

20th February 2026

Our Ref: SWLC.LPC1467

Development Services – North
Wiltshire Council
Monkton Park
Chippenham
Wiltshire
SN15 1ER

Dear Sir/Madam

Town and Country Planning Act 1990
Mixed use of land and buildings at Thickthorn Farm, Preston, Lyneham,
SN15 4DY including a Rural Training Facility (retrospective)

Please find enclosed a duly completed planning application in respect of the above development, and as previously discussed with Ms K Fryer in your enforcement team.

Ms Fryer originally approached my clients about a tower structure erected on site (as shown below), and it was agreed to re-site that, in lieu of the silos (also shown below, and which are no longer needed). This alternative siting is thus closer to an existing built backdrop, and the tower is in any event less physically impactful than the silos being replaced. However, whilst this solution was not contentious it transpired that there was doubt about the site's evolved use.



LPC (TRULL) LTD
TRULL, TETBURY
GLOS, GL8 8SQ
Tel: 01285 841433
www.lpctrull.com

It is the purpose of the enclosed application therefore to sanction the diversified use of the relevant parts of the farm site used by Greenway Training, (and the associated infrastructure).

Greenway Training operate a skills training facility at Thickthorn Farm, and it is understood to have been a farm diversification started in 2014. Indeed, I am aware that my client notified the Parish Council, and others, (including the District Councillor) explaining they were running courses in machinery operation and health and safety and offered invites to an open day that year.

Some key points to note about Greenway Training, as it has evolved, is the national importance it provides to the economy, reliant on skilled and qualified people to, in many cases, even be allowed to work. The facilities provided and key aspects are summarised below.

- Training 4000plus candidates/year
- Key sectors – Grounds maintenance/forestry and arb/agriculture/estate workers
- Planning on delivering the bootcamps on behalf of Wiltshire Council encouraging young people in the industry,
- Largest provider of the recent forestry commission grant scheme.
- Received grant funding through the UK shaded prosperity fund for a telehandler (hence the requirement for the tower).
- Candidates require training to enable them to work or continue working. Additionally, many local landowners obtain skills so as to be able to manage otherwise poorly managed woodlands, with biodiversity features.

It is arguable that had that diversified use required planning permission in 2014 it would be lawful, now by the effluxion of time. However, given the need for permission to reposition the safety tower, the enclosed application seeks to confirm the acceptability of the evolved operations and the range of buildings used in connection with the successful business.

The Proposal

Greenway Training began focusing training for farmers to operate machinery, however the key courses now offered encompass many industrial sectors and include:

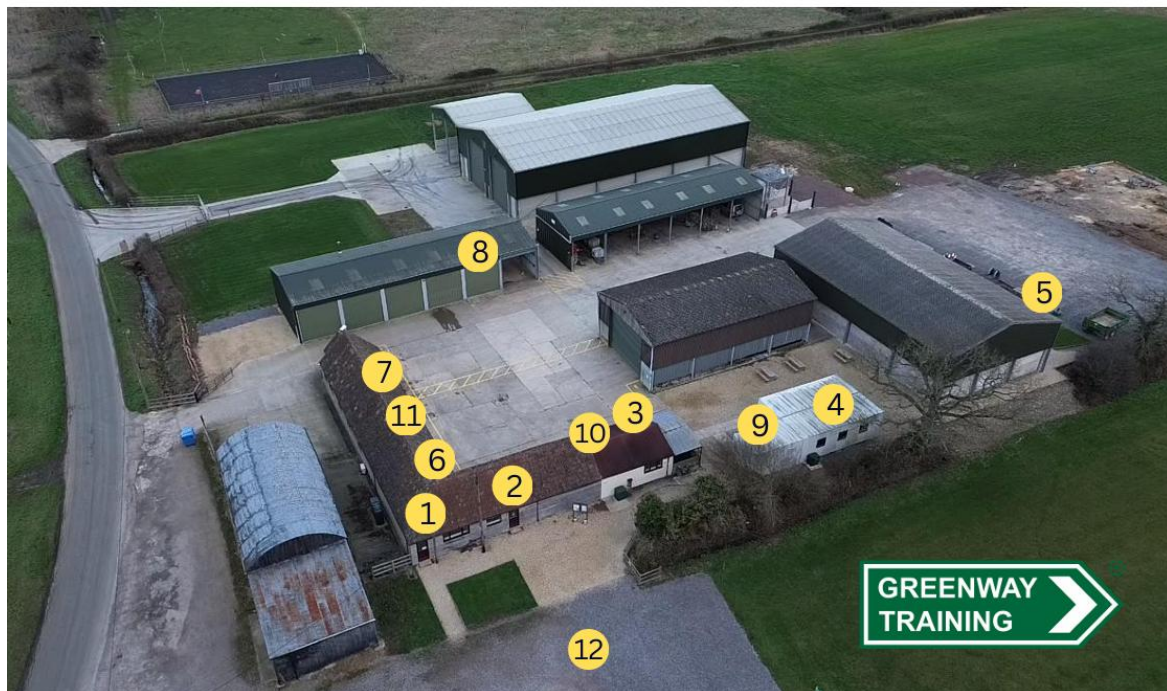
- Chainsaws including tree felling
- Tree planting
- Tractor handling
- Telehandlers
- Quadbikes
- Vegetation management – hedge trimmers/leaf blowers/mowers/sprayers

The range of employers whose staff, or self-employed contractors rely on the essential skills certificated is therefore very broad ranging, and as indicated involves an annual turn over of more than 4000 candidates a year

The importance of my client's business to vast sectors of local industry and public services cannot be underestimated. The nature of the course involved, including the operation of machinery and specialist tools makes their rural location essential.

