

Supporting Statement

Application to determine whether prior approval is required for proposed agricultural buildings and associated agricultural hardstanding.

Land at Fen Gate, Moulton Chapel, Spalding PE12 0XR

Applicant: Lewies Farm Ltd

Item	Detail
Application type	Prior notification / prior approval under Schedule 2, Part 6, Class A of the GPDO 2015, as amended
Agricultural unit	Approx. 18.5 acres / 7.49 hectares
Proposal	Peony production shed, cold store, open-fronted implement/trailer shelter and associated agricultural hardstanding
Total building footprint	875 sqm
Associated hardstanding	Approx. 900 sqm

1. Introduction

This Supporting Planning Statement has been prepared in support of an application to South Holland District Council to determine whether prior approval is required for agricultural development under Schedule 2, Part 6, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015, as amended.

The application relates to land at Fen Gate, Moulton Chapel, Spalding PE12 0XR. The applicant, Lewies Farm Ltd, intends to use the holding for the commercial growing of peonies as a horticultural crop.

The proposed development comprises a coordinated group of agricultural buildings and an associated agricultural hardstanding/yard area required to support the growing, harvesting, grading, packing, temporary cold storage and dispatch of peonies grown on the holding.

For clarity, the proposal comprises three functionally related agricultural buildings forming one coherent agricultural working area. The buildings are interdependent and collectively support the operation of the peony growing enterprise. The proposal is therefore presented as one agricultural development package, supported by a schedule of building dimensions and uses.

The proposal comprises:

- a main peony production/agricultural shed;
- a dedicated cold store for temporary chilled storage of cut flowers;
- an open-fronted agricultural implement/trailer shelter; and
- associated agricultural hardstanding/engineering operations to provide a working yard, loading, turning and machinery movement area.

The approved block plan shows the proposed buildings grouped together within a contained working yard, positioned beyond the 25m stand-off from Fen Gate/B1357 and adjacent to the existing agricultural field access arrangement.

2. Site and Agricultural Unit

The wider agricultural holding extends to approximately 18.5 acres, equivalent to approximately 7.49 hectares. The land therefore exceeds the 5 hectare threshold relevant to Class A agricultural permitted development rights.

The site lies within open countryside at Fen Gate, Moulton Chapel. The surrounding area is predominantly rural and agricultural in character, with large open fields, drainage features, scattered dwellings and agricultural buildings. The proposed buildings and yard are located close to the existing roadside field access and existing built form, rather than being positioned deep within the open field. This is considered to be the most appropriate siting approach in visual, functional and agricultural terms.

The applicant also owns the nearby dwelling, but the proposed development is not domestic in nature and is not required in connection with residential use. The proposal relates to the agricultural/horticultural use of the land as a commercial peony growing enterprise.

For planning purposes, “agriculture” includes horticulture, fruit growing, seed growing, market gardens and nursery grounds. Peony growing as a commercial cut-flower crop therefore falls within the scope of agricultural/horticultural use.

3. Description of Proposed Development

3.1 Main Peony Production / Agricultural Shed

The main agricultural building would measure approximately 20.0m x 35.0m, giving a footprint of 700 sqm.

The building would have an eaves height of approximately 6.0m, with a large agricultural door opening of approximately 6.0m wide x 5.0m high to allow access for agricultural machinery, crop handling, loading and dispatch.

The building is proposed as a steel portal-frame agricultural building. The lower walling would comprise precast concrete panels, with profiled steel cladding above and profiled steel roof cladding. The use of a steel portal frame, concrete plinth panels and profiled sheeting is consistent with the functional appearance of modern agricultural buildings.

The building would be used for the storage of agricultural machinery, fertilisers, crop handling equipment, flower boxes, packaging and packing/grading equipment associated with the peony crop grown on the holding.

3.2 Cold Store

The cold store would measure approximately 15.0m x 5.0m, giving a footprint of 75 sqm.

