damage during construction activity.

12. CONCLUSIONS

The proposed development would create a community facility for the residents of Weston and Basford within close proximity to the village of Weston. The site lies outside the settlement boundary in the green gap and open countryside, however it is immediately adjacent to the settlement boundary. More generally there are no other sites available within the vicinity and within the settlement boundary, and as such the proposed site is the most effective solution to providing this community facility.

The proposal keeps the communal storage and polytunnel sited close to the Weston Lane frontage and reflective of the built form opposite the site at Fourways. This arrangement

will minimise the impact on the green gap and protect the openness of the countryside. The allotment use is appropriate recreational activity in the open countryside.

With regard to other material considerations, the proposal will not result in a detrimental impact on highway safety, and proposes a new access further from the junction of Mill Lane, Whites Lane/Weston Lane and Cemetery Road. It is not considered this development would result in significant ecological impacts.

Taking the above into account, the scheme is deemed to be acceptable and in accordance with the relevant development plan policies and therefore members are recommended to approve this application.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

APPROVE subject to the following conditions

- 1. Standard time**
- 2. Approved plans**
- 3. No development to commence until a sample of the timber cladding to be used on the storage container has been submitted and approved.**
- 4. No development to commence until landscaping details have been submitted and approved.**
- 5. Implementation and maintenance of landscaping**
- 6. Tree protection in accordance BS 5837:2005 to TPO trees on site frontage**
- 7. Immediately prior to the commencement of any works between 1st March and 31st August in any year, a survey for the presence of nesting birds shall be carried out.**
- 8. No development to commence until detailed drawings of the new access and parking have been submitted and approved.**
- 9. No development to commence until details of the closure of the existing access have been submitted and approved.**
- 10. No buildings to be erected on the allotment plots without prior consent of the local planning authority.**
- 11. No further buildings to be erected on any other land without prior consent of the local planning authority.**

LOCATION PLAN: Cheshire East Council Licence No. 100049045

