

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK PLANNING COMMITTEE

Application No: **6/8/12/105** Grid Ref **292787 138452**

Applicant: **Mr R Webber, Shearwell Data Ltd, Putham Farm, Wheddon Cross, Minehead, Somerset**

Location: **Putham Farm, Wheddon Cross, Minehead, Somerset**

Proposal: **Proposed re-development of the site to replace an existing agricultural building and workshop lean-to with a purpose built B1 office, research and development and light industry workspace (2,153m² gross external area), 40kw roof mounted solar photo voltaic array, change of use and extension of existing agricultural storage building to B1 light industry (371m² gross external area), extension of car park, landscaping together with the provision of a new access drive (approximately 830m) from the B3224 to existing business building including crossing Public Bridleway No. WL 6/22 supplemented by an Environmental Statement received 18/05/12. As per additional and amplified information 08.08.12, 24.09.12, 08.10.12, 22.10.12 and 15.5.13.**

Introduction: This application was reported to the Planning Committee in September 2012, a site visit was held on 17 September and the application reported back to the Committee meeting in November 2012. At that time the proposals included a substantial agricultural building to serve the Putham and Lower House farm holding, which it was explained was farmed as a single unit.

At the November meeting, the Committee resolved to approve the Planning Application subject to the signing of a legal agreement that would tie the new farm building to the farm land at Putham and the land, farm buildings and dwelling at Lower House.

The applicant expressed concern over the need and form of the agreement. It was argued that the agreement would prevent the ability to deliver the project because of the impact on value related to the requirements of lending institutions. An alternative form of legal agreement was proposed by the applicant to overcome these concerns with the tying of the proposed agricultural building so that it linked to the farm land at Putham and Lower House (but not the farm buildings and dwelling at Lower House) and furthermore were any land to be sold and not replaced, the size of the building would be reduced commensurate with the remaining land. This proposed approach was considered by the Committee at their March 2013 meeting and it was resolved that this approach was not acceptable in the circumstances of this application. The Committee re-affirmed the resolution of November 2012 to permit the application proposals subject to the signing of a legal agreement tying the land, buildings and dwelling.

Since that time the Applicant has considered his options. The application has now been amended to remove the agricultural building and associated yard from the proposals. In summary, the application now proposes the demolition of the agricultural element of the main building on the site and on an almost identical footprint the erection of a business extension to the main business building. The smaller farm building is proposed to be converted and extended to

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business use, the car park is shown to be excavated and enlarged, and an access road formed across fields with highway improvements onto the B3224.

The agent has explained that:

“In the interests of being transparent with the Authority, our client intends to submit a separate application for an agricultural building in due course. The content of that application and the siting of the building will be subject to a review that is currently being undertaken. As mentioned previously, our client does not want any issues relating to the agricultural building to delay the formalisation of the consent that has already been given for the Application as now amended. Members will, of course, have the opportunity to assess any future application for an agricultural building against policy at that time.”

The agent has confirmed that other than the withdrawal of the agricultural building and associated yard “no changes have been made to any other aspect of the development proposals”.

The application site (red lined) area remains the same as the original submission because some of the excavated top soil is to be spread in the undulations of a field to the north west of the main business building. However, an additional plan has been submitted to seek to reassure and demonstrate that the business land is considered by the applicant, if permitted, to be the business building, car park, immediately surrounding curtilage and the new access road.

Previous Committee Reports and Information

Detailed reports have been presented to the Committee when the proposals have been considered previously. The report to November Committee set out all the main planning issues and analysis, planning policies, representations, consultation responses together with the site visit notes. This included the advice on landscape issues from the Head of Conservation and Access.

The report considered by the Committee on 6 November is attached with these papers. The only element not included is the Smiths Gore Report because this concerned the agricultural building, which is now withdrawn from the proposals. With the exception of the agricultural building considerations, all other parts of the report are still relevant to the consideration of the present proposals.

While there have been Committee resolutions, the Authority has not made a decision nor issued a decision notice on the present application. It is essential to have regard to all relevant matters in reaching a decision, including the analysis that led to the resolution to permit at previous meetings. However, the Committee is not duty bound, if planning considerations were to be weighed differently in a rational manner, and/or if planning considerations have materially changed since previous deliberations, to come to the same conclusion as before. The Committee needs to make the decision in accordance with the policies of the Development Plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise.

Representations

Local residents, Cutcombe and Exton Parish Councils, the Exmoor Society and Exmoor Uprising were re-notified of the revised application on 11 April and given the opportunity to comment if they wished.

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All previous representations are set out in the attached Committee Report from November 2012 and the attached minute and these comments need to be taken into account in the planning process.

In terms of representations in relation to the amended proposals the following have been received:

Cutcombe Parish Council - This application is fully supported. The Parish Council were a little concerned to note that the application has to go back to full Committee, thus incurring time delays and costs for the Applicant, the Exmoor National Park Authority and others, when the amendment is the omission of the large agricultural building rather than additions or other major changes.

Exton Parish Council- - Views awaited.

Exmoor Society - No further comments received.

Exmoor Uprising - No further comments received.

Local Residents -

One letter, from the owner of Little Putham, raises the following objections:

1. Our principal concern with the revised application relates to the missing sheep shed. Where are the large flocks of sheep to be accommodated this coming winter? And where will lambing take place next spring?
2. Either the sheep enterprise is to be abandoned, which is highly unlikely, or the most likely scenario is that if the Authority grant approval for the revised application, it will immediately be followed by a further application for the shed on the Putham site as per the original application.
3. The agent appears to have tried to blur the situation with regard to the proposed S106 agreement that the Committee asked for linking Lower House Farm with Putham Farm, by implying that such a linkage would impose an impossible financial constraint on the business. They have produced no evidence to substantiate their claim. Either the business is viable or not; either way, it is not in itself a planning issue.
4. The Committee should consider a S106 on the Putham Farm land restricting further development, as part of an approval, in order to protect the residents of the various households which lie on the original Putham farmland, as scant regards has been shown so far.
5. Whilst I now appreciate that neither you, nor your Committee have any intention of requiring the replacement, larger, building to be set back from the access drive, and thus giving some slight improvement in environmental terms to us all, will you please revisit the corner of the proposed development where the communal refuse bins are presently located, and the details for this area. There is no indication of where these are to be located. A new 4 metre high, vertical, earth embankment is indicated for this area, topped with a further 1/1.5 metre high hedge bank, plus a beech hedge on top. The upper level is indicated as a service area for lorries. There is no indication of any retaining wall, or safety measures. What will prevent this area collapsing, possibly on to someone, and what will prevent the present continuous run-off down the drives to our properties? This has only occurred since the site was developed. There are no details, on a detailed planning application, that we can comment on, or have confidence in.

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6. What is the rationale for the new business being developed on open farmland, now that there is no direct linkage to the farming?

Consultation Responses

Highway Authority- No further comments received.

Environment Agency - Please refer to our previous response to this application dated 27/7/2012 our ref DC/2012/111968.

Furthermore we note that there is a spring supply located immediately behind the existing shed, which might be impacted, but its an unlicensed supply used for stock watering, so, whilst it maybe Lawful Use, its not a Protected Right as such. (If it had been for potable supply however we would have objected).

Given the proximity of the spring, presumably the owner / user is aware of the construction and so steps will be taken during the construction to protect the spring supply. The spring is likely to derive its water from the south - i.e. away from the development area.

Head of Conservation and Access (Landscape) - I have commented previously on the details of the application and visited the site on a number of occasions as well as analysing the landscape assessment that has been submitted. My main concern, with the proposals as originally submitted, was with the scale and impact of the agricultural building. I raised concerns with this aspect of the proposals. Now this element of the application has been removed I am much more content with the impact and appearance of the overall development.

While the highway access improvements will cause localised harm I accept that this is necessary to meet highway safety requirements and the design minimises that harm. The business building and car park are designed so that they will have minimal landscape impact and the landscape proposals ameliorate the new road across the fields. In conclusion I have no objections to this proposal.

Planning Policies

Since the 20 May 2013, the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Structure Plan (with the exception of an area of Green Belt designation in North Somerset) and the Regional Planning Guidance 10 (South West) have been revoked. As a consequence these documents are no longer part of the Development Plan and therefore are not material planning considerations. Additionally, it has been officially confirmed that the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy will not come into force.

The Development Plan now consists of the Exmoor National Park Local Plan. For the avoidance of doubt the key planning policies from the Local Plan are:

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK LOCAL PLAN 2001-2011

LNC1 General National Park Policy

LNC2 Lighting

LNC8 Protection of Best Agricultural Land

LNC12 Exmoor Biodiversity Action Plan Areas

LNC13 Mitigation and Compensation for Nature Conservation Sites Affected by Development

LNC14 Protected Species and Habitats

LNC17 Small Scale Renewable Energy Conservation

CBS12 New Development

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E2 Business Development in the Open Countryside
E3 Safeguarding Existing Employment Land and Buildings
E4 Large Scale or Intrusive Industrial Development
A1 Agriculture and Forestry Development
U1 Water Resource Protection - Groundwater
U2 Water Resource Protection – Contaminated Land
U3 Water Supply
U4 Sewerage and Sewage Disposal – Capacity of System
U8 Reduction of Flood Risk from New Development
TR3 Traffic and Road Safety Considerations for Development
TR6 Highway Design for New Development
TR10 Car and Cycle Parking Provision
TR12 Public Rights of Way

The National Planning Policy Framework now has full weight in the planning decision making process as an important material planning consideration. The key sections are referred to in the November Planning Committee Report.

Main Planning Issues

The main planning issues are considered to be whether the principle of the development is acceptable in this open countryside location in terms of National Park purposes and planning policies and, if so, whether the specific impacts, such as landscape, highways and amenity are compatible with this location within the National Park.

