

Name of Applicant	Proposal	Expiry Date	Plan Ref.
Green Clover Developments Limited	Demolition of a warehouse and replacement with an agricultural building for vertical farming Units 2B To 2D, Oakland, Seafield Lane, Portway, Worcestershire B98 9DB	14.11.2022	22/01114/FUL

RECOMMENDATION: That planning permission be **GRANTED**.

Consultations

Highways - Bromsgrove

No objection subject to conditions in relation to cycle parking, accessible parking provision and electric vehicle parking provision.

Beoley Parish Council

Beoley Parish Council can see no technical reason to object to this application.

Agricultural Consultant

There are no concerns regarding the use of the building and the reasons for the building, as it is reasonable to require an agricultural building that complies with relevant structural and health and safety standards. It is considered that the need for the building is justified. We have not been to the site so cannot verify whether there are any other buildings that may be suitable and available.

There are no significant concerns with regards to the size of the building since it will replace an existing building of the same footprint and in this case, the larger the floorspace, the greater the growing capabilities. The design and the proposed materials are considered appropriate. The agricultural building will benefit from the existing infrastructure that is already present at Oakland International, including access and parking.

North Worcestershire Water Management

The site falls within flood zone 1 (low risk of fluvial flooding) and is not shown to be susceptible to surface water flooding (looking specifically at where the proposed building is to be located).

According to aerial photographs, the site of the proposed building is currently developed/hardstanding, therefore there should be no increase in runoff generated from the site and therefore no impact upon flood risk. I assume the existing drainage arrangements will be utilised although no details have been submitted. As a major application, the use of SuDS is expected. The following condition is recommended:

No works in connection with site drainage shall commence until a scheme for a surface water drainage strategy for the proposed development has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include details of surface water drainage measures, including for hardstanding areas, and shall conform

with the non-statutory technical standards for SuDS (Defra 2015). The submitted scheme shall give priority to achieving infiltration techniques and the scheme shall include the details and results of field percolation tests.

WRS - Contaminated Land

No objection subject to the provision of gas protection measures or the provision, implementation and verification of a remediation scheme.

WRS - Air Quality

WRS has no adverse comments in respect of air quality.

WRS - Noise

The applicant has been requested to confirm whether any external plant is proposed, a final response from WRS in relation to noise is awaited.

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

Certainly, the interior would be unsuitable for roosting given its use. Assuming the outer walls are tight fitted and offer no opportunities for bats under flashing or outer components of the roof, the potential for bat roost would be very limited.

Public Consultation

Site notice displayed 05.10.2022 (expired 29.10.2022)

Press notice posted 14.10.2022 (expired 31.10.2022)

No comments received.

Relevant Policies

Bromsgrove District Plan

BDP1 Sustainable Development Principles

BDP4 Green Belt

BDP19 High Quality Design

BDP22 Climate Change

Others

Bromsgrove High Quality Design SPD

NPPF National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

Relevant Planning History

The site has a long and complex planning history. The most relevant to the site are outlined below:

12/0455	Extension to existing Cold Store Appeal allowed 12.09.2013	Refused	10.01.2013
09/0996	Erection of 5049 sq m warehouse to replace former poultry sheds at rear of	Granted	21.04.2010

premises.

10/0238	Use of former agricultural sheds for storage and distribution (Use Class B8).	Granted	16.04.2010
B/2001/0039	Hygienic covered extension to cold store within existing Oakland Foods premises (as amended by plans received 12.02.01). Appeal allowed 03.08.2001 P1805/C/01/1058555	Refused	12.03.2001
B/2000/1337	Extension to existing food processing facility and extension to car park (northern)(as amended and augmented by plans and information recd 02.02.01, 05.02.01 and 09.02.01).	Refused	09.04.2001
B/1994/1027	Formation of car park for staff Appeal allowed 21/10/1997	Refused	11.03.1996
B/18923/1990	Erection of replacement/extension to egg packing station and erection of storage building. (as amended by plan received 29.1.90 and augmented by additional plan received 5.2.90).	Approved	12.02.1990
B/17745/1989	Erection of extension for farm offices, Attwell Farms Ltd.	Approved	10.04.1989
B/11294/1983	Extension to existing agricultural buildings. (as amended by plans received 7.10.83).	Approved	24.10.1983
B/3754/1977	Erection of 3 laying houses.	Approved	15.08.1977
B/1512/1975	Office accommodation within packing shed.	Approved	18.08.1975
B/1257/1975	Erection of replacement packing shed.	Approved	02.06.1975

