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Ms K Gould  
Planning Department  
South Oxfordshire District Council  
135, Eastern Avenue  
Milton Park  
Milton OX14 4SB

3<sup>rd</sup> May 2016

Dear Ms Gould

**FORMER WESTHILL FARMHOUSE**

I am writing to confirm the points we discussed at our meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2016.

Application for Demolition of the Former Farmhouse

Planning permission was granted for the demolition of the farmhouse in April 2016 in accordance with the planning officer's recommendation. However, the planning authority subsequently received an objection to the process because a copy of the site notice had not been submitted and the full consultation period had not expired before determination. No other objection has been received. A new application will be made this week, and we understand that the officer's report and the recommendation to permit demolition remain unchanged.

Previous Planning Advice

South Oxfordshire planning officers were approached in 2014 by members of a permaculture group to discuss the development of the site. Officers confirmed that permaculture use was consistent with the Green Belt planning designation which applies to the site. No other points were raised in relation to the future of the site, for example the issues of site access, residential use, educational use, retail, café or leisure uses, or use for corporate events.

Development on the Site

The former farmhouse was previously occupied as staff accommodation by a park ranger as an Oxford City Council employee. The building has remained vacant following the re-organisation of the parks service, until being extensively damaged by fire and is now incapable of occupation.

We understand that South Oxfordshire's planning policies and the national planning policies for Green Belt would not allow new residential or other development in this location unless there were exceptional grounds to justify a departure from policy. However, whilst residential use subsists the planning authority would allow redevelopment of the existing structure for residential use alone. It would not permit educational or institutional uses, retail, café or formal leisure uses on the site. The buildings are approximately three quarters of a mile by trackway from the Country Park car park and the planning

authority would not support any intensification or extension of the existing access.

I should be grateful if you would confirm the position as set out above. Please would you call me if it is helpful to discuss.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Edwards". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**David Edwards**  
**Executive Director**



File Message

You forwarded this message on 05/05/2016 15:19.

From: Kim Gould <kim.gould@southoxon.gov.uk>  
To: EDWARDS David  
Cc:  
Subject: RE: Westhill Farm Advice

Sent: Thu 05/05/2016 14:58

Message 2014\_10\_25 KG reply.pdf (177 KB)

Dear Mr Edwards,

Thank you for your e-mail.

I agree with the summary of our meeting with the exception of my pre application advice to Daniel Scharf on behalf of Nick Lurch and Adam Dawson. During that meeting other issues were raised including the siting of yurts on surrounding land, the possibility of a shop etc. My advice to them was that these uses would not be acceptable on green belt grounds.

I hope this is helpful.

Kim Gould

Planning Officer  
Planning and Building Control Services  
South Oxfordshire District Council  
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## Planning

Head of Service: Adrian Duffield



Listening Learning Leading

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Wallingford OX10 8ED

27 October 2014

**Ref: P14/S2999/PEM**

Dear Mr Scharf,

**Re: Proposed re-use of site for agriculture and forestry.  
At: Westhill Farm, The Ridings, near Headington, OX3 8TB**

I refer to your request for pre-application advice and to our meeting on site on 17 October with Nick Lunch and Adam Dawson to discuss the above proposal.

I understand that you wish to obtain an officers' view on whether a proposal to convert the outbuildings, repair the fire damaged farm house and to run a permaculture operation on the site would be supported.

During our meeting Nick and Adam set out their aspirations for the site which involved a large range of planning issues. I have asked for them to submit clarification on what their priorities are and some form of time line which corresponds to these priorities.

I am aware that your clients wish to receive some feedback from me prior to the meeting with the City Council early in November. I therefore intend to respond in very broad terms.