In terms of planning policy the key policies were set out in the November report (pages 46-49 of this report). It is important to note that it is reported that “in relation to the business element of the application, Policy E2 allows the extension of business premises in the open countryside providing there is no adverse effect on important planning interests which the Plan seeks to protect and Policy E4 will not be breached where the development is compatible with National Park purposes.” The NPPF provides wider support for business development and the need to stimulate the rural economy.

As before, based on the same Local Plan policies it is concluded that providing the impacts are acceptable, there is no policy objection to the proposed application.

A key planning issue with the original planning applications was the landscape impact and this was linked to the large scale of the development proposals. The Head of Conservation and Access spent considerable time analysing the proposals before advising in her report to the November Committee meeting (pages 72-77 of this report).

Both the Head of Conservation and Access and the Planning Case Officer were most concerned with the impact of the proposed agricultural building, which has now been deleted from the present application proposals. In terms of other impacts the report advises that there will be an adverse impact from the improvements at the highway access onto the B3224, but this has been minimised by the design and is unavoidable if the requirements of the Highway Authority are to be met. The impact of the single width road is largely mitigated by the proposed hedgebanks, and the car park extension will be set down in the landscape. The advice concludes that with the business building extension, there will be a minor beneficial effect on landscape because the building is well located in the landscape and the new build is a higher quality design.

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To conclude, now that the agricultural building has been deleted from the application proposals it is considered that the landscape impacts from the development are acceptable and accord with National Park purposes.

The applicant is reconsidering his agricultural building proposal and this may form the subject of a further application, but the landscape impacts of a future barn are not a consideration with the present proposals. Any future application will be considered on its merits at that time.

In terms of design, materials and layout, this was considered in the November report. The design of the business building extension has been the subject of considerable discussions and the siting, bulk, layout, materials and design are considered acceptable. The proposals incorporate elements of renewable and sustainable design to meet with the Local Plan policy requirements.

The County Highway Engineer is satisfied with the proposals in relation to highway and traffic related impacts and this includes the details of the road where it crosses the bridleway. The scheme will still provide an additional access to the site and this will remove some of the traffic that presently accesses the Shearwell site via the lane that passes Cutcombe School. The highway benefits set out in the previous report still accrue with the present proposals.

In terms of the impacts on residential amenity, these are again detailed in the previous report. While the scale of the business extension is substantial, it is considered that the siting of the car park and business activity itself will not so adversely impact on residential amenity that permission could reasonably be withheld. The new road access to the site does not pass near any residential property and is considered acceptable. There was some debate in the earlier report in respect of the impact of the proposed agricultural building in relation to residential properties and it was concluded that the relationship was acceptable. In any case this element of the application has been deleted from the application.

There will be excavated material from the construction of the access and new road as well as with the car park extension. The updated schedule which sets out how the material will be dealt with is as follows:

SOURCE AND DISPOSAL OF EXCAVATED MATERIAL:

Excavation	m3
Replacement agricultural building	<i>(deleted from application) -</i>
Construction of car park	1,792
Construction of access road and road drainage	<u>1,646</u>
	<u>3,438</u>
<i>less disposal</i>	
Formation of hedgebanks at Putham	913
Infill yard area at Putham	1,393
Stone and Shillet to resurface track at Goosemoor Farm <i>(application: 6/15/12/102)</i>	399
Top soil used at Armoor Lane <i>(prior notification: GDO 12/07)</i>	183
Top soil used at Putham	<u>550</u>
	<u>3,438</u>
Surplus	<u>0</u>

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With the previous submission there was 6,056 cubic metres of material resulting from the excavation of the agricultural yard and building area. This will not take place with the application in its present form. Furthermore, the hedgebanks will not now be needed in the vicinity of the previous proposed agricultural building and therefore the hedgebank figure is reduced from 1,573 to 913 cubic metres. It is the off site relocation of material to Goosemoor and Armour Lane that is substantially reduced by the amended proposals. The material proposed to be transferred to the track surfacing at Goosemoor is reduced from 5,075 to 399 cubic metres and the top soil proposed to be spread on the field at Armour Lane is reduced from 900 to 183 cubic metres.

The revised figures for the application, without the agricultural building and yard, show that the excavated material can be satisfactorily dealt with either on this site or in relation to the other planning applications that are within the system.

The November report also analysed flood risk and surface water drainage. The various technical reports, as updated, met with the requirements of the Environment Agency who raised no objection in respect of the application. The application, as now amended, removes the agricultural building which negates the need to deal with the clean water run off from the roof and any dirty water and waste issues from the livestock.

The economic impacts that may accrue from a development are a material planning consideration. The NPPF makes it clear that there are three dimensions to sustainable development, an economic role, a social role and an environmental role and that the roles should not be undertaken in isolation. There is Local Plan support for applications that deliver economic development where that accords with National Park purposes. Furthermore, it is also considered that the application proposals accord with a key aim of the NPPF to promote a strong rural economy by the growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas both through the conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings.

Conclusions

In particular, the Committee is asked to re-read the summary and conclusions from the November report (pages 57-60 of this report). As explained, the Planning Committee will again need to consider all the planning issues and the weight to be attached to all of the planning considerations. The starting point is the first National Park purpose and in particular the landscape impact. It is acknowledged that the scheme, while substantial, has been designed to minimise its visual impact. It was explained to the Committee at the November meeting that the most concerning landscape impact resulted from the agricultural building and if this building had been significantly smaller or removed from the application, the case officer would have been able to recommend the application for approval at that time.

Planning Officers now believe that the landscape impacts of the development proposals, as now amended, are compatible with National Park purposes and there is policy support for the proposals in terms of employment policies.

The application is submitted by an established Exmoor firm, with an international reputation, that is seeking to expand and economic benefits are material planning considerations. In terms of the sustainability of the location, the Committee and officers have previously considered this issue and have given weight to the case that the business benefits from a farming location because of the close relationship to farming activities. The application proposals do not presently include an agricultural building, however, the applicant has made it clear that the farming elements of the overall proposals are being separately reviewed and

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farm building proposals will be forthcoming in due course. Overall, the business is related to the farming industry and is considered to benefit from its rural location.

The application proposals will increase traffic movements to the site; however the new access from the B3224 will lead to a decrease in the likely movements through the crossroads in the centre of Wheddon Cross.

The Committee has analysed the details of this application at previous committee meetings and resolved to permit the application subject to a S106 Agreement. This agreement concerned the agricultural building and that element of the proposals has been removed. This is a change in planning circumstances, and now allows planning officers to recommend the application for approval, as the concerns regarding the landscape impact of the farm building have been addressed. The applicant has indicated that the farming elements of the proposals are under review and will be addressed in a future application.

In terms of other planning changes since that earlier resolution, the Development Plan has been amended by the revocation of the Structure Plan and the RPG10. The Local Plan is the most up to date Development Plan document and it is considered that the application proposals are in accordance with that document, and the NPPF gives support to the recommendation for approval. It is not considered that any planning considerations have changed materially since the earlier resolution that would lead the Committee to come to a different judgement on the merits of the application.

As before, planning determinations are a matter of balancing all the planning considerations. Officers now believe that the balance both in terms of policies and impacts falls in favour of approval.

Recommendation: Approve subject to the following conditions

CONDITIONS

- 1. Condition:** The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: In accordance with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, (as amended by the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).
- 2. Condition:** The development hereby permitted shall not be carried out except in complete accordance with the details shown on the submitted plans, numbers 2r6, 3r4, 4r5, 10r1, 11r3, 12, 13r2, 16r1, 17r3, 18r2, 19, 22, 25, 11.36.03J, 11.36.04H, 11.36.07E, 11.36.11A, 11.36.10G, 11.36.17 and 2446.02D.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure the development accords with the approved plans.
- 3. Condition:** Prior to occupation of the business building hereby permitted details of all proposed tree planting throughout the application site including the land behind the visibility splays for the improved vehicular access, shall be submitted to and be approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The details shall include the proposed times of planting, species, size of tree and maintenance regime. All tree planting shall be carried out in accordance with those approved

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details and thereafter retained. Any trees that become diseased or dies shall be replaced to the previously agreed specification and thereafter maintained.

Reason: To safeguard the character and visual amenities of this National Park location.

- 4. Condition:** The parking area shown on the approved plans shall be made available for use prior to the first occupation of the extended business development hereby permitted and thereafter retained for that purpose.

Reason: To ensure that adequate facilities are provided for the parking of vehicles clear of the highway in the interests of the free flow of traffic and the visual amenities of the area.

- 5. Condition:** Any gas, electricity, water, sewage, telephone and cabling services to any building on the application site shall be placed underground.

Reason: In the interest of the visual amenities of this National Park area and the character and siting of the building.

- 6. Condition:** No floodlights or other forms of external lighting shall be installed within the red lined application site without the prior permission, in writing, of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To protect the amenities of this National Park location and in particular the dark night sky – a special quality of the National Park.

- 7. Condition:** The extension to the business building hereby permitted shall have an eaves projection of at least 125 mm, unless an alternative projection is agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the design and impact of the eaves is sympathetic to this building within this National Park location.

- 8. Condition:** The business building extension hereby permitted shall be used for B1 purposes only and for no other purpose (including any other purpose in Class B of the Schedule to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (or in any provision equivalent to that Class in any statutory instrument revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification).

Reason: To restrict the use of the premises, and the associated traffic movements, in the interests of the amenities of this rural location, as well as ensuring business use is retained in the interests of the rural Exmoor economy.

- 9. Condition:** Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any subsequent order amending or replacing that Order), the B1 business buildings on the application site shall not be extended or altered in any way without the prior approval in writing of Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the business buildings cannot be extended under permitted development rights and therefore the condition controls

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the introduction of a more intensive business use of the site, and the related traffic movements and other activities which may adversely affect the character and amenities of this location within the National Park.

