

**OFFICER REPORT FOR APPLICATION 03/3214P**

**RELOCATION OF EXISTING GARDEN CENTRE AND LANDSCAPE  
CONTRACTORS BUSINESS (OUTLINE PLANNING PERMISSION)**

## **POLICIES**

The site lies within the North Cheshire Green Belt and an Area of Special County Value for Landscape as provided in the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan 2011.

## **RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS**

None on this site.

03/1776P - Change of use from garden centre to new leisure facilities (cricket pitch) - approved September 2003 on the site of the existing garden centre.

## **CONSULTATIONS**

The Head of Service Health and Public Safety raises no objections.

Nether Alderley Parish Council raised no objections.

The views of the Highway Authority are awaited.

## **PUBLICITY**

Neighbour notification, site notice and newspaper advertisement, with a closing date for representations of 12 January 2004.

## **REPRESENTATIONS**

The Wilmslow Trust questioned whether the site is appropriate in the Green Belt.

## **APPLICANTS' SUBMISSION**

The application is accompanied by a supporting planning statement and transport assessment. These are concerned with a description of the background to the application, the application site and surroundings, an assessment of the proposed development, an appraisal of the development against planning policy and guidance, and a conclusion. The main points of the supporting statement are as follows:

The company has been located at this site for 55 years. The company has leased the site from AstraZeneca for that period of time. The lease will expire in 2004 and the company are uncertain as to whether a renewal will be given. Planning permission has been granted for enhanced open space and recreational facilities on the site of the existing garden centre to AstraZeneca. That use is an appropriate use in the Green Belt. The company need to find an alternative site to continue his business and retain its existing client base. It is acknowledged that the site is located within the North Cheshire Green Belt where there is a presumption against inappropriate development. Any alternative sites within the immediate area would also be subject to Green

Belt policy. This statement has assessed the existing and proposed uses, and categorised these as either horticultural or non horticultural. The application proposes a substantial reduction in overall uses including non horticultural uses and the overall site area. The proposal results in an overall floor space reduction of nearly 60%. The existing prominent frontage to the A34 would become recreational open space enhancing the visual appearance of the area and the openness of the Green Belt. The relocated garden centre at the Bollington lane site would be reduced in scale and in a less prominent location. 32 full time and 14 part time jobs would be safeguarded. The Council would have a more stringent means of control over the development of the proposed garden centre. There is a requirement to improve the existing Bollington Lane and Congleton Road junction, but two to three trees along the hedgerow fronting the A34 may be lost. A full landscape strategy for replacement and enhancement will be submitted at the time of reserved matters.

### **KEY ISSUES**

- 1 The application follows that granted in September 2003 for the redevelopment of the existing garden centre into an area for new leisure facilities (cricket pitch and open space) for AstraZeneca. The AstraZeneca site is of regional strategic significance in employment terms. The applicants are proposed to relocate the business on the opposite side of the A34. The application is in outline with matters of access and layout of buildings applied for. Subsequent details will be required for design and external appearance of the buildings and landscape. The application does not propose a total relocation for the uses but involves a substantial reduction, with existing retail franchises not being transferred. The proposal does not involve the relocation of residential accommodation which would remain on site. A comparison of existing and proposed floor space is available. Access to the site would be taken directly off Bollington Lane.
- 2 The key issues in considering this application are national policy, the Development Plan, access and highway issues and the impact of the development on the area.
- 3 National policy is set out in PPG2 on Green Belt in which it is indicated that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. There is a presumption against inappropriate development which should only be approved in very special circumstances. New buildings in the Green Belt are inappropriate unless they are required in the essential interests of agriculture, forestry or other rural enterprises. The applicants have sought to demonstrate that the proposal would involve a significant reduction in floor space and the removal of some existing development, whilst their existing site would be developed only for open uses.
- 4 Green Belt policy is also contained within the Cheshire Structure Plan and Macclesfield Local Plan Alterations 2011. The site also lies within

the Area of Special County Value for Landscape where the Council seeks to conserve and enhance the quality of the landscape and to protect it from development which is likely to have an adverse effect on its character and appearance.

