

Strawberry bank planning application
PL/2020/02158/PPFL

Meriden parish council wishes to comment on this planning application as follows:-

Sustainability

Sustainable and recycled materials will be used in the construction. Solar farm powers the existing building plus the new extension based upon the fact that they put back into the grid on occasion. Heat reclaim systems and a commitment to carbon neutral by 2025 are all positive.

Green belt

The extension is replacing farm structures which are to be demolished. Therefore there is to be no loss of green belt or green space in this application. However it is noted that there will be a loss of visual amenity and wildlife habitat which the local community have enjoyed from footpaths, Berkswell Road and the landscape will change from traditional farm structures to a modern conferencing centre. The height of the new extension will increase by 12' and we deem this to be acceptable as there will be no further obstructions to the landscape and to the neighbouring properties. However this will be an enclosed structure joining up the footprint of the existing farm buildings. Enhancement of the new building structure is required by good landscaping including native tree/hedgerow species forming a screen and enabling growth of wildlife corridors and restoring/increasing habitat.

Noise mitigation

After meeting with the applicant, we understand there to be acoustic sound panelling to mitigate any noise impact to neighbouring properties. We understand that there is to be an extension to the license in the near future. The applicant has already consulted neighbouring properties, Solihull Borough Council, and police who did not express any concerns. It should be noted that while the parish council has received no complaints due to existing business operations i.e. café, farm shop and licensed restaurant; we do have concerns regarding the increased capacity of the venue as a conferencing centre and wedding venue and outside noise associated with both. The cumulative impact of Strawberry Bank and Heart of England Club should be noted.

We understand that there will be a reduction in commercial traffic movement due to the business diversification, growing and rearing their own produce which will lead to a reduction of their farming traffic by 50%. Does this 50% reduction mitigate the increased levels of vehicle movements on a narrow rural highway without pedestrian pavements/walkways/pathways along Berkswell Road with members of the public walking in the road?

Parking

There will be a 193 car parking spaces for the whole site, which is adequate for staff, restraint, farm and accommodation customers. This application is part of a wider diversification of the business on the site which has been explained. However a car park with a capacity of 193 parking spaces is not attractive to the landscape amenity currently enjoyed. Quality landscaping is required to screen a car park that cannot be seen from surrounding landscape vistas.

Light pollution.

The car park will be lit by low level bollards with low lumen bulbs reducing impact in the rural area. The reduction of agricultural activity will also reduce light pollution, and we are assured the hospitality light system is one that automatically reduces according to natural light. However as a wedding venue with capacity for 193 cars there will be light nuisance from vehicles entering and leaving the site detrimental to neighbouring properties.

Footpaths

The applicant states there will be no affect on existing footpaths surrounding the site. Again any loss of trees/hedgerows must be replanted with native species to screen the boundary of the newly created conference/wedding venue.

Meriden Parish Council would strongly recommend a pavement to be linked from the existing pathway that starts on the junction of Berkswell Road to the Berryfields entrance and driveway.

Highways

Meriden Parish Council have a concern regarding cars exiting the site on the rural road network due to low and limited visual splay on a rural highway that is already seeing an increased level of activity due to other commercial diversification of businesses sited between Meriden and Berkswell including Pettifors and Home Farm. The impact includes HGVs damaging highway surface and verges. Berkswell Road is very busy B Road and once again the cumulative impact of increased traffic through Meriden Village Centre should be considered and a traffic management plan

General Observation

Part of the application is changing the use of an agricultural building to a class E appropriate to commercial use. The application is part of a wider diversification of the business on the site, which has been explained to us at great length by the applicant. The business is known to employ local people, is a historical part of the community (as the family has been part of the farming community for over 100 years) and has acted responsibly in regards to the growth that has already occurred in the business as well as in relation to their licence. It is intended that the application will lead to more local employment due to the expansion of the business as well as the complete retention of all agricultural employees. However the continued growth of this business must not be at the expense of losing the rural environment that the local community enjoy and at its heart Meriden remains a Village. It is important to protect greenbelt, greenspace and valued landscapes and any diversification should be made sympathetically and in keeping with local aesthetics of Village architecture and environment.