- 10. Condition:** No internal floor, mezzanine or other additional floorspace shall be constructed within the “Moulding, Storage Goods/Raw Materials” section of the extended business building as shown Plan 11.36.03J without the grant of planning permission by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To control the introduction of a more intensive use of the premises and the related traffic movements and other activities, which may adversely affect the character and amenities of this location within the National Park.

- 11. Condition:** The extent of the business land and buildings on the site hereby permitted shall be limited to the blue hatched area shown on Drawing 25 and all other land within the red lined application site shall be used for no purpose other than agriculture.

Reason: In the interests of clarity and to ensure that the extent of the business part of the site is specified in the interests of protection the open countryside.

- 12. Condition:** Prior to the use of the business building extension to the main Shearwell building hereby permitted details shall be submitted to and agreed by the Local Planning Authority in writing with respect to the “non recyclable and recyclable waste and storage area” shown on Drawing 19. The details shall include the extent of the area used for such storage, any fixed containers or receptacles, the operation of the area and screening proposals. Once agreed this waste area shall provide and thereafter be operated in accordance with the agreed details.

Reason: In the interests of the visual and residential amenities of the area.

- 13. Condition:** Earth banks, a minimum of 1.5m in height (after the earth has settled) above original ground level, shall be constructed in all the locations shown on Plan 17r3, unless an alternative form of landscaping is agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. At the top of the bank, unless an alternative form of landscaping is agreed, there shall be planted a double staggered row of beech, ash, hazel, hawthorn and blackthorn with approximately 15/20cm between each plant in each row. The plants should be approximately 30cm in height when planted. Planting shall take place during the first planting season following commencement of the development (unless an alternative timetable is agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority) and shall be maintained for a five year period, such maintenance to include the replacement of any beech plants that become diseased or die.

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Reason: To help screen and soften the impacts of the development in this open countryside National Park location.

- 14. Condition:** Prior to the commencement of the development, a Travel Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Travel Plan should include soft and hard measures to promote sustainable travel as well as targets and safeguards by which to measure the success of the plan. There should be a timetable for implementation of the measures and for the monitoring of travel habits. The business extension hereby permitted shall not be occupied unless the agreed measures are being implemented in accordance with the agreed timetable. The measures should continue to be implemented as long as any part of the business extension is occupied.

Reason: The site lies in a rural area where there is no direct access to the site from public transport. In terms of the operation of the site all efforts are necessary to reduce traffic movements both in terms of the sustainability of the operation and in relation to the amenities of this rural area within the National Park.

- 15. Condition:** The proposed access from the B3224 shall be constructed in accordance with the approved plans, including the provision of a tarmac surface, unless alternative details and surfacing is agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety at the entrance to the B3224 and to ensure that the access is provided to accord with the terms of the application proposals and the highway benefits which result.

- 16. Condition:** The vehicular access and road the subject of this application shall be constructed with the French drains as shown on the approved plans.

Reason: To ensure that water is drained sustainably from the new road.

- 17. Condition:** Provision shall be made within the site for the disposal of surface water so as to prevent its discharge onto the highway, details of which shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the construction of the improved entrance onto the B3224. Once approved the works shall take place in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

- 18. Condition:** At the proposed access there shall be no obstruction to visibility greater than 900mm above adjoining road level within the visibility splays shown on the submitted plan Drawing No. 2446.02.D. Such visibility splays shall be constructed prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted and shall thereafter be maintained at all times.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

- 19. Condition:** The development permitted by this planning permission shall only be carried out in accordance with the approved Flood Risk Assessment by Harcombe Environmental Services dated 10/05/2012 and Acorn drawing number 13 r2 (as amplified and updated by additional document dated 22/10/12) and the following mitigation measures detailed within the FRA:
1. Limiting the surface water run-off generated by the 1:100 year storm so that it will not exceed the run-off from the undeveloped site and not increase the risk of flooding off-site.
 2. Provision of sustainable drainage methods, notably the proposed soakaways and French drains.

Reason: To prevent flooding by ensuring the satisfactory storage of/disposal of surface water from the site.

- 20. Condition:** No development approved by this planning permission shall take place until a remediation strategy that includes the following components to deal with the risks associated with contamination of the site shall each be submitted to and approved, in writing, by the local planning authority:
- A preliminary risk assessment which has identified:
1. All previous uses potential contaminants associated with those uses a conceptual model of the site indicating sources, pathways and receptors potentially unacceptable risks arising from contamination at the site.
 2. A site investigation scheme, based on (1) to provide information for a detailed assessment of the risk to all receptors that may be affected, including those off site.
 3. The results of the site investigation and the detailed risk assessment referred to in (2) and, based on these, an options appraisal and remediation strategy giving full details of the remediation measures required and how they are to be undertaken.
 4. A verification plan providing details of the data that will be collected in order to demonstrate that the works set out in the remediation strategy in (3) are complete and identifying any requirements for longer-term monitoring of pollutant linkages, maintenance and arrangements for contingency action.
 5. Any changes to these components require the express written consent of the local planning authority. The scheme shall be implemented as approved.

Reason: National Planning Policy Framework para 109 states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels water pollution. Government policy also states that planning policies and decisions should also ensure that adequate site investigation information, prepared by a competent person, is presented (NPPF, para 121).

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21. Condition: Prior to any work to construct the larger business building extension hereby permitted, including any grounds works in association with those building works, the new access drive including the provision of the sight lines and width increase shall be operational. (Operational does not include the final tarmac surfacing). The final tarmac surfacing shall be completed prior to the first occupation of the larger business building extension.

Reason: To ensure that the new access is operational and can be used by construction vehicles in the interests of the amenities of this rural area.

22. Condition: No spoil or other materials resulting from the demolition, excavation or other construction works associated within this permission shall leave the Putham Farm site other than via the improved access on to the B3224.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and the amenities of this rural National Park location.

23. Condition: Once provided, the new vehicular access shall be permanently retained and available to access the application business site and its car park.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and the amenities of this rural area.

24. Condition: The main business building, both the existing and extension hereby permitted as well as the detached building hereby allowed to be extended and changed from agricultural use, shall be operated by a single business and the buildings shall not be sub-divided or have separate tenants that do not operate as a single operation within the site, without the prior agreement in writing of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: The application submission is based on the traffic movements associated with a combined operation and it has been approved on that basis, together with a need to protect the rural amenities of this National Park area in terms of the intensity of activities.

25. Condition: The car park extension hereby approved shall be provided, surfaced and operational prior to the first occupation of the larger business building extension hereby permitted and that car park shall thereafter be retained for its designated use.

Reason: To ensure that the car park is provided in accordance with the proposals and to ensure that cars do not need to park elsewhere on the site which would have an adverse impact on the visual amenities of the area.

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26. Condition: The ground and other works shall take place in accordance with the recommendations of the Ecological Assessment Report (Appendix 3 of the Environmental Statement) unless agreed otherwise in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To accord with best practice in the interests of wildlife and conservation.

27. Condition: The recommendations in the Flood Risk Assessment and Surface Water Drainage Strategy (Appendix 8 of the Environmental Statement) and the recommendations in the Contaminated Land and Ground Water Assessment (Appendix 9 of the Environmental Statement) shall be implemented in full before the extension to the existing business building hereby permitted is occupied, unless agreed otherwise in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To accord with the best practice and to ensure that run-off and potential pollution does not cause any amenity or other environmental problem.

28. Condition: Prior to commencement of the business extension to the existing business building, details of the packaged sewerage treatment plant, including large scale drawing of its position, levels in relation to adjoining ground, boundary treatments, its specification and noise levels shall be submitted to and be approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Once approved the works shall take place in accordance with the approved plans and the plant shall be operational before occupation of the larger business building extension hereby permitted.

Reason: To ensure that the system meets the necessary requirements and is operational before occupation of the extended business building in the interests of the amenities of the area.

29. Condition: Notwithstanding the submitted proposals, prior to the first occupation of the business building extension hereby permitted, details of a protocol as to how the site will be operated to minimise light spillage, both in terms of physical measures and work practices, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Once approved the buildings and site shall be operated in accordance with the agreed measures.

Reason: To ensure that light spillage from the buildings is minimised in the interests of protecting the Exmoor Dark Sky – one of its special qualities.

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- 30. Condition:** Prior to the occupation of the larger business building extension hereby permitted details for the secure parking of bicycles shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Once approved the secure area shall be provided in accordance with the agreed details and thereafter retained.
- Reason: To encourage cycling to work as part of sustainable transport measures.
- 31. Condition:** In relation to the agricultural field, within the red lined application site area to the north-west of the main business building on the site, no spoil other than top soil shall be spread in this field.
- Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure its continued agricultural use.
- 32. Condition:** The main business building extension hereby approved shall be constructed from the external materials specified in the submitted plans, including the samples, unless alternative materials are agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
- Reason: To accord with the proposals and in the interests of the visual amenities of this rural area.
- 33. Condition:** Prior to any use of the new vehicular road and access from the B3224 to access the application site buildings and car park, including use by vehicles in association with the construction works on the application site, the alterations to the sight lines at the crossing with the bridleway and the provision of the ramps shall be implemented in their entirety and thereafter those sight lines and measures to slow traffic as shown on Plan 4r5 shall be permanently maintained.
- Reason: In the interests of safety at the crossing of the bridleway and new access drive.
- 34. Condition:** The hedge and other vegetation boundary, which stretches from the existing car park entrance, along the north-eastern side of the business building, both existing and extended shall be retained and managed. The hedge section from the entrance to the car park to a position alongside the front of the building shall be retained and not reduced in height below 2.5m above the level of the car park.
- Reason: In the interests of visual amenities of this National Park location.
- 35. Condition:** Prior to any construction, including demolition, on site (or such alternative timetable agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority), protective fencing shall be erected to safeguard the hedges adjoining any construction work. This shall include the areas around the yard area to the south of the main business building and those protective fences shall be in place throughout the demolition, excavation and construction phases of the development.
- Reason: To ensure that important hedges and other vegetation are protected during the works in the interests of the visual amenities of this National Park area.

