

## Appendix A

### Committee Speech Westerfield – 20 Jan 2014

Chair and Councillors, my name is Penelope Laurenson and I am a Planner with Lightsource. We have made some significant changes to the proposal since it was last before you. These include reducing the height of the panels from 2.5m to 1.8m, and reducing the number of cabinets from 40 to 14, these have been grouped centrally and will be surrounded by trellising with creepers growing up it. We have also provided larger setbacks from boundaries and included an enhanced planting plan to screen views of the site.

This is an appropriate site for a solar farm. The site is Grade 3b land, which is of lower agricultural value, and sheep grazing within the solar farm will retain an agricultural use. The grid connection is on site, avoiding any additional ecological impacts. And, critically, the site is not located within any national or local level landscape designation. The Case Officer notes that “this site may be considered to be one of the less sensitive sites within West Oxfordshire”.

The case officer introduces something of a red herring by stating that the proposal has not been shown to be sequentially preferable to brownfield sites. As this proposal is not EIA, an assessment of alternatives is not required, and the site should be assessed on its own merit. In addition, opportunities for solar development on brownfield sites is low, the majority of suitably large sites are already earmarked for housing expansion, other sites have no grid connection available, and still others have numerous visual receptors making them unsuitable.

Visual impact is key to determining this proposal. The proposed planting will screen key views of the site, as well as providing enhanced habitat for local wildlife.

The case officer is concerned that the planting of native trees and hedgerow will introduce an “alien feature” into the landscape. The field, and those immediately surrounding it, are characterised by weak hedges and gaps in trees – however, this is not a natural phenomenon, but a direct result of human interference to enhance agricultural production. Approximately 60% of British Wildlife is in decline, primarily as a result of intensifying agricultural production.

The Council’s own character guide for the Limestone Wolds area sets out objectives for:

- Retaining and introducing more hedgerow and trees and native species
- Planting large blocks and belts of native woodland to restore a mosaic of woodland and farmland; and
- Introducing natural vegetation cover in field headland and margins.

Such enhancement has been successfully implemented at the quarry to the east of the site. Enforceable conditions can be attached to a planning permission to ensure our planting is established as proposed, and maintained in accordance with the submitted Landscape and Biodiversity Management Plans.

From our community engagement we have directly received a number of supportive comments regarding the proposal. Whilst these individuals have not made formal representations to the Council, the fact only one objection was received by Council reflects that most in the community are either neutral or supportive of the proposal.

I respectfully request that members approve this proposal.

**13/1596/P/FP, The Old Barn, Worton**

Thank you for taking the time to visit the site on Thursday.

I hope that it is now apparent how the scheme has been devised to create an innovative and beautiful building extension, that would be sympathetic to and not compete with the existing barn.

As you could see, the office tenants have relocated to other premises at Worton Park, and the barn will now be converted into a house.

Our solicitors' letter confirms the availability of permitted development rights, which would apply to the dwelling. This is a highly relevant material consideration that needs to be taken into account. If the application is refused, the applicants would have to look at building alternative extensions to the rear, sides and front of the existing barn.

This could provide an extra 378 square metres of development. By way of comparison the existing barn has an area of 267 square metres. Alternatively speaking such extensions could enlarge the property by 142%, rather than the 90% increase that the application scheme presents.

The fallback position of permitted development rights could therefore result in a quite a substantial disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building.

Also as you can imagine, such extensions, particularly with one to the front of the barn, which is possible because the barn does not front a public highway, would significantly alter and obscure the original form of the barn, resulting in loss of its agricultural character and appearance.

Alternatively, the application scheme ensures that the fabric and character of the barn are preserved, and the extension has been designed to be subservient and orientated so that the barn remains the main distinguishing feature of the building.

The permitted development route could also not achieve the same standard of sustainable design, of net zero emissions as provided by the application scheme, which is the highest level that could be achieved working with a converted barn.

The double height glazed wall to the southern elevation together with concrete floors and walls would allow the building to harness solar gain in the winter, whilst the projecting eave fitted with rotating louvres below would control solar gain in the summer.

The trees along this aspect also offer the best control of solar gain. During the summer, when in leaf, they aid the desired shading effect, and in winter, when they have lost their leaves, they let the radiant heat from the sun through to reduce the heat load for the property. They are also about to be thinned by a third under a felling licence, which will increase the levels of solar gain through the winter.

It is apparent that the application scheme has many benefits over the fallback position of permitted development rights. Furthermore, if you were minded to grant planning permission, the applicants would be prepared to accept a condition that excludes any permitted development rights to further alter or extend the property.

I would urge you therefore to grant planning permission for this exceptional and innovative design which is supported by the Council's professional design expert, the Parish Council and locally – and can also demonstrate very special circumstances to justify development in the Green Belt.

### Committee comments - 13/1703/P/OP

This application follows the refusal of a previous scheme for 5 houses in November - impact on CA and neighbouring property, 2B The Crescent.

We've listened carefully to Committee's concerns - and particularly to the comments of some Members that 4 houses rather than 5 might be acceptable. The current scheme has been amended accordingly and is for only 4 houses.

The following issues are relevant in relation to the previous reason for refusal:

- Unit 4 - sited away from boundary with 2B The Crescent. Not sited directly behind 2B, low height, and 1 metre difference in ground levels - noticeably lower than 2B. Can increase height of boundary treatment behind 2B - invite a condition requiring details of this to be agreed.
- No dormer windows in the NE & NW roof slopes of unit 4 - so no overlooking of 2B.
- Scheme has been discussed with Conservation Officer: Units 1 and 2 facing Woodstock Road have been designed with simple front elevations, constructed of natural stone and blue slate. Conservation Officer says the scheme will be a "net benefit" to the CA.
- New dry stone boundary walls provide visual continuity within the site.

The following points show how the proposal will fit comfortably on the site and so will not harm the Conservation Area:

- Low density = only 16 dph or 6.5 dwellings per acre.
- Design Guide also says that new urban schemes should not normally exceed a plot ratio of 40%. The proposal has a plot ratio 32% - so complies with the Design Guide.
- The average proposed plot width is 17.6m - compares favourably with the average plot width of existing properties in the area.
- Proposal = demolition of no. 18, site has a 38m wide frontage, and the proposal to develop the site as a whole served by a new access road. So proposal is not "backland development".

Access is proposed via a new private road in the position of the existing access to 20 Woodstock Road. Unit 2 has an access directly off Woodstock Road, which uses the existing access to no. 18. Re. TC's comments - no "additional" vehicular access is proposed. County Highways raise no objections.

I hope you will be able to support the officer recommendation to grant pp for 4 houses on the site. The high quality design & appearance, use of natural materials, and demolition of the existing chalet bungalow at no. 18, will add to the richness of the properties in the area without harming neighbours or the Conservation Area. Will provide much needed new homes in Witney.

*Mike Gilbert January 2014*