The assessment of this proposal has to be considered in the context of the relevant policies of the Development Plan and government advice which are set down below:

### **South Oxfordshire Core Strategy 2027 (SOCS)**

**CSS1 Overall Strategy**  
**CSEN2 Green Belt**  
**CSR2 Employment in rural areas**  
**CSQ2 Sustainable Design and Construction**

### **South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (SOLP)**

**G2 Protection and enhancement of the environment**

<b>G4</b>	<b>Development in the countryside</b>
<b>C8</b>	<b>Species protection</b>
<b>C9</b>	<b>Landscape features</b>
<b>GB4</b>	<b>Visual amenity of the green belt.</b>
<b>D10</b>	<b>Waste management</b>
<b>R4</b>	<b>Recreation in the countryside</b>
<b>E8</b>	<b>Re-use of rural buildings</b>
<b>A3</b>	<b>Diversification of the agricultural industry</b>
<b>T1/2</b>	<b>Transport requirements of new developments</b>

### **The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**

### **The National Planning Policy Framework Planning Practice Guidance (NPPFPPG)**

In assessing this proposal, the main broad issues which need to be considered are:

- Is the principle of permaculture appropriate in the green belt?
- The principle of repairing the farmhouse and using it for residential use.
- Is the conversion of the existing barns to workshops/classroom uses and basic temporary residential accommodation acceptable?
- Is the replacement or repair of the existing barn for uses associated with the permaculture/ educational use acceptable
- Highways
- Ecology/Forestry
- Other issues

The fundamental aim of green belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of green belts are their openness and permanence. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the green belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. It is within this context that the proposal has to be considered.

### **Permaculture/nature conservation**

In general terms, the principle of these practices are appropriate uses within the green belt as they would not adversely affect the openness or visual amenity of the green belt. Agriculture and forestry uses are listed in the NPPF as being appropriate uses in the green belt. It is therefore my opinion that the principle of these uses is acceptable.

### **Repairing the farmhouse and using it for residential use.**

It is my understanding that the farmhouse has been used for residential use by park rangers until approximately 2008 when a change in policy by the City Council resulted in the rangers being relocated and the farmhouse being vacated and subsequently damaged by an arson attack. The repair to the building would not be contentious as it would not adversely affect the openness or visual amenity of the green belt and would bring the building back into residential use which is in accordance with government advice which seeks to bring into use empty housing.

### **Conversion of outbuildings for use as classrooms/ancillary agricultural buildings/ temporary residential use**

The NPPF advises that the re-use of buildings in the green belt is not inappropriate providing the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction. Policy E8 of the SOLP allows for the re-use of rural buildings provided that a number of criteria are met.

During our meeting I saw a range of barns to the north of the main farmhouse which appeared to be of permanent and substantial construction. Suggested uses for these included a classroom/visitor information facility, temporary residential accommodation during the repair of the main farmhouse and general ancillary agricultural uses. It is necessary to consider the proposal to convert these within the context of policy E8.

Policy E8 of the SOLP states that proposals for the re-use of rural buildings will be permitted provided that the following criteria are met:

- **they are of permanent and substantial construction and are capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction.** I am of the view that the outbuildings northwest of the farmhouse are in a relatively good condition and could meet this criterion.
- **Their form, bulk and general design are in keeping with their surroundings.** It is unlikely that the design or form of these buildings would change materially with any conversion.
- **The fabric and essential character of the buildings are maintained.** If the buildings were converted to the uses referred to above it is my opinion that this could be done in a way which did not adversely affect the fabric or essential character of the buildings.
- **If the buildings are in the green belt, the proposed use does not have a materially greater impact than the present use on the openness of the green belt and the purpose of including land within it.** The suggested uses which I have referred to above would not, in my opinion, have a greater impact than the present/previous use on the openness of the green belt.
- **There are no overriding amenity, environmental or highway objections.** Given the isolated nature of the site, I do not consider that the proposed conversion of the outbuildings would result in amenity issues. I have consulted the Council's countryside officer, Dominic Lamb, who I understand is meeting Nick Lunch on site soon to look at the proposal from an ecology/environmental perspective. As a general comment, he is supportive of the re-use of the site as a permaculture centre as these types of facilities are based on the premise of low impact living and by nature would be appropriate to the site. I have also consulted the County Highway Authority in relation to access and am awaiting their comments. I understand from our meeting that vehicular movements to the site would typically involve a mini bus to the Shotover Hill car park once a day plus a delivery using The Ridings access in frequently.
- **In the case of B1 or B2 uses, the floorspace in the building or in the complex of buildings does not exceed 500 square metres.** The suggested

proposed uses may include a B1 use (office/light industrial) but this would not exceed 500 square metres.