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36. Condition: Prior to the works taking place to improve the vehicular access onto the B3224, details of the relocation/removal of the telegraph pole and the related overhead lines shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Once the details have been approved works shall take place in accordance with the approved plans and those works shall be completed prior to the occupation of the business building extension hereby permitted.

Reason: To ensure that the sight line is free from obstructions and in the interests of the visual amenities of this National Park area.

37. Condition: Notwithstanding The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (as Amended) other than the timber framed, non-illuminated signs, submitted as part of the application proposals, no further signs at the entrance to the application site shall be erected without the prior approval in writing of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of the visual amenities of this National Park area.

38. Condition: Any forklift, vehicles or other machinery that is based on site shall not, unless agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, have reversing equipment that produces a noise, unless agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of the amenities of this National Park location and in particular in relation to the amenities of those residing at Putham.

INFORMATIVES

SUMMARY OF REASON FOR GRANTING PLANNING PERMISSION

The Local Planning Authority, having regard to all planning considerations material to the determination of this application, including particularly landscape, highway network and safety, amenities of neighbours, economic circumstances, agricultural justification, ecology, archaeology, pollution, surface water, design, materials, layout, lighting and crime issues, and all consultations and representations made in connection with the application, conclude that the proposals accord with the provisions of the Development Plan as applicable to it and there are no material planning considerations that justify its refusal.

In accordance with the requirements of Article 31 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order, 2010, as amended in determining this application, Exmoor National Park Authority has worked positively with the applicant to ensure that all relevant planning issues have been appropriately resolved. This has included the following proactive and positive engagement: discussions resulting in the receipt of amended plans, Committee site visits and Committee discussions and resolutions.

COUNTY HIGHWAYS ADVICE

Having regard to the powers of the Highway Authority under the Highways Act 1980, the applicant is advised that the creation of the new access will require a Section 184 Permit. This must be obtained from the Highway Service Manager, Area Highway Office for West Somerset, Mart Road, Minehead, Tel No. 0845 345 9155. Application for such a permit should be made at least four weeks before access works are intended to commence.

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The minor works will involve construction works within the existing highway limits. These works must be agreed in advance with the Highway Service Manager at the Area Highway Office for West Somerset, Mart Road, Minehead, Tel No. 0845 345 9155. He will be able to advise upon and issue the relevant licences, necessary under the Highways Act 1980.

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Application No: **6/8/12/105** Grid Ref **292787 138452**

Applicant: **Mr R Webber, Shearwell Data Ltd, Putham Farm, Wheddon Cross, Minehead, Somerset**

Location: **Putham Farm, Wheddon Cross, Minehead, Somerset**

Proposal: **Proposed re-development of the site to replace an existing agricultural building and workshop lean-to with a purpose built B1 office, research and development and light industry workspace (2,159m² gross external area), 40kw roof mounted solar photo voltaic array, change of use and extension of existing agricultural storage building to B1 light industry (371m² gross external area), extension of car park, erection of replacement agricultural building (1,758m² gross external area) and associated yard area, landscaping together with the provision of a new access drive (approximately 830m) from the B3224 to existing business building including crossing Public Bridleway No. WL 6/22 supplemented by an Environmental Statement received 18/05/12.**

Introduction: This application was presented to the Planning Committee at its September meeting. That report set out the details of the application and the then consultee responses and representations, and summarised the main planning issues at that time.

Outstanding at the September Committee meeting was the landscape advice from the Head of Conservation and Access and the agricultural appraisal that the Authority had commissioned to help to judge the need for the agricultural building.

The Committee resolved to defer the application so that a site visit could be undertaken. The site visit group visited the site on Monday 17 September and the notes of that meeting are attached to this report (Annex 1).

Since the September Committee meeting, further information and amendments have been submitted by the applicant. This includes a detailed farming justification, photomontages of the proposed development in the wider landscape from a number of viewpoints and amendments to the agricultural barn. The barn, whilst having the same floorspace, has had the eaves lowered from 4.6m (15ft) to 4.3m (14ft), and the pitch of the roof dropped from 15 degrees to 12 degrees. The ridge height of the 23m wide section of the building has been reduced by 0.9m from the original submission and the ridge height of the 27.5m wide section of the building has been lowered by approximately 1m.

The Authority is now in receipt of the final views of the Head of Conservation and Access and these are set out in full as an annex to this report (Annex 2). The advice from Smiths Gore, the Authority's agricultural adviser, has also been received and their advice is summarised in the report, as well as their full report being attached (Annex 3).

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The application site lies in open countryside to the south and south-east of Wheddon Cross and Cutcombe. The area is characterised by open grazing fields on valley sides with the fields bounded by hedgebanks. There are some copses of trees and more extensive areas of woodland in the wider area.

At the present time there is one large building and one smaller building on the site. The larger building accommodates Shearwell Data Systems in the north-western end of the building and the south-eastern section is a livestock shed. They are internally connected. The building has sheeted elevations and roof.

The main building has an approximate gross external area of 2,895sqm. This is made up of 1,424sqm of office and production space over two floors and approximately 1,358sqm of agricultural floorspace, with an extra 113sqm of mezzanine space. A smaller sheeted building to the west of the main building measures approximately 278sqm. The total floorspace on the site is therefore 3,173sqm, of which the footprint measures 2,438sqm.

The business element falls within the B1 Business Use Class and is a mix of production, office, and research and development space. Approximately 50 full-time and 10 part-time staff are employed in the business on the site. The business is a supplier of visual and electronic ear tags, bolus, farm software and electronic identification (EID) to aid identification and management of cattle, sheep and other livestock both in the UK and internationally. In association with the business is the National Livestock Management Database which is a central repository for farm information, providing secure off-site backup electronic data facilities to farmers and the industry.

A tarmac car park is located immediately to the north-west of the main entrance to the building and is cut into the slope of the hill and accommodates about 45 car parking spaces in an informal way.

The site is accessed via a concrete and fenced drive across an open grazing field which connects to Popery Lane. Adjoining the access onto Popery Lane is an intersection with the Coleridge Way Bridleway and Lower Park Lane. A pair of semi-detached houses lies in the vicinity at this end of Popery Lane. Popery Lane is a single width lane, with occasional passing places, and connections with the main road network by the Cutcombe First School.

The Shearwell building and livestock shed was originally linked to Putham Farm house at the hamlet of Putham, to the south-east of the Shearwell building. The stone farmhouse at Putham has been separated from the land holding and the outbuildings to the farmhouse have been converted to separate residential units. There is also another dwelling, Higher Putham, amongst this hamlet. The owners of this property have converted an outbuilding, with planning permission, to form a small chiropractic clinic. Access to the hamlet at Putham is via Cutcombe, and the present joint access with Shearwell, before, passing along the lane immediately adjoining the Shearwell building.

In terms of planning history, a sheep and cattle building was permitted under Application 6/8/89/111. This was the original permission that allowed a building for farming purposes. This was permitted in June 1989.

In 1992 an application to consider the change of use of 6 of the 10 bays of the barn to light industrial was submitted for consideration. At this time the use was explained as the supply of mail order goods, woodwork/joinery, design and supply of agricultural buildings and stables and an animal tagging business. The application was approved on 9 September 1992.

An application to extend the sheep shed was submitted under Application 6/8/95/110. This was approved in February 1996.

The result of these permissions was a mixed use of the building, a combination of livestock shed in one section and the business element in the other. Subsequent internal and external changes, with the necessary planning permissions as required, have seen the business element expand.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Summary

The application proposes to demolish the existing agricultural element of the main building and to replace it, on a very similar footprint, with an extension to the existing business accommodation. While the ridge height of the extension will be the same, internally part of the extension will be two storeys while part will be single storey. The single storey element is proposed to have a double height internal space to allow for production activities. An extension to the storage building alongside the main building and the proposed change of use of this building from agricultural to business use is proposed.

An extension to the car park and a new vehicular access passing across agricultural fields from the B3224 is proposed.

A new agricultural building is proposed to be constructed on land to the north-west of the car park and main building.

Detailed Proposals

Business Building

It is proposed to demolish, rather than convert, the agricultural element of the main building on the site. The proposals seek to erect an extension attached to the main business floorspace of additional office, workshop and production space. The extension is proposed to be built on the same floor level as the existing agricultural section of the building and this will link in with the business building at the same level. At the present time the ridge of the roof of the agricultural element of the building steps down on two occasions from the business part of the building. In the case of the proposed extension, the ridge will step up approximately 0.5m from the ridge of the existing business section. The ridge height of the extension will measure approximately 8.6m above the ground level, and at the southern end this will compare with the present ridge of the agricultural building of approximately 7.0m. The overall building will remain approximately 78m in length; with the end 50m to be replaced if approval were to be granted.

The present elevations of the building, except the front business section, are clad in merlin grey pvc coated metal sheeting below a merlin grey metal sheeted roof. The agricultural element is grey ventair metal sheeting below a grey metal sheeted roof.

The application proposes that the new and existing roof and the elevations be reclad (with the exception of the front section). The agent has explained that the new extended and existing building will be clad with composite trapezoidal insulated panels coloured goose wing grey with contrasting darker vertical sections of merlin grey panels along the northern elevation. The agent explains that “although there are only limited views from a distance, the dark grey sections will appear as open breaks in the building”. The south elevation of the building is proposed to be clad in goose wing grey with dark vertical sections and a section of “Energi” panels to provide an insulated solar air heating system.