- 5 The existing site and the uses on it have expanded over time but have done so in a sporadic manner, the opportunity being given now to have control over the future development of the business. The proposals for the relocation of the garden centre do involve a reduction in floor space and built development, but also in a less prominent location. Taking the overall impact of the two sites, it is concluded that there would be no reduction in openness and that the impact of the proposed relocation could be minimised by appropriate conditions, particularly at the reserve matters stage and also in terms of landscape enhancement. The existing business would be on a smaller scale than the existing one, there would be a reduction inappropriate uses (particularly retailing ones) within the Green Belt and there is an opportunity to increase the openness of the Green Belt at this point. The proposal is also a relocation of an existing business. For these reasons it is concluded that very special circumstances may exist here so as to allow the Council the opportunity to consider the application sympathetically.
- 6 There would be a reduction in the overall sight size, including plant growing and retailing. The franchises would close, as some of them have already done. There has been an emphasis in recent years to the landscaping contracting aspect of the business. A further consideration is the retention of the business and the jobs provided by the company in the area. It is acknowledged that the use provides a combination of appropriate and inappropriate uses in the North Cheshire Green Belt, but having regard to the circumstances outlined above, it is concluded that a policy objection to the application would not be appropriate in this situation.
- 7 A transport assessment accompanies the application and gives detailed consideration to the garden centre's relocation. A key issue is the improvement of the Bollington Lane/Congleton Road (A34) junction with is currently substandard. Improvements to visibility splays in both north and south bound directions are necessary in order to meet highway requirements. It is understood that the County Council are looking already at this junction in terms of the potential impact of additional traffic at either end of the Alderley Edge Bypass. The applicants have proposed a junction solution in order to improve visibility splays which would include removal of an existing area of hedgerow and possibly up to three mature trees that lie within that hedgerow. It is acknowledged that their loss is likely to have some impact on the landscape character around the area. In that the loss of these trees may, in any event, be required for an improvement to highway visibility arising from the construction of the Alderley Edge Bypass, it is concluded that no objections be raised in principle to their loss, subject to adequate mitigation and compensatory planting.

- 8 In order to meet highway requirements 67 car parking spaces are proposed together with an overspill area of 15 spaces. The views of the Highway Authority on both the access arrangements, junction improvements and car parking proposals are awaited, although it is understood that they are unlikely to be recommending refusal of the application.
- 9 A number of other issues are needing to be addressed. The hours of opening of the business at present are 9.00am until 6.00pm Monday to Saturday and 10.00am until 6.00pm on Sunday. The applicants wish to retain these trading hours if possible and in the circumstances it is considered appropriate to incorporate them in a planning condition should Members be minded to support the application. It is also likely that HGV and service vehicle movements would remain the same, or would indeed slightly reduce given the loss of the franchises.
- 10 A further issue concerns the schedule of goods to be sold at the site which are predominately goods directly related to garden and outdoor products with some seasonal products. The list is based upon other sites within the North Cheshire Green Belt and elsewhere. The list of products proposed does involve a reduction in the list of types of goods sold at the site at present and could be the basis for an appropriate legal agreement. It is concluded that the list of goods was not excessive for this type of use.
- 11 This is an outline application with many matters reserved for subsequent approval. The development will, in any event, only proceed if the company has to relocate from their existing site. It is concluded that in these circumstances it would be appropriate to enter into a legal agreement to secure a sequence of development following their vacation of the existing site, to secure the highway improvement works, the landscape mitigation works and to provide for the list of approved goods for sale at the site.
- 12 Having regard to the nature of this application, it is concluded that as an outline application it can be recommended for approval, although it is to be noted that the views of the County Highways Authority are awaited.

## **SUBJECT TO**

The views of the County Highways Authority and subject to the prior completion of a Section 106 Agreement along the lines indicated above, grant planning permission subject to the following conditions.