The cold store is required for the temporary chilled storage of cut peonies grown on the holding prior to grading, packing and dispatch. It would comprise an insulated coldroom structure with associated refrigeration plant. The proposed cold store is ancillary to the horticultural use of the holding and would not be used for third-party cold storage, general warehousing or non-agricultural commercial storage.

The cold store is an important operational element of the business because cut flowers require temperature-controlled storage to preserve quality, reduce deterioration and allow efficient dispatch.

3.3 Open-Fronted Agricultural Implement / Trailer Shelter

The open-fronted shelter would measure approximately 10.0m x 10.0m, giving a footprint of 100 sqm.

The shelter would be open along the long side and would be used to store trailers and equipment that require protection from the weather while remaining readily accessible. The shelter is proposed as a small agricultural structure with a simple steel frame and profiled roof/wall cladding to match the wider agricultural building group.

3.4 Building Footprint Summary

Building	Approx. dimensions	Approx. footprint	Proposed use
Main peony production/agricultural shed	20.0m x 35.0m	700 sqm	Machinery, fertilisers, crop handling, flower boxes, packaging and packing/grading equipment
Cold store	15.0m x 5.0m	75 sqm	Temporary chilled storage of cut peonies grown on the holding
Open-fronted implement/trailer shelter	10.0m x 10.0m	100 sqm	Weather-protected storage for trailers and agricultural equipment
Total	-	875 sqm	-

The total proposed building footprint is therefore approximately 875 sqm. This is below the current 1,500 sqm Class A ground area limit for new agricultural buildings/extensions on agricultural units of 5 hectares or more.

4. Associated Agricultural Hardstanding / Engineering Operations

The proposal includes an associated agricultural hardstanding/yard area of approximately 900 sqm, as shown on the submitted block plan. The hardstanding is required to provide a functional working area for agricultural vehicle access, loading and unloading, trailer and machinery movement, crop handling, movement between the production shed, cold store and open-fronted shelter, and dispatch of flowers grown on the holding.

The hardstanding is proposed as an agricultural working yard, not as a commercial vehicle yard, contractor's yard, public parking area, general storage yard or distribution use.

The proposed hardstanding is below 1,000 sqm. It is therefore a modest and proportionate engineering operation directly related to the functional needs of the

peony growing enterprise. No engineering operations exceeding 1,000 sqm are proposed as part of this submission.

For the purposes of this statement, the engineering operations comprise the formation of the agricultural hardstanding/working yard and associated within-field manoeuvring area required to serve the peony production buildings. They do not include any new access engineering, widening, gates, hardstanding or surfacing within 25m of the metalled edge of Fen Gate/B1357.

5. Agricultural Need and Functional Justification

The proposed buildings and yard are reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture/horticulture on the holding.

The peony growing enterprise requires operational space for:

- machinery and trailer storage;
- storage of flower boxes and packaging;
- secure storage of fertilisers and horticultural inputs;
- crop handling equipment;
- grading, bunching and packing;
- temporary chilled storage of cut flowers;
- loading and dispatch; and
- safe year-round agricultural vehicle movement.

The buildings are deliberately grouped around a single working yard. This arrangement reduces the spread of built development across the holding, improves operational efficiency, and avoids unnecessary movement across planted growing areas.

The main production shed provides the covered internal space required for machinery, crop handling equipment, packaging, grading and dispatch preparation. The cold store provides the temperature-controlled environment needed to preserve cut-flower quality. The open-fronted shelter provides weather protection for trailers and equipment while allowing quick agricultural access.

The buildings are not proposed for public retail, floristry unrelated to flowers grown on the holding, events, third-party storage, general warehousing, or any non-agricultural commercial use.

6. Permitted Development and Prior Approval Context

The application is made under Schedule 2, Part 6, Class A of the GPDO 2015, as amended. Class A permits agricultural development on agricultural units of 5 hectares or more, including works for the erection, extension or alteration of agricultural buildings, the formation or alteration of private ways, and engineering operations where reasonably necessary for agriculture within the unit.

The site comprises approximately 7.49 hectares and therefore falls within the Class A agricultural unit threshold.