The roof of the building, both existing and proposed to be extended, is specified to be covered in composite trapezoidal insulated panels coloured anthracite with overhanging eaves. The agent has explained that the anthracite colour and the type of panel has been selected due to its low reflectance value of 8.4%, compared to the existing merlin grey of 16.4%.

On the south-west roof elevation, which faces towards the rising field, it is proposed to erect a 40kw PV panel array. These panels would be attached to the new roof and consist of 6 rows of 34 panels. The papers explain that the proposed panels would have a matt black frame.

The main entrance elevation to the building would remain unaltered. The other elevations show windows, a balcony area with balustrade, a fire escape and at the south-east end of the extension two large roller shutter doors. These would allow access to the double height production area. Adjoining the doors would be a yard area.

The lower areas of the yard would be raised to create a level surface, one of the openings closed and a packaged sewerage plant constructed in this area. The plant would be predominantly underground with the exception of the control cabinet.

Storage Building

In 2006 an agricultural implement store was approved on elevated land to the south-west of the main building. The building measures approximately 9m in depth and 30m in width. The present application seeks to reposition the rear wall and extend the building to the south-west by 3.05m. Instead of using the building for agricultural purposes, it is intended that the building will be used in conjunction with the business use on the site.

Access Track

As part of the application it is proposed to provide a second vehicular access route to the site. The plans show a tarmac access road linking from the existing agricultural access on the B3224, which is sited approximately 600m from the centre of Wheddon Cross. The plans show works to improve the access which have been designed in conjunction with the County Highway Authority. The agricultural access lies on a relatively straight section of road as it slopes down towards Wheddon Cross. However at the present time, visibility from the agricultural access is restricted to the north direction by a bank and vegetation, and to the south by vegetation and a ridge in the road.

The plans show the removal of about 94m of hedgebank to the north of the access by the removal of a section of hedge to provide a 2.4m by 120m visibility splay. To the south, the proposals involve the removal of 5m of bank and realigning 23m of the boundary, and this will deliver a 2.4m by 160m sight line. The width of the access into the site will be widened. Immediately adjoining the main road the width of the new tarmac entrance at the bell-

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mouth will be about 40m. The access then curves in on both sides until the width of the first section of the road is 6m. It is explained that the access layout is required so that a lorry preparing to leave the improved access can be passed by a lorry turning into the site.

The proposals also include the erection of entrance warning signage to the east of the entrance on the roadside verge and slow markings within the west bound carriageway.

Approximately 20m back from the carriageway edge is a gate which leads through to a grazing field. The width of the gateway is proposed to be widened and very shortly afterwards the access track is shown to be reduced in width from 6m to 3.05m. The proposed track then passes along the contour line, following the boundary with the field to the north for about 280m. At this point there is a field access through the double hedgebank boundary with the Coleridge Way Bridleway, which passes north-south.

The application sets out proposals for the new access track to pass across the bridleway. At the bridleway, the hedgebanks will be lowered and set back to allow both vehicle drivers and bridleway users better inter-visibility. The tarmac access will continue through the bridleway but there will be speed ramps down either side which will, it is explained, help ensure that drivers slow down while crossing the bridleway. The slope of the bridleway is proposed to be re-profiled “to remove (the) low spot where the water currently pools and the bridleway is suffering from surface deterioration”. Either side of the proposed section of tarmac, the bridleway would have new sections of compacted stone surface. A warning sign would be sited on the verge on the way into the site, before the bridleway and the ramp down, to warn drivers of the approaching bridleway.

After the bridleway the proposed access track then passes to the east alongside the field boundary and to the south of a hedgebank for approximately 300m. It is then proposed to pass through a hedgebank before dropping down the field slope towards the existing Shearwell site. This last section again follows a hedgebank boundary. The track divides and one section serves the yard at the south-east corner of the extended building and another section runs to the north alongside the storage building and then drops down into the car park.

Five passing bays are proposed along the length of the access track.

The entrance from the B3224 and approximately half the length of the proposed access track is in separate ownership and the applicant has secured agreement to provide the access if planning permission is secured.

Car Park

The existing car park, as previously extended, presently measures approximately 55m by approximately 30m and accommodates, in an informal arrangement, approximately 50 cars parking spaces. The car park is set on the same level as the building and is partially screened by vegetation to the north-east and by the face of the hill which the car park has been cut into.

The application proposes to extend the car park by excavating out an area to the north-west of the present car park. The car park as a whole would then extend approximately 90m from the front of the building and by approximately 30m in width. The surface is proposed to be finished in tarmac with rolled chippings to match the proposed new access drive. The car park is proposed to accommodate approximately 97 cars.

Agricultural Building

The application proposes to erect an agricultural building to the western part of the application site. It is explained that this is required to replace the building lost by the extension of the business. The proposed building has an approximate length of 72m and an approximate width of 23m. There is a wider section of the proposed building at the western side where the width increases to approximately 27.5m to accommodate a livestock handling area. The height of the building has been reduced by the applicant and amended plans received. The eaves have been lowered from approximately 4.6m (15ft) to approximately 4.3m (14ft). Also the roof pitch of the building has been reduced from 15 degrees to 12 degrees. The approximately 23m wide section of the building has a ridge height of approximately 6.7m (reduced by 0.9m from the original submission) and the approximate 27.5m wide section of the building has a ridge height of approximately 7.2m (reduced by approximately 1m from the original submission). The ground floor area of the proposed building measures approximately 1,758sqm with an additional 125sqm of internal mezzanine.

The elevations are proposed to be clad in vertical timber Yorkshire boarding over a base of concrete panels, with the exception of the western end elevation which is proposed to be finished in a dark grey metal ventair system, which it is said, reduces rain blowing into the building. The roof of the building is shown as anthracite cement fibre panels with a series of roof lights. The updated details explain that the Yorkshire boarding will be overlapped internally to reduce light escape from the building. Furthermore, the rooflights facing north have been reduced and now represent 9.6% of the roof area.

The plans show that the proposed agricultural building would, if permitted, be cut into the slope of the hillside. The building is shown running parallel with a hedgebank, and on the southern side where the land rises, the cut into the slope at the back of the yard area is between 3m and 4m depending on position. Stone finished yard areas are proposed around the building with a raised area to the southern side of the building to access the internal mezzanine. Large steel doors which are indicated to be finished in a dark grey colour are shown at each ends of the proposed agricultural building.

The site of the agricultural building is located partly in the field to the west of the present car park, but it also extends through a section of hedgebank and projects approximately 50m into the adjoining field. With the section of yard proposed to the western end of the barn, the proposed building extends up to the hedgebank of the next field boundary. From the northern yard section of the new agricultural building, to the south-east corner of the yard to the extended business building, the site extends over a distance of approximately 330m.

Finally the application proposes to spread topsoil in the further field to the west, where there are a series of dips in the field. The application papers explain that the sections where topsoil is proposed to be spread will be re-seeded.

A summary of the floorspace changes and increases is summarised as follows:

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	Present Floorspace (sqm)	Total Floorspace (sqm)
Business		1,424
Ground Floor	802	
First Floor	622	
Agricultural		1,749
Ground floor	1,358	
Mezzanine	113	
Detached store	278	
Total Floorspace		3,173
Footprint of buildings		2,438
	Proposed Floorspace (sqm)	Total Floorspace (sqm)
Business		3,786
Ground floor existing	640	
Ground floor proposed	1519	
First floor existing	622	
First floor proposed	548	
Second floor proposed	86	
Detached Store	371	
New Agricultural building		
Ground Floor	1,758	1,883
Mezzanine	125	
Total Floorspace		5,669
Footprint of buildings		4,288

Total proposed increase in floorspace $5,669 - 3,173 = 2,496\text{sqm}$

Total proposed increase in footprint $4,288 - 2,438 = 1,850\text{sqm}$

SUPPORTING JUSTIFICATION AND APPLICANT'S ANALYSIS

The Planning Application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement that sets out details on a range of subjects important to the consideration of the proposed development. The key elements are set out below.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

The papers include a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). This is an analysis of the potential landscape impact of the development; the business extension; the new agricultural building; the enlarged car park and the new access drive. The assessment has been made from approximately 30 different viewpoints and undertakes an analysis of the landscape impact upon the wider area, in particular from public rights of way and other public locations.

The detail of the LVIA has been expanded following discussions with the Head of Conservation and Access. Furthermore, photomontages have been submitted from agreed view points to assist with the judgment of landscape impact. These are available for inspection on the Authority's website and will be available as part of the Committee presentation.

Landscaping

As part of the application proposals the plans show a series of planting and hedgebanking proposals. Behind the northern visibility splay at the improved access, an area of tree planting is proposed including beech, sessile oak, rowan and sycamore. Along the first section of the proposed access track, the field boundary to the north is at present a wire fence. The application proposes to construct hedgebanks along this northern side of the proposed access, totalling approximately 160m in length.

As the proposed access track passes down the slope towards the main building, a further boundary hedgebank is proposed, together with a hedgebank to the south of the proposed agricultural building.

The other main element of landscaping is the management of the recently cut back hedge and tree screen along the north-east side of the existing agricultural building.

Traffic and Transport Assessment

This Assessment explains that presently all traffic to the application site, from the main road network, is required to pass down Popery Lane and this is narrow with hedgebanks on either side. For vehicles that come from the Taunton direction along the B3224, which links from the M5, there is a need to negotiate the cross roads in the middle of Wheddon Cross to access the Shearwell site.

