

**CONSULTATION FROM CASTLE POINT BOROUGH COUNCIL
OUTLINE APPLICATION FOR A DWELLING IN
CONNECTION WITH HORTICULTURE
SLATFORDS NURSERY, WEIR CUTTING, ARTERIAL
ROAD, RAYLEIGH.**

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The planning application on which this Council is being consulted relates to an area of land to the south west side of the Arterial Road to the west of Rayleigh Weir. The land is accessed from the Arterial Road immediately adjacent to the Esso petrol filling station which is located between the Rayleigh Weir and the Fairglens interchanges. It appears that no matters of detail, other than the access, are to be considered at this stage.
- 1.2 The consideration of planning applications is a statutory function for the Authority charged to deal with them. In this case it is discretionary whether this Council responds.

2 JUSTIFICATION

- 2.1 The site is within the Green Belt. The horticultural operation, which consists of the propagation and growing on of seedlings for sale is based currently on two sites. Initial propagation takes place at a site at Thorpe Road, Hawkwell, in this district. Plants are then transferred to the Rayleigh site for growing on.
- 2.2 In 1998 a similar application was made for a dwelling at this site. The application was refused and an appeal dismissed. The applicants now claim that a change in the operation of the business (in that all operations will be transferred to the Rayleigh site) justifies a dwelling here.
- 2.3 The applicants have submitted planning justification reports, an agricultural assessment and a traffic report. The proposal is justified on the basis that, with the consolidation of the business on the site, constant supervision is required particularly at sensitive times, to ensure that there is no loss of crop. Supervision is required to ensure that the growing environment is at its optimum.
- 2.4 The applicant also points to the inability to gain insurance for agricultural equipment at the site, given the lack of an on site presence and that, hence there are issues of security.

- 2.5 Members will be aware of the traffic levels carried by the Arterial Road. The applicant claims further support for the application on the basis that the provision of accommodation on the site will reduce trips to and from it and hence have a minimal beneficial effect on the Arterial Road traffic levels.

3 CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 Assessment of the claimed justification in cases such as this is difficult. The normal practice of this Authority is to commission independent assessment by an agricultural expert. This Authority is not in a position to give a view on the claimed functional need and it is considered that before reaching a decision Castle Point Council should commission an independent report.
- 3.2 With regard to the financial viability of the nursery business that operates from the site, very little information has been provided in the way of the costs and profit of the operation. It is suggested that this should be considered in more detail prior to any decision being made by Castle Point. (Note: it may be the case that full accounts have been provided to Castle Point but they are not being released as part of the application documentation to ensure business confidentiality).
- 3.3 With regard to the highway issue, there is some merit in the arguments made. It is considered that any change to traffic flows is so marginal (and indeed is probably offset by other conventional domestic journeys) that this should play little part in the decision making.

4 RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES** to respond to Castle Point Borough Council in relation to this application as follows:
- (1) it is recommended that independent expert assessment is sought in relation to the claimed functional need before a decision is reached with regard to its veracity;
 - (2) it appears that insufficient detail has been submitted to justify whether the financial status of the businesses is capable of supporting the erection of the proposed dwelling. Full details of the costs of and income to the business should be provided to allow an accurate assessment to be made. (Note: this Council is aware that such information may have been provided to Castle Point but may be being dealt with in a way that protects business confidentiality);

- (3) it would not appear to this Council that significant weight can be placed on the highway arguments being advanced. Any reduction in trips to and from the site as a result of residential development on it would appear to be offset by conventional domestic trips from the new premises. (HPS)

Shaun Scrutton

Head of Planning Services

Background Papers:

Documentation supplied with the consultation from Castle Point and held in the Planning Offices at Acacia House

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