The proposal is designed for agricultural/horticultural purposes and is reasonably necessary for the peony growing operation on the holding. It does not involve the alteration of a dwelling. It would not house livestock, slurry or sewage sludge.

The proposed building footprint totals approximately 875 sqm and is below the relevant 1,500 sqm Class A threshold for agricultural units of 5 hectares or more. The proposed hardstanding is approximately 900 sqm and no engineering operations exceeding 1,000 sqm are proposed.

Where prior approval is required, the relevant assessment should be confined to the matters specified in the GPDO. For agricultural buildings under Part 6, the key matters are the siting, design and external appearance of the proposed buildings, together with any relevant considerations specific to the associated agricultural works.

7. Access and 25m Classified Road Stand-Off

The application site benefits from an existing agricultural field access from Fen Gate/B1357.

The proposed buildings, hardstanding and associated agricultural operational development are positioned more than 25m from the metalled edge of Fen Gate/B1357. The submitted block plan shows the proposed yard and building arrangement set back from the road.

For the avoidance of doubt, this prior notification does not include any new access engineering, widening, gates, hardstanding, surfacing, bellmouth works or roadway upgrade within 25m of the metalled edge of Fen Gate/B1357. The existing agricultural field access is retained for the purposes of this submission.

If the applicant subsequently wishes to upgrade the entrance or the first section of access roadway within the 25m stand-off, such works would be dealt with separately through an appropriate planning/highway application if required.

This approach ensures that the present prior notification is confined to the agricultural buildings and associated yard works located beyond the relevant 25m classified-road stand-off.

8. Siting, Design and External Appearance

The proposed buildings are sited as a compact agricultural group close to the existing field access and existing roadside built form. This avoids unnecessary dispersal of buildings across the holding and reduces the visual impact of the development in the wider countryside.

The design approach is functional, agricultural and appropriate to the rural setting. The proposed buildings use a simple agricultural palette including steel portal framing, precast concrete lower wall panels and profiled steel cladding. These materials are typical of modern agricultural buildings and are suitable for the intended use.

The concrete panel plinths provide low-level impact resistance, durability and protection from machinery movement and wash-down operations. The profiled steel cladding above provides a lightweight agricultural envelope. The cold store is designed as a specialist insulated agricultural structure but is visually tied into the wider agricultural building group through its external form and cladding treatment.

The buildings have been grouped around a defined yard area, allowing safe and practical access between the production shed, cold store and open-fronted shelter. This is the most efficient arrangement for the proposed horticultural operation.

The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in relation to siting, design and external appearance.

9. Landscape and Countryside Character

The site is located within an agricultural landscape where functional farm buildings, drainage features and open fields are characteristic of the area.

The proposed buildings would introduce new built form into the field, but the development is agricultural in nature and would serve the land on which it is located. The buildings are grouped together rather than scattered, and their siting close to the field entrance limits the spread of development across the wider holding.

The proposal would not introduce domestic, retail or industrial character. The scale and appearance of the buildings are consistent with their agricultural function.

The wider land would remain in horticultural/agricultural use for peony growing. The proposal therefore supports the continued productive use of agricultural land.

10. Drainage, Watercourses and IDB Matters

The block plan identifies a drain along the eastern side of the proposed compound area. The proposed buildings and yard have been positioned to avoid direct works to the drain.

No works are proposed to any watercourse, ditch, culvert or drain as part of this prior notification. Surface water from the proposed agricultural hardstanding would be managed within the site and would not be discharged onto the public highway.

The hardstanding should be formed as permeable agricultural stone or otherwise designed to manage surface water appropriately, subject to final specification. Where any future discharge to a watercourse or alteration of a drain/ditch is proposed, any necessary separate consent would be obtained.

The applicant has reviewed South Holland Internal Drainage Board mapping and understands that the immediately adjacent watercourses are not identified as SHIDB-maintained arterial drains. Nevertheless, this statement does not suggest that separate drainage, riparian, IDB or highway consents can be disregarded. The proposal simply confirms that no works to watercourses are proposed as part of the present agricultural prior notification.