In terms of the upgraded access onto the B3224, which is proposed to serve the Shearwell site, Somerset County Council's road safety unit has confirmed that there have been no accidents on this section of road in the last 5 years.

The assessment has documented the existing vehicle arrivals and departures to the application site. In the morning peak of 8am to 9am, there are 40 arrivals and the peak period for departure was between 16.30 and 17.30, where there were 36 car movements. The total employee cars arriving and departing the site was 58 per day. In terms of the weekly delivery movements for the 2 week study period, there were 44 arrivals and departures and this was made up of 28 vans and 16 lorries.

The analysis also examined where the vehicles came from. For employees on a daily basis, 9 came from Cutcombe itself, 11 from the Minehead road, 11 from the Exford direction, 22 from the Taunton direction and 5 from the Dulverton direction. This means that for employees, 38 of the 58 vehicle movements presently pass through the Wheddon Cross crossroads to access the site.

In terms of weekly van movements, 7 come from the Minehead direction, 10 from the Exford direction, 8 from the Taunton direction and 3 from the Dulverton direction. As a consequence, 21 of the 28 van movements into the Shearwell site come through the crossroads in Wheddon Cross.

In relation to weekly lorry movements, in terms of the study period the data shows that all the movements came from the Taunton direction and therefore all have to pass through the crossroads within the centre of Wheddon Cross.

The assessment acknowledges that the car park is proposed to be increased from 50 to 97 car parking spaces and that the proposed development is anticipated to create 50 additional jobs on the site. The report therefore projects that the increased employee vehicle trips will rise by 50 per day and also that the delivery vehicles would increase by 10 per week, comprising 5 additional van movements and 5 additional lorry movements.

The assessment then analyses the position if the new access were to be permitted and become operational. The new access would allow all employee, van and lorry movements from the Taunton direction to access the Shearwell site without the need to use the Wheddon Cross junction and Popery Lane. It is very likely that traffic to and from Exford would be encouraged to do the same as it would be more convenient to cross straight over at Wheddon Cross rather than turning left and then travelling past the school and using Popery Lane. Traffic to and from Minehead are likely to use the Popery Lane access thereby again avoiding the cross roads. As a consequence, the report concludes that the majority of vehicles accessing the site would not need to use the crossroads in the centre of Wheddon Cross.

The report also comments that the new access has been laid out to the requirements of the County Highway Authority, that efforts will be made to encourage employees to car share and that the combination of measures will improve highway safety in Wheddon Cross.

Ecological Assessment

Consultant ecologists have investigated the site and evaluated the proposals. The investigations showed no active bird nests were seen in the hedges to be removed or the bank around the area to be in-filled (at the south-east yard area). The survey found no nesting birds or barn owls in the agricultural building.

In terms of dormice, it is explained that there are very limited records available across the site and the wider area, however, the consultants consider it likely that dormice may be present in nearby woodland as well as in hedges around the fields in the area.

No badger setts were found on the site and in terms of bats there were no signs of bats in the agricultural building and there are no trees with potential bat roosts in any of the hedges to be affected. The report explains there is no suitable reptile habitat on the sites.

The report concludes that “because of the abundance of other suitable habitats for nesting birds and foraging/commuting bats, the (minimal) lengths of hedgebanks to be affected are considered to be of no significant ecological value”.

The report recommends the timings for certain parts of the works and concludes that hedgebank planting takes place to ensure connectivity for dormice to replace the hedgebank which will be severed by the new agricultural building. It is concluded that “this replacement hedgebank would recreate habitat for use by nesting birds, dormice and foraging/commuting bats”.

Flood Risk and Surface Water Drainage Strategy

The application is accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) undertaken by specialist consultants. Under the Environment Agency’s requirements, a FRA is required where the application site exceeds 1 hectare. There is no part of the application site in an area which has been identified as liable to flood.

The study examines how surface water presently drains from the site. Runoff from the present car park is collected in gullies and transferred to a large open ditch running the length of the Shearwell/agricultural building. This ditch drains to a stone lined sump connected to a surface water main under the farm yard at the south-east of the main building. That then drains to a larger water main/culverted water course under the garden of Higher Putham which connects into the system described below.

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Runoff from the rear stone farm yard and the tarmac road junction (east of the sheep shed) currently flows down the private road towards the cottages of Lower and Higher Putham. Surface water runoff on the existing road is directed away from the entrance to Higher Putham by 2 no. raised humps in the road, and then drains into a stone lined sump and a culverted water course, before being culverted again under a track and yard area, and then outfalls into a steep open watercourse into woodland.

The application proposes to improve and supplement the present drainage systems. The agent has explained that the following measures will be put in place;

- Minor modifications from the farm yard to control the existing surface water runoff.
- The access road will be constructed with a sub-base of large stones and flanked with French drains.
- Potential runoff from the road, where it slopes down to the east yard, will be directed by the camber of the road to a bunded soakaway area with a high level overflow to the drainage sump in the yard.
- The new Shearwell Data building, which will replace the existing agricultural building, will drain from the roof (as the existing building does) directly to the open ditch and drainage sump.
- The construction of a road hump to direct surface water to the collection sump in the east yard will prevent surface water from flowing onto the private access drive.
- The open ditch will be cleared of debris and vegetation to increase drainage capacity.
- The existing concrete collection sump will be improved by constructing a new, larger concrete chamber.
- A new package Treatment Plant sewerage system is proposed
- The car park extension will drain to a gully and a stone filled soakaway. The overflow from the soakaway will be directed to an open ditch.
- The replacement agricultural building and yard will drain from the roof guttering and yard gullies to two stone soakaway chambers intended to accommodate a 1 hour storm event.

The report concludes that with the mitigation measures which have been incorporated into the proposals, any impact in terms of flood risk is likely to be negligible. The report explains that the improvements to the existing yard will stop uncontrolled surface water runoff from that area.

Ground Water and Land Contamination Assessment

This report looks at previous and proposed land uses, and pollution and contaminated land issues. The report explains that “the proposed development and land use will not result in a change to the existing operations carried out on the site and will result in an improvement in the management of surface water on this site and effluent treatment”.

The report recommends additional work to reduce the risk of a pollution event by;

- Modification to the groundworks and surfacing of the farm yard, to improve the capture of surface water runoff

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- Improvements to the surface water drainage system as set out in detail in the reports, and
- Installation of a package plant sewage treatment works to replace the septic tank based treatment system.

Treatment of Excavated Materials Assessment

The papers explain that the proposed development will involve the excavating of approximately 9,624 cubic metres of material comprising topsoil, subsoil and shillet. The analysis sets out that 1,573 cubic metres would be used in the formation of hedgebanks and 1,393 cubic metres to infill the yard area at the application site. Applications have been submitted for the resurfacing of a track at Goosemoor Farm which the papers explain would accommodate 5,075 cubic metres of stone and shillet and for the spreading of 900 cubic metres of topsoil at the farm holding at Armoor Lane. These applications are yet to be determined. The remaining 553 cubic metres of top soil are proposed, as part of this application, to be spread on the field to the west of the proposed agricultural building.

In respect of the topsoil to be spread on the field at the application site, it is explained that it will be used to remove dips and level out variations in the landform. The papers explain that “the average depth of spread over the area, which is approximately 0.5 hectares, would be 0.11m”.

Lighting Assessment

The report on lighting acknowledges the importance of the Exmoor dark skies and the agent sets out proposals to reduce the impact of the new buildings and activities on the area.

It is explained that no new external lighting is proposed. With the new office development the report explains the application incorporates the following to mitigate any light pollution impacts from internal light sources:

- Internal blackout window blinds - all windows will be fitted with light restricting blinds to be utilised when natural light sources fall to inadequate and inefficient levels.
- No external lighting.
- No roof lights.

In respect of the agricultural building, the agent has set out the following design elements to minimise the light pollution from this proposed building;

- Ventair cladding to the west elevation.
- Solid door fittings for all openings.
- Fluorescent lamps and in particular the “use (of) sealed battens that have minimal upward light loss”.
- Roof lights – minimum number of roof lights to allow natural light to enter thereby reducing the need to artificially illuminate the spaces.
- No external lighting.

Historic Environment Assessment

This section of the papers explain that the Heritage Environment Record shows no nationally or registered historic sites or features on the application site. The Historic Landscape Characterisation mapping data together with the available mapping shows the land as 18th-21st Century enclosed land. The report concludes by stating that “considering the low level of sensitivity against the magnitude of the works, the proposal is likely to have negligible impact on the historic environment”.

Economic Impacts

The Environmental Statement includes a statement on the employment impacts from the proposals. This explains that approximately 50 full time and 10 part time employees are presently employed at the site. It is explained that “over the course of the next 10 years, the applicant anticipates the level of the expanded business to generate a further 50 full-time jobs. Approximately 30 of those jobs are anticipated to be generated over the next 18 months”.

The report analyses the jobs market and in particular the relatively low level of Business Use Class types of jobs within the area. This section of the report concludes the analysis by explaining that:

“considering the economic profile of the Exmoor National Park and the threat that further loss of working aged or skilled population poses to that against employment growth forecasts, the proposal is anticipated to deliver moderately significant positive impact on the local employment market”.

The applicant has explained that “of the 65 members of staff, 38 live within Exmoor National Park. Of the 27 who live outside the National Park, six live in Minehead and nine in Watchet and Williton which I would describe as “local to Exmoor”. The remainder commute from areas outside the National Park”.

Agricultural Justification

As part of the applicant’s additional submissions, more detailed information has been submitted to seek to justify the size and form of the agricultural building.

This information explains that Putham and Lower House (the farm house, land and buildings to the north) are farmed as a single unit. In total there are 205 acres, comprising 64 acres at Putham and 141 acres at Lower House. In addition, the papers set out that a further 30 acres that adjoin Lower House is farmed as part of that unit and this has been the case for the last 5 years.