Assessment of Proposal

Site Description

The application site (Oakland International) is located on the east side of Seafield Lane approximately 650m north of the junction of Seafield Lane with the B4101 Beoley Lane leading onto the A435. The Oakland site comprises a number of categories of buildings ranging from modern purpose built storage and distribution buildings to the immediate north and south of the application site. The building, which is the subject of the application is located in the central part of the main range of buildings on the site. Seafield Pedigrees and Atwell Farm Park are located on the opposite side of the road to the west. The land immediately to the north of the site comprises a car park with agricultural land beyond. There is a public footpath BE-552 along the field margin running along beyond the northern boundary of the site. The site is located in the Green Belt.

Proposal

The proposal relates to the demolition of an existing warehouse building and its replacement with an agricultural building which will be used for vertical indoor farming. The building identified for demolition is numbered Building 2 comprising parts B, C and D on the accompanying site plan which are currently being used for the storage, packing, grading and distribution of food products. The building numbered 2A is being retained. The proposed building will be occupied by a company called Vertical Futures.

The collective floorspace for demolition is 2,592sqm. The replacement building will be erected on the same footprint as the demolished parts and would have 2,592sqm of floor space. The proposed agricultural building measures 7.7m to the eaves and 10.6m to the ridge. It should be noted that the height is 0.8m greater than the building being demolished. There would be two entrances to the building provided on the south east elevation. The existing access arrangements with Seafield Lane will remain in place and there are no proposals to alter the existing parking or turning areas.

Background

In terms of background, Oakland ~~Redditch~~ are currently undergoing a major transfer of storage and distribution activity to other sites (Bardon, Corby and Dublin) and the trading volume at the Seafield Lane site is being reduced due to a number of factors. These include the unsuitability of some of the existing buildings (including warehouse 2) for storage and distribution following a Health and Safety Audit and the substantial increase in fuel costs have necessitated consolidation of activities at Bardon and Corby, where critical mass can be achieved. There would be a projected reduction of approximately 160 employees (reducing the current workforce at the site from 450 to 290). The vertical farming operation would employ 20 staff.

Vertical farming is a method of production within an entirely controlled environment where the crops are supplied with the appropriate levels of water, air and energy to encourage the maximum crop yield. It amounts to a step beyond more conventional methods such as the use of glasshouses. Vertical farming utilises LED lighting, hydroponic/aeroponic sprays to feed plants and the temperature and humidity of the facility are maintained at an optimum level. The advantage of the system is that yields are maintained at

predictable levels regardless of the prevailing weather conditions and production can occur in close proximity to the storage, packaging and distribution of the products. This reduces the food miles required to deliver the food produced and there are sustainability benefits arising from this approach. It is noted that only 50% of the UK's demand for vegetables and 16% of the demand for fruit is fulfilled from existing conventional agricultural systems which are heavily reliant on the availability of labour and weather conditions. It is estimated that approximately 750 tonnes of food would be produced annually at the facility. The application is accompanied by a Planning Statement, Agricultural Needs Statement and Transport Statement in which further details are set out in the relation to vertical farming technology.

Principle

The site is located in the Green Belt where development is only considered to be appropriate if it falls within a closed list of exceptions. Policy BDP4.4(a) of the Bromsgrove District Plan (BDP) lists one of these exceptions to be buildings that are required for agriculture. This policy is consistent with paragraph 145(a) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The views of the Councils Agricultural Consultant are noted. There are no concerns expressed in relation to the use, design and siting of the building for vertical farming purposes. In terms of scale, vertical farming utilises height and volume to achieve efficiency of production and it is considered that the additional 0.8m is justified in respect of the farming model proposed. The size of the building at 2,592sqm is commensurate with the production capacity envisaged and allows space for seeding and storage of supplies and water. In respect of scale, it should be noted that the building would replace an existing building of the same footprint and whilst the increased height is noted, it would be lower (at 10.6m maximum to ridge) than the adjoining building 3B (which is 12.9m to the ridge). Members should note that the building to be replaced is currently used for storage and distribution purposes and a Certificate of Lawfulness was granted for the use of a similar adjoining building (currently 3B) (former agricultural sheds) as falling within a B8 (Storage and Distribution Use) under application 10/0238. In terms of the planning merits of the proposal with respect to Green Belt and land use, it is considered that the loss of the B8 storage use to be replaced by an agricultural use would be considered a benefit. This is both in the context of the appropriateness of an agricultural use in the Green Belt and the potential reduction in traffic and servicing of the use were the building to remain within Class B8 (storage and distribution), as set out in paragraph 6.5 of the submitted Planning Statement.