The annotated site, relating to the application development is inserted below. The aerial image shows that the tower previously mentioned has now been repositioned. Classroom five faces the yard previously bounded by the tower, which is used for vehicle handling and has a woodchipped area beyond, on which wood cutting exercises take place.

- | | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 1 Classroom one | 4 Classroom four | 7 Office | 10 Kitchen |
| 2 Classroom two | 5 Classroom five | 8 Workshop two | 11 Assessment room |
| 3 Classroom three | 6 Workshop one | 9 Toilets | 12 Carpark |



The site remains in agricultural use alongside the training course activities. Indeed, the Dutch barn and rear lean-to structure to the road frontage in the image above is in a separate commercial use and the site's planning history confirms that by application N/06/02073/COU the 'L' shaped range behind that was approved (and subsequently used) as 'B1 office/Workshop use'. Such a use of course now falls within Use Class E to the Schedule. The application development, albeit it in part continues to use the historic offices as offices along with the related facilities, as a whole falls to be considered as a Class F1 use (Learning and non-residential institutions). The overall premises are in a mixed use though.

Also, material to the extent of the land used by Greenway Training is the approved hardstanding referred to above faced by Classroom five. This was provided pursuant to application PL/2023/10258 and was described as a hardstanding, related to agricultural and forestry uses. This is clearly akin to the woodland management skills being taught.

It is also noteworthy that despite the need to make a Prior Approval submission the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted development) (England) Order 2015, at Part 3, Class R allows the change of use of an agricultural building and land from an agricultural use to, inter alia, the provision of agricultural training. The scale of such activities is permitted up to 1000m².

To complete the application bundle, and in the interests of expediency, I have included plans of the repositioned tower, being operational development, otherwise the application relates to a use of the land and existing buildings, and the additional plans therefore only include the details of the classroom structures and toilet facilities placed on the land (and shown in situ below), and which therefore help demonstrate that they are movable by design.



Classroom 4



Toilet building marked 9 on the aerials image inserted previously



Classroom 5

Planning Policy

The NPPF highlights that planning law (section 70 [2] of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38 [6] of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) requires applications for planning permission to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance the relevant development plan applicable to the application proposal is the adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy (2015), and the following policies are most relevant.

Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS)

Core Policy 1: Settlement Strategy

Core Policy 2: Delivery Strategy

Core Policy 19: Spatial Strategy for the Royal Wootton Bassett and Cricklade Community Area

Core Policy 34: Additional Employment Land

Core Policy 35: Existing Employment Land

Core Policy 48: Supporting Rural Life

Core Policy 50: Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Core Policy 51: Landscape

Core Policy 57: Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping

Core Policy 61: Transport and Development

Core Policy 64: Demand Management

Core Policy 67: Flood Risk

Also applicable to the application assessment as material planning documents are;

The Wiltshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document ('the WDG SPD') - adopted March 2024

Wiltshire Local Transport Plan 2011-2026

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and associated Planning Practice Guidance, sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions. The policies within the following chapters of the NPPF are relevant to the assessment of the proposed development

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 2. Achieving sustainable development
- 4. Decision-making
- 6. Building a strong, competitive economy
- 8. Promoting healthy and safe communities
- 9. Promoting sustainable transport
- 11. Making effective use of land
- 12. Achieving well-designed places
- 14. Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- 15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

KEY ISSUES AND PLANNING ASSESSMENT

Issues

- Principle of development
- Impact on the character and appearance of the area
- Impact on neighbouring amenity/uses
- Highway matters
- Biodiversity

PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

Under the heading, 'Building a strong, competitive economy' the NPPF gives significant weight to supporting economic growth and productivity, and as far as a prosperous rural economy paragraph 88 requires decisions to enable;

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed, new buildings;
- b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;
- c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and
- d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

The following paragraph indicates that planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may

have to be found beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport.

The application development is not only a rural based business, that has diversified part of the former farmyard but also provides a wide ranging support function to many employment sectors nationally. Its operation is therefore essential to maintaining a competitive and strong economy, as an important facet of sustainable development.

As a rural diversification proposal Core Policy 48 to the WCS refers to the conversion and reuse of rural buildings, and sequentially preferences employment uses. Such uses are supported subject to the following criteria.

