H Sly and Sons

Robert Doughty Consultancy

Planning, Design and Access Statement.
Proposed Agriculture Research and Training Facility,
Land off Langary Gate Road, Gedney Hill, Spalding,
Lincolnshire.

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32 High Street, Helpringham,
Sleaford, Lincolnshire NG34 0RA
Tel: 01529 421646
Email: admin@rdc-landplan.co.uk
Web: www.rdc-landplan.co.uk



town planning



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architecture

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. H Sly and Sons is a family farming business that has a main farming base at Langary Gate Farm, to the south of the application site. In addition to the family farm, a second business operates from Clifton's Bridge on Fishergate near Sutton St James. This business trades as Horizon Agriculture and occupies a number of agricultural buildings that are now used to manufacture specialist agricultural machinery and, in particular, machinery designed to limit the impact on soil structure. At present two different types of specialist equipment are manufactured by the company and this is expected to rise to four in the near future.

1.2. The company actively promotes conservation agriculture and is now at the forefront of modern agricultural technology, helping to put South Holland on the map both nationally and internationally. Although the Clifton's Bridge site is ideal for manufacturing (the company has employed 11 more staff in the last 12 months), the company does not own any of the land beyond the existing curtilage and there is no possibility of acquiring any to be used for the new venture. Consequently, the applicant company needs a base from which to trial and sell their specialist equipment, which cannot be done at the manufacturing base at Clifton's Bridge.

1.3. In line with the company's ethos, it intends to construct a 'green' building off Langary Gate Road, north of Gedney Hill, that will be used to house and trial the equipment when in development, and also to act as a sales base for demonstrating the equipment to potential purchasers and for training. There will be no manufacturing at the new sales base as the two uses are simply not complementary within the same curtilage. The adjoining farmland is all owned by the farming family and will be where the trialling and demonstrations will take place. It is proposed to construct a new building which will be occupied by 2-6 members of staff who will handle all the sales and marketing. The ability to have the machinery on the family farm in front of the crops that are produced by them will give the company a significant advantage over competitors, as the staff can talk 'farmer to farmer' rather than 'salesmen to customer'. The sales office will also hold international dealer and customer training days.

1.4. The second part of the project is for the building and surrounding land to be used year-round as a research centre for sustainable and conservation-orientated agricultural practices. The company has ties with Reading, Cranfield and Lincoln Universities, which will conduct long term (10-20 year) experiments and trials in the surrounding fields. This will include agroforestry, which will entail growing trees in rows 30m apart (see site plan) and then growing crops between each row. This is designed to turn the existing farming operation from a net carbon emitter to a carbon negative operation. University PhD students and Indigo (a US based carbon trading company) will visit and monitor the carbon cycle of the farm over a number of years and the resultant information will be made available to the wider agricultural sector and associated industries. This will assist Britain in staying at the forefront of agricultural innovation and sustainability. The building will also have a greenhouse attached to it which, along with the permanent trial areas between the rows of trees, will enable the company to demonstrate the long-term improvement in soils, soil drainage and on-farm profitability and yields.

1.5. Visitors who travel some distance to attend the site whether for academic, training or sales reasons will inevitably require overnight accommodation. It is therefore proposed to include some basic student type en-suite bedrooms for visitors to use if needed. Courses etc would be charged for and include this accommodation and some basic catering, consisting of a small kitchen to offer produce from the farm to fit in with the sustainable model the company is aiming for. The applicant is aiming for the building to be self-sufficient in terms of power with the use of solar and wind power.

1.6. The building will also be used by local companies and organisations already operating in the agricultural sector. The applicant has already had expressions of interest from Hutchinsons Wisbech, Bayer Crop Science, Precision Planting/Agco, Aviva Fertiliser, Edaphos Agronomy and the universities of Cranfield and Reading (in addition to their involvement in long term crop experiments). In addition to these, there is every likelihood that more organisations will find the centre a unique opportunity to take part in and study up to date sustainable agricultural practices. In the event that the planning application is approved, the applicant company also proposes to seek links with the Food Enterprise

Zone in Holbeach as there are obvious synergies between the two. Projects such as this application further underpins the importance of food production to the area through innovation and education reaching out beyond the boundaries of South Holland.