The Agricultural Consultant raises the matter of the availability of other buildings to meet to requirements of the proposed vertical farming operation and refers to a number of the new buildings to the south east of the main range which have recently been constructed. These are referred to as buildings 4 and 5 on the site plans accompanying the application. These buildings comprise a Cold Store and an extension of this building (Ref:12/0455) was allowed under appeal on 12/09/2013. It is not considered that these buildings would be available or be of sufficient scale to accommodate the vertical farming proposal.

Design and Appearance

The design of the building would be similar to that of the adjoining buildings with metal sheeted walls and roof. The building design will be entirely enclosed to ensure that

ambient environmental conditions are maintained. There would be limited visibility of the proposal from public vantage points such as Seafield Lane and it is not considered that the building would have any discernible impact when viewed from the public footpath to the north, given the current arrangement of buildings on the site. The proposed roof solar panels would not be easily visible by virtue of the configuration of the buildings on the site. It is considered that the proposal would comply with policy BDP19 and Sections 6.2 and 6.3 of the Bromsgrove High Quality Design SPD in respect of design.

Drainage

It is stated that the drainage will utilise a sustainable drainage system. The site falls within flood zone 1 (with a low risk of fluvial flooding) The site of the proposed building is not shown to be susceptible to surface water flooding. It is assumed that the existing drainage arrangements will be utilised although no details have been submitted. As a major application, the use of SuDS would be expected. There are no objections raised by North Worcestershire Water Management subject to a condition requiring a surface water drainage strategy to be approved and implemented.

Ecology

The application is not accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. However, the views of Worcestershire Wildlife Trust have been sought in relation to the requirement for a survey. It should be noted the interior of the building has been used as a chiller and enclosed in insulation material, the frontage of the building comprises two loading bays with sealed modern aluminium cladding. The building would not be considered to offer potential as a bat roost.

Highways

The Planning Statement outlines that there would be reduction in Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) movements arising from the proposal. The level of reduction is not quantified. The agricultural building will require the import of seeds, consumables and feeds on small vehicles rather than HGVs and therefore it is considered that there would be reduction in the HGV traffic on Seafield Lane as a result. The building amounts to the replacement of existing floorspace and it is considered that the existing access, parking and servicing areas are adequate to meet the requirements of the proposal. There are no objections raised by Worcestershire Highways subject to conditions in relation to Electric Vehicle Parking Provision, Cycle and Accessible Parking provision.

Residential amenity

The site of the proposed building is commercial in nature and it is not considered that the vertical farming proposal would have a discernible impact on residential amenity. The potential for reduced HGV movements would have some benefit in terms of the traffic levels on Seafield Lane between the site and the B4101. The comments of Beoley Parish Council are noted and whilst there is no objection raised to the current proposal, reference has been made to other unauthorised developments at the site. Your Officers are satisfied that the building to be replaced has an established lawful use and the matter of other developments without planning permission carries little weight in the

determination since the proposal must be considered upon its individual merits. No Third Party Representations have been received.

Contaminated Land/Air Quality/Noise

The application site is within 250m of a registered landfill site or significant area of unknown filled ground which has the potential to produce landfill gas from degradation processes. WRS have no objection subject to a condition requiring gas protection measures or a risk assessment. There are no adverse comments of noise or air quality.