- i. The building(s) is/are structurally sound and capable of conversion without major rebuilding, and with only necessary extension or modification which preserves the character of the original building.
- ii. The use would not detract from the character or appearance of the landscape or settlement and would not be detrimental to the amenities of residential areas.
- iii. The building can be served by adequate access and infrastructure.
- iv. The site has reasonable access to local services.
- v. The conversion or re-use of a heritage asset would lead to its viable long term safeguarding

The existing buildings that have been refunctioned have accommodated that change without any operational development and therefore their simple change of use, akin to the sanctioned position, sits full square with the tenet of these policy considerations.

Returning to the established mixed uses on the site and the land's employment characteristics it is a matter of fact that the Development Plan is silent regarding uses outside the previous B Class uses, however it is noteworthy that additional employment development in the rural areas is supported at Core Policy 34 where it expands an existing business, and in the area's strategic economic interests. Additionally, the diversification represents a sustainable form of development, consistent in scale with the location and will not adversely affect nearby properties. There are also trickle down benefits in the local economy as many attending the courses will stay overnight locally, thus spending in the related economy. The definition of tourism includes those that travel for both work and pleasure.

IMPACT ON THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE AREA

Core policy 57 to the WCS requires a high standard of design in all new developments. Furthermore, policy 51 requires development to protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character and must not have a harmful impact upon landscape character, while any negative impacts must be mitigated as far as possible through sensitive design and landscape measures.

In this instance, as the only physical changes are the provision of the three carefully sited temporary structures, shown in the above photographs, and the light weight tower structure, now re-sited up against a solid built envelop, in lieu of the original

larger silos, the mixed use conserves the character and visual context of the large farm site. The farm and its widespread expanse of buildings have been satisfactorily accommodated in this rural location as an entirely expected component of the working landscape.

The use of the existing buildings and external activities have been accommodated on site for in excess of 10 years, thus clearly demonstrating that the core nature of the business, bringing people to site for hands on learning, has been assimilated without comment, and by association, without harm. It is therefore strongly maintained that the more recent provision of additional teaching space and facilities will be similarly visually subsumed as part of the prevailing mixed use. The scope of the Class R use rights mentioned earlier of course highlight that training regarding agricultural related skills could be accommodated in principle at such a site, including buildings and land.

IMPACT ON NEIGHBOURING AMENITY/USES

Core policy 57 to the WCS at item vii. requires development to have regard to the compatibility of adjoining buildings and uses, the impact on the amenities of existing occupants, and ensuring that appropriate levels of amenity are achievable within the development itself, including the consideration of privacy, overshadowing, vibration, and pollution (e.g. light intrusion, noise, smoke, fumes, effluent, waste or litter).

As indicated above the core diversified activities have been in operation for in excess of 10 years and therefore there is no basis to suggest that the application development, as part of a mixed and active agricultural site, including separate commercial uses will give rise to any materially different externalities. The nearest houses to the site are to the east and west and notwithstanding the fact there have been no complaints are of course well established and inured to the range of noise and other externalities arising from the historic working farm. The acceptable levels of residential amenity are unchanged by the sanctioned uses proposed.

HIGHWAY MATTERS

The NPPF at paragraph 110 notes that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision-making. Additionally, paragraph 116 makes it clear that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.

The road links to the nearest motorway junction for those attending courses are considered not to be too rural and the site itself has a well-established access arrangement which has been approved on several separate occasions to accommodate large grain lorries etc. There is plenty of hardsurfacing suitable for parking and manoeuvring. Specifically, though it is understood that the majority of people attending course (many of whom share with colleagues) park to the west of the yard on the historic hardstanding expanded since Covid. The space available

has satisfactorily accommodated all visitors, and thus reflects the maximum capacity required, related to the operation of all the potential courses/classrooms. I am advised that staffing and related programming means that a maximum use is in fact avoided for logistical reasons.

The application development is car dependant in the main because of the rural siting needed to accommodate the mix of training opportunities offered. The rural location just outside Lyneham is essential and supported in the NPPF and Core Strategy. Moreover as indicated the permitted Class R usage for up to 1000m² evidences the flexibility of such uses, by definition in a rural location.

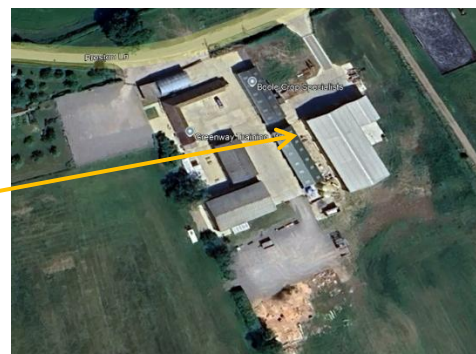
BIODIVERSITY

The application development, involving in the main, a simple change of use and a hardsurfaced working farmyard environment is considered not to trigger the Biodiversity Net Gain regime. However, it is recognised that core policy 50 seeks to enhance a site's biodiversity baseline. Accordingly, it is anticipated that the proposal will be conditionally controlled to insert a new birdbox as shown below on the existing farm building identified alongside.

Traditional brick box (To be installed as per manufacturers design & details).



Schwegler brick box example



Yours faithfully

Simon Chambers

Simon Chambers
Director

Enc.

Cc Mr R Boole