1.7. The proposal requires a rural location and one where there is ready access to dedicated areas for agricultural field trials. Langary Gate Road is a typical rural road, but is lightly trafficked, mainly serving local farms etc. The road is long and straight with numerous informal pull-ins. The farming business owns land either side of the road in the vicinity of the site, including the dwelling and paddock to the south. Invariably, visitors to the site will arrive by car, because, as with most rural locations in Lincolnshire, public transport is either limited or non-existent. Occupation of the site will vary on a daily basis with there being fewer than 10 people on site some days, with significantly more on demonstration days. Car sharing will be encouraged and having accommodation on site will also reduce vehicle movements away from the site to find local accommodation, which is some way away, and also limited.

1.8. Presently, the company does provide some machinery demonstrations, but these are simply organised in one of the farm's fields, where there are no facilities such as parking (vehicles are routinely left on the side of the road), catering or accommodation. They are, therefore, less than ideal and can only be carried out during the drier months of the year and where the cropping regime permits. If potential customers want to see machinery without necessarily seeing it being trialled, they must attend the manufacturing base, which is less than ideal because there is no dedicated sales area (or room for one) and having non-staff attending what is essentially a heavy engineering site brings with it particular health and safety issues. The machinery display area in the proposed new building will operate much in the same way as a car showroom. One or two examples of the manufactured equipment will be taken down to the site from the Clifton's Bridge base by tractor from the farm. The equipment will remain there until sold at which time it will be replaced and so on. There will be no need for HGVs or low loaders to access the site.

1.9. The proposal needs a dedicated base and cannot operate on a disaggregated basis, which would result in multiple trips across the

district to access various elements of the project. There will be positive economic impacts for the area and we believe that the proposal results in an innovative form of rural diversification, albeit one that is intrinsically linked to the land.

1.10. The proposal has been the subject of positive pre-application discussions with both the local planning authority and the local highway authority.

2. APPLICATION SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

2.1. The application site is essentially the north western corner of an existing agricultural field with access onto Langary Gate Road. The dwelling and paddock to the south of the site is also in the farming company's ownership as is the land in the vicinity of the site.

2.2. The site and wider agricultural field is largely flat and there are no features of interest. The eastern boundary is characterised by a Drainage Board drain, which is the subject of bye-law control. The western and northern boundaries have existing planting and the southern boundary is open with a field drain separating it from the next field to the south.

2.3. Langary Gate Road is unusual for the area in that it is tree-lined for the majority of its length in the vicinity of the site.

2.4. The character of the area is dominated by a flat landscape in agricultural use with the occasional farmstead and dwellings.

3. PLANNING POLICY

The Development Plan

3.1. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that, "If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise."

3.2. The Development Plan for the purposes of this application is comprised of the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan (the 'Local Plan') 2019. Those policies considered relevant for the proposal are set out below:

Policy 1: Spatial Strategy

Policy 2: Development Management

Policy 3: Design of New Development

Policy 4: Approach to Flood Risk

Policy 7: Improving South East Lincolnshire's Employment Portfolio

Policy 29: The Historic Environment

3.3. Policy 1 sets out the spatial strategy for the distribution of growth across the plan area and acknowledges that some land uses require a rural location because of their functionality.

3.4. Policy 2 indicates planning permission will be granted where the development satisfies the sustainable development considerations including impacts on amenity, ecology, the road network and drainage together with supporting quality design and maximising sustainable materials and resources.

3.5. Policy 3 confirms the Council's commitment to promoting good design and sets out a number of criteria developments must satisfy where appropriate.

3.6. Policy 4 considers the approach to Flood Risk and accordingly the application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment that complies with the requirements of the NPPF.

3.7. Policy 7 indicates that proposals which assist in the delivery of economic prosperity will be supported in principle.

3.1. Policy 29 requires development proposals to conserve and enhance the character and appearance of designated and non-designated heritage assets and their settings through high-quality sensitive design.

National Planning Policy Framework

3.2. The National Planning Policy Framework (the "NPPF") sets out Central Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

3.3. Paragraph 8 of the NPPF confirms the commitment to sustainable development based on three dimensions:

"a) **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;

b) **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and

c) **an environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy."