Conclusion

The building would be used for a Vertical Farming operation and this amount to appropriate development in the Green Belt in the context of policy BDP4 of the Bromsgrove District Plan and paragraph 145(a) of the NPPF. The proposed building would replace an existing building on the same footprint which is currently in storage and distribution (B8) use. The size, design, use and siting of the building are considered appropriate. No objections have been raised by consultees or members of the public in relation to the proposal.

RECOMMENDATION: That planning permission be GRANTED.

Conditions:

- 1) The development to which this permission relates must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of the grant of this permission.

Reason: In accordance with the requirements of Section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2) The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following plans and drawings:

Drawing Ref: 9919-B-100 Site Location Plan

Drawing Ref: 9919-B-200 Existing Site Plan

Drawing Ref: 9919-B-201 Proposed Site Plan

Drawing Ref: 9919-B-300 Existing Ground Floor Plans and Elevations

Drawing Ref: 9919-B-301 Proposed Ground Floor Plans & Elevations

Reason: To provide certainty to the extent of the development hereby approved in the interests of proper planning.

- 3) Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning General Permitted Development Order 2015 (or any Order revoking and re-enacting that Order), no development included within Schedule 2, Parts 3 (Changes of Use) or

Part 6 (Agriculture and Forestry) shall be carried out on the holding without the Prior Approval of the Local Planning Authority to an application in that behalf.

Reason: In order to ensure that the proposed building remains available for agricultural purposes in accordance with policy BDP4 of the Bromsgrove District Plan and the NPPF.

- 4) The building the subject of this permission shall be dismantled and the resultant debris removed from the site should the use of the structure cease to be used for agricultural purposes within ten years of completion.

Reason: In order to protect the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt in accordance with policy BDP4 of the Bromsgrove District Plan and the NPPF.

- 5) (a) Gas protection measures complying with Characteristic Situation 2 as set out in BS8485:2015 and CIRIA C665 as a minimum requirement must be incorporated within the foundations of the proposed structure(s). Following installation of these measures, and prior to the first occupation of the development, a verification report shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Verification of the installation of gas protection measures must be carried out in accordance with current UK guidance and best practice.

or

b) A risk assessment should be undertaken to establish whether the proposed development is likely to be affected by landfill or ground gas or vapours. The risk assessment must be provided to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, prior to the commencement of development. The assessment shall be carried out in accordance with current UK guidance and best practice.

c) Where the approved risk assessment (required by condition (b) above) identifies ground gases or vapours posing unacceptable risks, no development shall commence until a detailed remediation scheme to protect the development from the effects of such ground gases or vapours has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Following approval, the remediation scheme shall be implemented on site in complete accordance with approved details unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

d) Following implementation and completion of the approved remediation scheme (required by condition (c) above) and prior to the first occupation of the development, a verification report shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority to confirm completion of the remediation scheme in accordance with approved details. Verification of the installation of gas protection measures must be carried out in accordance with current UK guidance and best practice.

Reason: To ensure that the risk to buildings and their occupants from potential landfill or ground gases are adequately addressed.

- 6) The Development hereby permitted shall not be first occupied until 6 sheltered, safe, secure and accessible cycle parking spaces to comply with the Council's adopted highway design guide has been provided in accordance with details which

shall first be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and thereafter the approved cycle parking shall be kept available for the parking of bicycles only.

Reason: To comply with the Council's parking standards.

- 7) The Development hereby approved shall not be brought into use until 1 accessible car parking space has been provided in a location to be agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority and thereafter shall be kept available for disabled users as approved.

Reason: To provide safe and suitable access for all.

- 8) The Development hereby approved shall not be opened until 2 electric vehicle charging spaces have been provided in accordance with a specification which shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The power points shall be kept available and maintained for the use of electric vehicles as approved.

Reason: To encourage sustainable travel and healthy communities.

- 9) No works in connection with site drainage shall commence until a scheme for a surface water drainage strategy for the proposed development has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include details of surface water drainage measures, including for hardstanding areas, and shall conform with the non-statutory technical standards for SuDS (Defra 2015). The approved surface water drainage scheme shall be implemented prior to the first use of the development and thereafter maintained in accordance with the agreed scheme.

Reason: To allow proper consideration of the proposed surface water drainage systems and to ensure that the development is provided with a satisfactory means of drainage and in accordance with National Planning Policy Framework.

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