11. Flood Risk

The proposal is for agricultural buildings and associated agricultural hardstanding serving a horticultural enterprise. It does not introduce residential accommodation or vulnerable overnight occupation.

The South East Lincolnshire Local Plan recognises that much of the plan area is at significant risk of flooding and requires development in areas at risk of flooding to demonstrate appropriate flood-risk consideration, including surface-water management and not increasing flood risk elsewhere.

The proposal can incorporate flood-resilient design measures appropriate to agricultural buildings, including suitable finished floor levels, robust low-level concrete wall panels, resilient materials and controlled surface-water management. The proposed yard would be laid out to avoid increasing flood risk to third parties.

12. Ecology and Biodiversity

The proposal relates to agricultural land that is to be brought into productive horticultural use. The wider holding would remain as agricultural/horticultural growing land.

Development granted planning permission by a development order under section 59, which includes permitted development rights, is exempt from mandatory statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.

Notwithstanding this, the proposal would retain the wider agricultural field, avoid works to drains/watercourses, and allow for landscape/boundary planting and grass margins where appropriate. Existing drainage features would be retained and the proposed compound is kept compact to minimise land take.

13. Planning Policy Context

Although this is a prior notification submission under permitted development rights rather than a full planning application, the proposal is consistent with the broader direction of national and local planning policy.

The National Planning Policy Framework supports a prosperous rural economy. It supports the sustainable growth and expansion of rural businesses through well-designed new buildings and supports the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. It also recognises that rural business sites may need to be located adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, provided they are sensitive to their surroundings and do not have unacceptable impacts on local roads.

The proposal directly supports a land-based horticultural enterprise and is therefore aligned with this national policy direction.

The site lies in the countryside for the purposes of the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan. Policy 1 identifies land outside settlement boundaries as countryside and allows development in the countryside where it is necessary to such a location and/or meets sustainable development needs in terms of economic, community or environmental benefits. The Local Plan also recognises that the countryside is a precious resource mainly in its role for agriculture, and that agriculture and forestry are uses which must function in the countryside.

Policy 2 sets out development management considerations including size, scale, layout, character and appearance, access and vehicle generation, neighbouring amenity, sustainable drainage, flood risk, habitats and heritage. The proposal

responds positively to these matters by grouping the buildings, using agricultural materials, limiting the yard to a proportionate working area, avoiding new works within the 25m road stand-off, and retaining the wider land in productive horticultural use.

Policy 3 requires development to use high-quality design and layout, respond to landscape character, incorporate appropriate drainage and landscaping, and minimise land take. The proposed siting and compact agricultural yard arrangement are consistent with those objectives.

The proposal does not remove the holding from agricultural production; rather, it supports active horticultural use of the land.

14. Conclusion

The proposed development is a functional and proportionate agricultural development required to support a commercial peony growing enterprise on a holding of approximately 7.49 hectares.

The proposal comprises three related agricultural buildings and associated hardstanding, forming a single coordinated agricultural working area. The total building footprint is approximately 875 sqm, which is below the relevant 1,500 sqm Class A threshold for agricultural units over 5 hectares.

The associated hardstanding is approximately 900 sqm and is included as a proportionate agricultural engineering operation required to allow safe access, loading, unloading, trailer movement, crop handling and dispatch connected with the peony growing enterprise. No engineering operations exceeding 1,000 sqm are proposed.

The buildings are sited and designed appropriately, using a simple agricultural form and materials. The compound is positioned close to the existing field access and existing roadside built form, while remaining outside the 25m stand-off from the metalled edge of Fen Gate/B1357. No new access engineering or roadway upgrade within that 25m area forms part of this prior notification.

The development is required for agriculture/horticulture, is designed for that purpose, and would support the sustainable growth of a rural land-based business. The proposal is therefore considered to fall within the scope of Schedule 2, Part 6, Class A of the GPDO 2015, as amended, and prior approval should not be required or, if required, should be granted in respect of the relevant matters of siting, design and external appearance.