3.4. This is followed by a commitment to a presumption in favour of sustainable development and at paragraph 11,

"For decision-taking this means:

c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or

d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or

ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole."

3.5. Paragraph 38 confirms this to be the case stating that, 'decision makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development wherever possible.'

3.6. Paragraph 38 states that "Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permissions in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible."

3.7. Paragraph 47 states that planning law requires applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan.

3.8. Paragraph 83 indicates that planning policies should enable the growth of all types of businesses in the rural areas through well-designed new buildings and the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses.

4. DESIGN AND ACCESS

Use

4.1. The proposed use requires a rural location due to the inextricable link with agriculture and the connection with the existing locally based manufacturing business and the operation of the family farm.

4.2. Langary Gate Road has the advantage of being close to where the machinery is currently being manufactured and is also part of the family farm where a wide variety of crops can be monitored. The land beyond the footprint of the development, as shown on the submitted site plan, will be planted and trialled and will be the subject of more focussed research and development.

4.3. There is no possibility to obtain land beyond the existing curtilage of the Clifton's Bridge manufacturing base and so basing the proposal on the land owned by the family farming operation makes economic sense to the applicant. There is no advantage in planning terms in buying land elsewhere as this would also be in an open countryside location.

4.4. The proposal incorporates machinery sales and demonstrations, research and development, agriculture training and courses, together with the ability for those travelling from away or those undertaking courses over a number of days the ability to stay in simple accommodation on site. Were there to be no accommodation on site, visitors would have to travel to and from the site each day leading to additional traffic movements which would undermine the sustainable credentials of the proposal. Policy 1 acknowledges that there will be occasions where development in the countryside is necessary and this will be supported where it can be demonstrated it meets the sustainable development needs of the area. In the event that the various elements of the proposal were developed in different locations, this would lead to a highly unsustainable business model and one that would result in trips across the countryside to access the various elements of the project. The residential element of the project does not result in permanent accommodation in terms of the nature of occupation but is more akin to temporary workers accommodation, which is relatively commonplace in the rural landscape to service the needs of the agricultural industry. A suitably worded condition can control the nature of occupation to those involved with the work being carried out at the facility.

4.5. The proposed use complies with the strategic principles set out in Policy 1 and paragraph 83 and 84 of the NPPF.

Access

4.6. Langary Gate Road is a typical rural road which is subjected to the ever-increasing size (and weight) of agricultural machinery and crop haulage.

4.7. Clearly the fact that the field where the development is proposed, together with the trials area beyond, will always generate traffic movements simply through normal agricultural practices should be considered as a baseline for assessing the traffic movements associated with the new use. The manufactured agricultural equipment will be transported by the applicant using existing tractors from the farm as and when they are needed from the Clifton's Bridge site to the application site. One or two examples will be brought to the site for display and demonstration and will only be replaced if they are sold on to customers. There would be no reason use an HGV low loader simply because the two sites are close together and the cost of hiring a low loader would be disproportionate to the distance the equipment needs to travel. Once a piece of equipment is sold, it will be taken back by tractor to the manufacturing site to be cleaned and checked over before being dispatched to the customer from Clifton's Bridge. The other elements of the project result in relatively few vehicle movements and it is anticipated that on any given day the site will accommodate anywhere from single figure number of sales-staff to around 50 people who might attend an equipment demonstration together with visiting academics. With regard to the equipment demonstration, we should point out that these already occur in the area, but in a very much ad-hoc basis, in that attendees simply pull up on the highway verge next to a field and watch the demonstration. The new facility will allow for proper parking and associated facilities to be made available.

4.8. The vehicles visiting the site will be cars and 4x4s, together with other agricultural machinery that would be associated with the use of the land in any event.

4.9. The application complies with Policy 2 and paragraph 84 of the NPPF in respect of the highway and access considerations.

Business and the Economy

4.10. The manufacturing business at Clifton's Bridge (Horizon Agriculture) continues to grow and in the last 12 months, 12 new members of staff were taken on. Despite the current economic climate, the agricultural industry remains buoyant. The industry continues to evolve and innovate and Horizon Agriculture is at the forefront of developing and manufacturing agricultural machinery that reduces the impact on the soil and its structure.

