

Land North West of Alkerton Oaks Business Park, Stratford Road, Shenington

12/00960/F

Ward: Wroxton

District Councillor: Councillor Webb

Case Officer: Simon Dean

Recommendation: Approval

Applicant: SGS UK Ltd

Application Description: Multi-span range polytunnel

Reason for Referral to Committee: Major application

1. Site Description and Proposed Development

- 1.1 The application site is an area of arable field, to the West of the Stratford Road, in the Northern corner of the District, close to the District boundary. The site is broadly flat, with a public right of way running along the Southern edge. The field is bounded by strong tree lines to the East and West, and a similarly strong hedge line (albeit at a lower height) to the South. The site lies within the locally designated Area of High Landscape Value, but is not within the AONB. Shenington and Alkerton, with its' designated Conservation Area and Scheduled Ancient Monument lie approximately 1-1.3km to the South.
- 1.2 The proposal is for the erection of a 24x47.5m (1140 sq.metres) polytunnel, with 3m walls reaching a total height of 4m, running along the Northern side of the hedge-line. The polytunnel is to be used for purposes associated with SGS's field trial business, which is based in the Alkerton Oaks business park to the immediate South of this site. The polytunnel is accessible by an existing gate onto the Stratford Road, but the applicants intend to access it from the industrial estate, across the fields from their offices.
- 1.3 The polytunnel is to complement the existing SGS operations on the site; providing year-round space for growing crops for small scale field trials (as already occur on the fields surrounding the site). The applicants do not intend to provide any electrics or lighting to the polytunnel and will not be creating a new access.

2. Application Publicity

- 2.1 The application has been advertised by way of site notice and press notice. The final date for comment was the 20th September 2012. No correspondence has been received as a result of this consultation process.

3. Consultations

- 3.1 **Shenington with Alkerton Parish Council:** *"object to this application for the following reasons: The Shenington with Alkerton Conservation Area Appraisal published February 2009 by Cherwell District Council demonstrates that the site of the application falls within the setting of the conservation area. As a consequence, the parish council believes that the application requires very careful review including on-site appraisal to determine whether the setting would be adversely affected and, if so, whether planning conditions could be applied that would provide adequate protection."*

Cherwell District Council Consultees

- 3.2 **Landscape Officer:** *"Further to a site visit and consideration of the visual impact and landscape sensitivity. The site is within an Area of High Landscape Value I have no strong objection to this multi-span polytunnel being erected, given the structure may appear temporary and the glare factor may be lower than that of glass. However, I recommend the following conditions. The hedgerow immediately south of the polytunnel is to be retained and maintained at its maximum full grown height and present density to screen from open countryside from the south/south west and adjacent business park. The maintenance height is to be indicated. The Stratford Road hedgerow to be retained and maintained at current height and density. The maintenance height is to be indicated. The New Covert Plantation provides a valuable screen to the development*

immediately northwest and I hope that this may continue to be the case. Future applications for increasing such development in this area would, in effect produce a greater detrimental visual impact which would be inappropriate to the AHLV designation.”

4. Relevant National and Local Policy and Guidance

4.1 Development Plan Policy

Adopted Cherwell Local Plan (Saved Policies)
C7: Landscape conservation
C13: Area of High Landscape Value
AG2: The Construction of Farm Buildings

South East Plan 2009
CC1: Sustainable development
BE6: Management of the historic environment

4.2 Other Material Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework

5. Appraisal

5.1 The key issues for consideration in this application are:

- Principle
- Landscape impact
- Impact on the setting and significance of the designated heritage assets

Principle

5.2 The proposal, relating as it does to an existing agricultural business in the countryside is considered to be acceptable in principle. Both the new National Planning Policy Framework and the adopted Local Plan place a strong degree of emphasis on the rural economy and this proposal relates to an important part of the rural economy, allowing the business to be sustained and expand.

5.3 The acceptability of proposals relating to agriculture and the broader rural economy is generally couched in terms of landscape and visual impact, which will be assessed below.

Landscape impact

5.4 As the site lies within the locally designated AHLV, is within largely open countryside (notwithstanding the boundary screening noted elsewhere) and is a rural area, the landscape impact of the proposals is important to assess. The landscape impact is also a key facet of the policy tests for the proposal set out in the saved adopted policies of the local plan.

5.5 The Parish Council have expressed concern that the proposal may harm the landscape, owing to the nature and topography of the site. However, given the well-screened nature of this particular field (with substantial hedgerows to the North and South, and substantial tree-belts to the East and West), the relatively low-key appearance of the proposal (including the likely matte-finish plastic sheeting) and the agricultural nature of the proposal leads Officers to consider that the impact is acceptable.

5.6 Whilst the polytunnel will be visible from the public right of way running east-west through the site, that impact of the structure is considered to be acceptable, as the structure is not wholly inappropriate or unexpected within such an agricultural setting and landscape.

Impact on the setting and significance of the designated heritage assets

5.7 The Parish Council have raised the issue of the impact of the proposal on the setting of the Shenington with Alkerton Conservation Area, and, by association, the impact on the setting of the “Lynched ridge and furrow N of Shenington” Scheduled Ancient Monument (list number 1006328). They have suggested that the “*application requires very careful review including on-site appraisal to determine whether the setting would be adversely affected*”. During the course

of the application, both the Case Officer and the Landscape Officer have visited the site, and assessed the relationship of the application site to the wider countryside and the village of Shenington.

- 5.8 Given the distance from the village, the intervening natural screening (field boundaries) and the intervening development (principally the Alkerton Oaks business park), it is not considered that the proposal will harm the setting or significance of those heritage assets.

Conclusion

- 5.9 The proposal is considered acceptable in terms of its impact on the landscape and its impact on the setting and significance of the heritage assets. In addition, the proposal, which is essentially an agricultural use, is appropriate for the location, and will contribute towards a prosperous and diverse rural economy.

- 5.10 The comments of the Parish Council with regards to the potential landscape impact of the proposal are noted, but for the reasons set out above, it is not considered that those objections are sustainable.

- 5.11 Furthermore, the proposal does not harm the setting or significance of the heritage assets.

6. Recommendation

Approval, subject to the following conditions:

- 1 Time
- 2 Except where otherwise stipulated by conditions attached to this permission, the development shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the following plans and documents and the materials and finishing details included therein;
 - i. drawing PL-RB3-127462-0001 Rev A (submitted with the application)
 - ii. the site layout plan (submitted with the application)
 - iii. the site location plan (submitted with the application)
 - iv. the details set out in the Application Forms and Design & Access Statement, including details on access (submitted with the application)

Reason - For the avoidance of doubt, to ensure that the development is carried out only as approved by the Local Planning Authority.

- 3 Permission specific to SGS – remove when no longer used
- 4 Retain hedgerows

PLANNING NOTES

- 1) PROW protection/ no obstruction

SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE GRANT OF PLANNING PERMISSION AND RELEVANT DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

The Council, as Local Planning Authority, has determined this application in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicated otherwise. The development is considered to be acceptable on its planning merits as the proposal is of a size and style that is appropriate and will not unduly impact on the character or openness of the countryside, the character of the area or the amenity of users of the public rights of way network. In addition, the proposal will not harm the setting or significance of the designated conservation area or Scheduled Ancient Monument. As such the proposal is in accordance with Policies CC1 and BE6 of the South East Plan 2009, Policies C7, C13 and AG2 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan and Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework. For the reasons given above and having regard to all other matters raised, the Council considers that the application should be approved and planning permission granted subject to appropriate conditions, as set out above.