- **In the case of proposals for residential use, other uses have been explored and found to be unacceptable in planning terms.** One of the suggested uses is for temporary residential accommodation to provide on-site presence and security once tools and equipment are stored on the site, during the repair of the farmhouse. If this is the case, it is my view that an argument could be put forward to justify why a temporary residential use is appropriate and necessary. In addition, the most recent permitted development regulations relating to the conversion of agricultural buildings are generally more permissive and these would be a material consideration in the determination of any planning application for the use of these buildings.

### **Replacement or repair of outbuilding for uses associated with permaculture practices**

During our meeting, I was shown a building which lies to the south west of the farm building and which appeared to be in a reasonable state of repair. It was suggested that this building would be needed in association with the permaculture practice which is intended for the site but may require some alteration or maybe replaced altogether. The NPPF advises that the replacement of a building in the green belt is not inappropriate providing the building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces. In addition it advises that the alteration of a building is not inappropriate provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. Therefore, it is my view that this building could be converted and altered to suit your clients' requirements providing it complies with this guidance and policy E8 criteria.

### **Highways**

I understand from our meeting that students to the permaculture centre would walk to the venue from the Shotover Hill car park north of the site and would be brought there by mini bus. (approximately 1 per day) As such, the amount of vehicular movements generated by this proposed use would not be great. Other visitors could be members of the general public who are visiting the park for recreational purposes and will have either walked from home or parked in the car park. The only vehicular movements to the site will be by delivery vehicles which would use the predominantly tarmac road from The Ridings and would be very infrequent. I have consulted the County Highway Authority for their views and will forward their response once I have received it.

### **Ecology / Forestry**

The site lies outside but adjacent to an SSSI. The proposal involves works to buildings which may be used by bats or other protected species. Dominic Lamb, the Council's countryside officer is meeting with Nick Lunch on site soon to assess the likely impact on protected species and to advise on any surveys which may need to be undertaken prior to any planning application being submitted and to advise on any mitigation measures which may have to be incorporated into the design of any conversion or repair of buildings. I will forward his consultation response once I have received it.

With regards to trees, any planning application should include a survey drawing showing existing trees on the site and information confirming which trees will be removed or retained as part of the proposal. A formal consultation will then be carried out with the Council's forestry team.

### **Other issues**

I have sought to address what I consider to be the main considerations with this proposal in order to assist your clients in their discussions with the City Council regarding the future of this site. During our meeting, other issues were mentioned which included the use of the orchard for camping which involved the erection of yurts. It is my opinion that this proposed use would not be acceptable as it has the potential to adversely affect the openness, character and visual amenity of the green belt and should not be included in any formal planning application. The idea of a small scale café and/or shop was also mooted. It is my opinion that these uses would not be acceptable as they would not be an essential part of the permaculture use of the site and would have the potential to escalate and, in my opinion, is likely to be contentious with local residents. It is my view that such, non essential uses of the site should not be included in any initial planning application and that the focus of any formal submission should be on securing the use of the site for permaculture and the conversions and other works essential for that.

I hope the advice in this letter is helpful. You will appreciate that the views expressed are my own which are not binding on the Council. If you wish to obtain a formal view, you should submit a formal planning application with the necessary forms, plans and fee which will take approximately 8 weeks to determine.

Yours sincerely,



Kim Gould  
Planning Officer