4.11. This proposal also presents the opportunity to development greater understanding of innovative forms of sustainable agricultural methods. The proposal will generate links with other leading agricultural businesses and academics both here and abroad. Lincolnshire is renowned for its agricultural, horticultural and food industry businesses and the Food Enterprise Zone at Holbeach is an obvious example of how the region is developing and promoting these industries.

4.12. H Sly and Sons is a local farming family with associated businesses that are at the forefront of this innovation.

4.13. The new facility at Langary Gate Road will provide a new base for the existing sales team and further recruitment will be required to service the other elements of the multi-use facility. This will have a positive impact on the rural economy both during the construction and operational phases.

4.14. The proposal accords with Policy 7 and paragraph 84 of the NPPF.

Design and Appearance

4.15. The proposed building consists of three distinct elements.

4.16. A modern red brick two storey building will house the principle training and research areas which will also face the car parking area and the entrance into the site from Langary Gate Road. This building is deliberately modern with brick detailing and a flat roof hidden behind a parapet wall. The sleeping accommodation is at first floor.

4.17. A single storey flat roof glazed link joins the training facility with the machinery display area beyond. The glazed link separates the two principal functions of the building and provides break-out areas during training sessions and enables those attending displays and demonstrations to move out of the unheated display building for a coffee

or light lunch for example. The display area is essentially the showroom for the manufactured agricultural equipment and here potential customers can view the products and listen to presentations from the sales team and also from academics involved in demonstrating how the machinery will assist in furthering sustainable forms of agriculture. The display building has black/charcoal metal cladding part way up the sides and then a polycarbonate cladding system will disguise a shallow pitch roof and a red oxide internal steel portal frame which is the principle structure.

4.18. The building is 'cranked' providing views over the growing trials and demonstration areas.

4.19. A small glazed area will also be constructed to allow produce to be displayed and also for views out across the tree plantations and the growing areas as shown on the site plan.

4.20. It is intended that the site will generate its own power requirements and so it is planned to install photovoltaic panels on the roof and also a small wind turbine. Foul water will be treated in a package treatment plant and roof water will be collected in a pond on the site for re-use and the pond will also act as a biodiversity enhancement for the facility.

4.21. The quality of the modern building design therefore complies with Policy 2.

Flood Risk

4.22. A Flood Risk Assessment has been provided to support the application and this demonstrates that the site is not at risk from flooding and there is no risk of increased surface water run-off to other adjacent land users or land uses. The proposal therefore complies with Policy 4.

Landscaping

4.23. The proposed site layout indicates some planting within the site, and the site will be the subject of more detailed planting secured by an appropriately worded planning condition. As mentioned earlier, the site is already well screened from Langary Gate Road and this screening will be augmented by the rows of tree planting within the field trials area. In time, therefore, the proposal will not be visible from beyond the site boundary. The planting in the field trials area will also enhance the biodiversity credentials of the site, which is presently in monoculture

and, therefore, of limited ecological value. The proposal, therefore, complies with Policy 2 (8).

Heritage Impact Assessment

4.24. Policy 29 requires development proposals to conserve and enhance the character and appearance of designated and non-designated heritage assets and their settings through high-quality sensitive design.

4.25. We have consulted both Heritage Gateway and the LPA's online mapping service and there does not appear to be any assets near to the proposal that will be affected.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1. H Sly and Sons is a local farming family which has diversified into providing innovative and industry leading machinery to support sustainable methods of agriculture including soil care.

5.2. This new facility will enable a consolidation of that business and enable it to expand to incorporate research and development, residential courses and field trials in one sustainable location on the family farm.

5.3. Traffic movements will be minimised by virtue of having all the business elements on one site and, despite the rural nature of the approach roads, the type and volume of traffic will not detrimentally impact on the few occupiers along Langary Gate Road or the structure of the road itself.

5.4. The design of the proposed building is deliberately modern to reflect the aspirations of the business; however, the use of red brick is characteristic of the building materials seen locally.

5.5. It is anticipated that the building will be powered by renewable electricity generated on site and the landscaping and pond will greatly increase the biodiversity over that which exists at present.

5.6. A Flood Risk Assessment demonstrates that the proposal is not at risk of flooding.

5.7. The proposal results in a sustainable form of development which complies with both national and local planning policy and guidance and is acceptable in all other respects.

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Robert Doughty
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