The papers explain the farming practice on the land which is predominantly sheep with some cattle. Stocking densities, machinery, hay, straw and overall requirements are detailed to justify the space that is proposed as part of the application. It is explained that the proposed 1,758sqm of footprint is sought to replace the 1,636sqm of existing agricultural footprint which will be lost by change of use and redevelopment proposals.

The papers explain that the farms at “land at Armour Lane” and Goosemoor Farm are operated as separate farm holdings. Nevertheless, details of both farm units have been submitted so that the details are available and stocking densities can be compared. The unit at “land at Armour Lane” includes 188 acres of agricultural land, yard area and two new agricultural buildings (732sqm and 557sqm). It is explained that this holding is

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4.9 miles from Putham by road and the two buildings are used to house approximately 573 ewes.

Goosemoor Farm which was purchased in 2010 includes 238 acres of agricultural land, agricultural buildings and a farmhouse. It is explained by the applicant that this is farmed as a separate unit and is approximately 4.5 miles away from Putham by road.

It is explained that other than the sharing of farm equipment across the units, they are all farmed independently such that, for instance, lambs born at a particular farm are fattened at that farm.

The papers detail the benefits of the close connection between the business and the farm building. However, the applicant has explained that the testing and demonstrating of Shearwell equipment does not lead to an increase in the floorspace for the proposed barn. It is explained that the use of the building by Shearwell is incidental to the agricultural use and even when the existing barn is full of sheep the central passage is used for demonstration purposes.

PLANNING POLICIES

Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the policies of the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan is made up of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan and the Exmoor National Park Local Plan. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which was published in March 2012, is a material planning consideration that should be given due weight in the planning process.

SOMERSET AND EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY JOINT STRUCTURE PLAN

STR1 Sustainable Development

STR6 Development Outside Towns, Rural Centres and Villages

STR7 Implementation of the Strategy

Policy 1 Nature Conservation

Policy 2 Exmoor National Park

Policy 5 Landscape Character

Policy 11 Areas of High Archaeological Potential

Policy 13 Locally Important Archaeological Remains

Policy 16 Provision for Land for Industrial, Warehouse and Business Development

Policy 18 Location of Land for Industrial, Warehousing and Business Development

Policy 19 Employment and Community Provision in Rural Areas

Policy 43 Access for People with Disabilities

Policy 48 Access and Parking

Policy 49 Transport Requirements of New Development

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK LOCAL PLAN 2001-2011

LNC1 General National Park Policy

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LNC2 Lighting

LNC8 Protection of Best Agricultural Land

LNC12 Exmoor Biodiversity Action Plan Areas

LNC13 Mitigation and Compensation for Nature Conservation Sites Affected by Development

LNC14 Protected Species and Habitats

LNC17 Small Scale Renewable Energy Conservation

CBS12 New Development

E2 Business Development in the Open Countryside

E3 Safeguarding Existing Employment Land and Buildings

E4 Large Scale or Intrusive Industrial Development

A1 Agriculture and Forestry Development

U1 Water Resource Protection - Groundwater

U2 Water Resource Protection – Contaminated Land

U3 Water Supply

U4 Sewerage and Sewage Disposal – Capacity of System

U8 Reduction of Flood Risk from New Development

TR3 Traffic and Road Safety Considerations for Development

TR6 Highway Design for New Development

TR10 Car and Cycle Parking Provision

TR12 Public Rights of Way

In terms of the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** key advice in relation to this application explains:

The NPPF sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development. It explains that there are three dimensions to sustainable development, economic, social and environmental roles. It explains that the roles should not be undertaken in isolation and;

“to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system. The planning system should play an active role in guiding development to sustainable solutions.”

National Park purposes should be given greater weight in the planning process than the presumption of favour of sustainable development.

The NPPF comments in paragraph 28:

Supporting a prosperous rural economy

Planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development.

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To promote a strong rural economy, local and neighbourhood plans should:

- support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings;
- promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;
- support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres; and
- promote the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

In terms of transport, paragraph 34 explains:

“Plans and decisions should ensure developments that generate significant movement are located where the need to travel will be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes can be maximised. However this needs to take account of policies set out elsewhere in this Framework, particularly in rural areas.”

In relation to National Parks paragraph 115 states;

“Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.”

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Cutcombe Parish Council – Initial response

Cutcombe Parish Council considered this application at its meeting on 19th June and has submitted the following comments:

- 1 Fully supported but some concerns were raised which no doubt can be addressed (see items 6 and 7 below).
- 2 Prior consultation with ENPA and the Parish was much appreciated.
- 3 Future employment opportunities in the Parish to be welcomed.
- 4 Reduction in traffic movements on Popery Lane to be welcomed: it is understood that delivery lorries will be encouraged to always use the new track.
- 5 Landscaping measures around the building are welcomed.
- 6 Concern was expressed that there might be some additional noise for nearby residents at Putham.

- 7 Concern was expressed that the new road crosses a bridleway: Council would like to see signage both sides of the bridleway and road set a reasonable distance back so that riders and drivers have adequate warning: it is understood that a traffic calming measure will be in place either side of the bridleway crossing to slow down traffic and that the hedges will be trimmed to give riders increased visibility.

Cutcombe Parish Council - Revised Information Comments

At its meeting on 21st August Cutcombe Parish Council considered the above planning application and voted to support it. Public concerns were expressed and debated particularly re light pollution from the building during hours of darkness. The applicant stated that he had been told that he must use Yorkshire Boarding on cattle buildings even though he would prefer Vent Air which will not allow light through (and apparently keeps a building drier), and I have been asked to seek clarification from ENPA on this point. In view of Exmoor's Dark Sky Status, has lighting policy been revised since the award, and how does this fit in with the insistence on Yorkshire Boarding if a more suitable product is readily available?

Exton Parish Council

Councillors were of the opinion that the opportunities being outlined with regard to future employment for Exmoor were positive. Concerns were expressed with regard to increased traffic on the B3224 and the entrance to a new access drive. However, this could only improve the situation in Cutcombe itself, where a high number of vehicles were using a narrow country lane to access Putham at present.

ENPA Access and Recreation Team

This application affects public bridleway WL 6/22 and restricted byway WL 6/37 (Putham Lane).

The proposed access track would cross bridleway WL 6/22. We have had detailed discussions on site with the applicant, his agent, and colleagues from Somerset County Council Highways team and Public Rights of Way team, and established the standards which Somerset County Council as Highway Authority would require of this crossing. These standards are reflected in the application. The premise of these standards and the resulting proposals is that bridleway users should not be unduly inconvenienced and the onus should be on the access track users to give way to bridleway users. The applicant will also be applying to this team for authorisation to change the surface of the bridleway for the short section where the track crosses. As a result of the proposed access track, there should be a significant reduction in traffic travelling along Putham Lane restricted byway which could result in improved safety and enjoyment for restricted byway users.

Avon & Somerset Police

Thank you for consulting Avon & Somerset Police in relation to the above planning application.

Having reviewed the documentation submitted in support of the application, I would comment as follows:-

1. Design & Access Statement:- the DAS should demonstrate how crime prevention measures have been considered in the design of the proposal. It does not appear to do so.

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2. Crime Statistics:- a check of the reported crime statistics for the area of this proposed development (within a 500 metre radius of the grid reference) for the past year reveals the following:- 4 Offences. This area can therefore be regarded a very low crime area.
3. Perimeter Security:- the proposed earth banks and post & wire/stock netting fencing offer little or no security value and can only be regarded as boundary demarcation. The earth banks, whilst defining defensible space, may also reduce natural surveillance of the site. No detail is shown of the type and construction of proposed gates and whether lockable, etc, which they should be.
4. Landscaping:- planting, including the proposed hedgerows and trees, should not impede opportunities for natural surveillance and must avoid the creation of potential hiding places. Where visibility is important, particularly at the front of the development, plants should have a mature growth height of no more than 1 metre and trees should be devoid of foliage below 2 metres, so allowing a 1 metre field of vision. Defensive planting i.e. thorny shrubs can be used in appropriate locations to enhance security.
5. Car Parking:- appears to be in a fairly secure location within the development boundary in an area of reasonably good surveillance between the proposed new buildings. No indication is given of any secure cycle or motor cycle parking facilities being provided.
6. Lighting:- I note that there is only one existing external light, operated by movement sensor, illuminating the car park and that no new external lighting is proposed. Also, that the new building will be equipped with blackout blinds for use when internal artificial lighting is necessary.

I understand the need to minimise light pollution in this location but query whether, from a personal safety angle, one light is sufficient to illuminate the extended car park during the hours of darkness.

7. Building Shell:- External staircase (NE Elevation) - I have some concerns regarding the security of this staircase, which leads from ground level to the roof terrace, as this appears to potentially allow unauthorised access to glazed doors leading to the canteen and IT Room/New Server Room on the first floor. If this externally designed staircase is essential, as opposed to an internal staircase arrangement, I recommend it be gated at the bottom and secured when the building is unoccupied. Bearing in mind the flat roof design, any potential climbing aids such as the external staircase, downpipes, litter bins etc should be appropriately designed or avoided. This is particularly relevant in respect of the PV installation which could be liable to theft and damage.

Roller Shutters (SE Elevation) - the two roller shutter doors providing vehicular access for deliveries should be appropriately secured internally and externally and alarmed.

External doors and windows - external doorsets should comply with BS PAS 24-1:2007 and BS PAS 23-1:1999 in order to offer minimum standards of security. Similarly, windows should comply with BS 7950:1997.

8. CCTV - is not a universal solution to security problems, however, it can help deter crime and assist in the identification of culprits if a crime is committed, it can also

assist in the management of a facility. There is no indication in the documentation accompanying this application of any existing CCTV system or such a system being proposed for this development. If such a system is being considered, I am able to provide more specific information and advice.

9. Intruder Alarm System - similarly, there is no indication of any existing or proposed intruder alarm system being installed. Bearing in mind the isolated location and potential value of property on the premises, I recommend that a suitable monitored and verified intruder alarm system be installed. With regard to the high value goods and IT Suite, additional measures such as security fogging or offender marking devices can be included within the intruder alarm system. As with CCTV, I am able to provide further information and advice regarding such systems if required.

Environment Agency

Environment Agency Position: We have no objection to the proposed development subject to the following conditions regarding flood risk and the protection of controlled waters.

Flood Risk: The proposed development will only meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework if the following measures as detailed in the Flood Risk Assessment submitted with this application are implemented and secured by way of a planning condition on any planning permission.

Condition: The development permitted by this planning permission shall only be carried out in accordance with the approved Flood Risk Assessment by Harcombe Environmental Services dated 10/05/2012 and Acorn drawing number 13 r1 and the following mitigation measures detailed within the FRA:

1. Limiting the surface water run-off generated by the 1:100 year storm so that it will not exceed the run-off from the undeveloped site and not increase the risk of flooding off-site.
2. Provision of sustainable drainage methods, notably the proposed soakaways and French drains. Reason: To prevent flooding by ensuring the satisfactory storage of/disposal of surface water from the site.

Advice to LPA: It is pleasing to see sustainable drainage methods (SUDS) used to manage surface water arising from the development, particularly the French drains along the access road and the soakaways. However it is unclear how the soakaways have been sized, as the critical storm duration has not been calculated (instead an arbitrary value has been used). In addition, no infiltration testing (to BRE Digest 365 standards) has been undertaken therefore it is unclear whether the soakaways have the required capacity in the design rainfall event.

Informative: We recommend that the finished floor levels of the proposed buildings are set a minimum of 200mm above surrounding ground level. This will improve the flood resilience of the proposed built development.

Groundwater and Contaminated Land: We consider that planning permission could be granted to the proposed development as submitted if the following planning condition is included as set out below. Without this condition, the proposed development on this site poses an unacceptable risk to the environment.

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Condition: No development approved by this planning permission shall take place until a remediation strategy that includes the following components to deal with the risks associated with contamination of the site shall each be submitted to and approved, in writing, by the local planning authority:

1. A preliminary risk assessment which has identified all previous uses, potential contaminants associated with those uses, a conceptual model of the site indicating sources, pathways and receptors of potentially unacceptable risks arising from contamination at the site.
2. A site investigation scheme, based on (1) to provide information for a detailed assessment of the risk to all receptors that may be affected, including those off site.
3. The results of the site investigation and the detailed risk assessment referred to in (2) and, based on these, an options appraisal and remediation strategy giving full details of the remediation measures required and how they are to be undertaken.
4. A verification plan providing details of the data that will be collected in order to demonstrate that the works set out in the remediation strategy in (3) are complete and identifying any requirements for longer-term monitoring of pollutant linkages, maintenance and arrangements for contingency action.

Any changes to these components require the express written consent of the local planning authority. The scheme shall be implemented as approved.

Reasons: National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 109 states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of water pollution. Government policy also states that planning policies and decisions should also ensure that adequate site investigation information, prepared by a competent person, is presented (NPPF, paragraph 121).

Advice to LPA: The submitted report "Contaminated Land and Groundwater Assessment" by Harcombe Environmental Services ref 1204-01 Wheddon Cross - CLGA dated 10/5/2012) does not include a water features survey or assessment of risk to private water supplies. Both these items were requested in our previous response to this consultation (DC/2012/11108). We are therefore unable to assess the impact of the development on any such features.

ENPA Ecologist

Main issue is loss of small section of species-poor hedgebank; recommendations within survey report must be followed including timing of work and replacement of hedgebank. I would also suggest that rather than a single species beech hedge, a mixture of native species of local provenance should be used including those found in hedgerow H1: ash, hazel, blackthorn and hawthorn.

Wessex Water

With reference to the planning application, Wessex Water can confirm the site lies within a non-sewered area of Wessex Water and the nearest water supply pipe is deemed private. We have no issues with the proposals.

ENPA Archaeologist – There are no Historic Environment Records which relate to the surface irregularities in this field. In my opinion they do not represent significant

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archaeological remains. I think the features are most likely to be the surface outcropping of lime bearing rock which runs in a thin vein across central Exmoor (from Newlands at Exford to Treborough).

ENPA Landscape – The Head of Conservation and Access has visited the site on a number of occasions to begin to assess the potential impacts from the application proposals. The agent has undertaken a further analysis in the form of an expanded LVIA and submitted further papers. The Head of Conservation and Access has examined all the additional information including the revised photo montages and noted the reduction in eaves and ridge of the agricultural building in finalising her report. The report is attached in full as an annex to this report (Annex 2).

West Somerset Council - Lead Officer for Economic Development

Economic development is a corporate priority for West Somerset Council and is articulated as follows:

A thriving and increasingly varied local economy where people will have the skill to work and prosper.

The key objectives that sit below that are to

Broaden the variety of employment opportunities within the district

Increase the opportunities for training and improving skills

Shearwell Data Limited is already considered an exemplar innovatory business for West Somerset, currently employing up to 65 people in what we term as knowledge economy occupations. These jobs attract higher salaries and lead to significant opportunities for skills training. I am aware of the high standard of in-house training that is delivered to all employees.

I understand that the proposed development is in response to significant expansion of the business that would lead to an additional 65 jobs, 30 of which would be appointed within the next 18 months. I would certainly want to work with Shearwell to ensure that as much local recruitment to those jobs as possible was achieved.

The growth of this business from an Exmoor Sheep Farm to a high tech global business, has been phenomenal, and has exhibited truly sustainable and ambitious farm diversification. I would be very concerned about the impact on the local economy of West Somerset and Exmoor if this business had to relocate away from the area.

Therefore, I hope that Exmoor National Park's Planning Committee will support the application.

West Somerset Environmental Health –

1. Air Quality: The expansion of the business (Shearwell Data Ltd) at Putham Farm is proposed to double workforce to in excess of 100. Car parking is to increase from existing 45 spaces to 97 spaces to meet this demand. Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) flows are predicted to increase by 60 per day (50 employee and 10 delivery trips) but without indicating proportion of Heavy Duty Vehicles percentage (HDV; >3.5 tonnes gross). Based on these impacts, the following is conditionally recommended;

Car sharing is suggested to be the preferred method for mitigating any increase in local pollutants from these additional daily traffic flows. Based on the relatively small

increase in traffic flows as a result of this planning proposal, and relatively good existing background air quality, an air quality assessment is not requested. However, based on the increase in traffic flows alone and associated emissions, in conjunction with any comment or condition from the County Highway Authority, there should be means to mitigate, for example a suitable car-sharing scheme.

Furthermore, to reduce the risk of fugitive dust emissions, it is suggested that excavated material is to be used to resurface a farm track at Goosemoor Farm, Exton, (subject to separate planning application). The LPA should be assured that, as much material is re-used on-site to avoid the need to transport material away and therefore reduce any increase in dust emissions arising.

2. Contaminated Land: In terms of potential contaminated land issues, the applicant explains (Planning Application) that there are no known potential land contamination issues, or sensitive receptors likely to be impacted. However, the applicant explains (Appendix 9, Contaminated Land and Groundwater assessment) that the existing Shearwell Data building houses small scale plastic moulding and minor manufacturing machinery including printing equipment and chemicals.

Therefore, based on the existing use and the Environment Agency's comments, the Council requires additional information such as location of any private water supply in the area. Once this additional information is supplied, any remediation strategy and verification plan should be reviewed/amended, to prevent unacceptable risks to both human health and the environment.

3. Drainage: A new packaged treatment plant is proposed, to replace the existing septic tank. Whilst, the new Klargester packaged treatment plant will be subject to;
 - 3.1 Building control application/approval to cope with maximum anticipated demand (e.g. based on British Water Flows and Loads and Part-H approved document, Building Control) and,
 - 3.2 The discharge is likely to require an environmental permit from the Environment Agency (discharge is going to watercourse).

No details have been provided regarding provision for a fat trap to protect the Klargester e.g. from on-site canteen and the application does not explain how the existing drainage system is to be replaced. A scheme should therefore be submitted showing the provision (where necessary) of fat trap, and details showing methodology to render innocuous the existing drainage provisions.

Proximity to nearest residential premises

The proposed agricultural building to the north of the site is at the closest proximity to the properties off Popery Lane. It is felt that the distance between the two would not greatly impact on the residents of Popery Lane in terms of light, dust and noise. However, as noise has not been covered in the Environmental Statement, it is recommended as an informative that the applicant consider potential noise impacts on the residents from the use of this building and take remedial action where it is thought that noise may cause a nuisance to neighbours.

Exmoor Society

The Exmoor Society has been following this application since its submission, has visited the area on three occasions and was pleased to attend the recent Members' Site Visit.

The Society is impressed by the internationally renowned work carried out here and considers it to be a highly appropriate activity for this National Park as it is linked to the livestock industry that is so crucial to Exmoor's environmental, economic and social wellbeing. We recognise too the importance of bringing highly paid jobs to the area.

We fully support the views expressed in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment produced by the Head of Conservation and Access. In general terms, but with the reservations expressed below, we support the application at this stage. We will need to see the formal recommendations made to the Planning Authority before we can come to a final conclusion.

The Society's views are summed up as follows:

- Construction of a replacement Business Building on the existing site. We believe that the visual impact of new building will be no greater than that of the existing one and that the new design may well represent an improvement.
- The Society has no reservations about the changes proposed to the existing building to the rear and south west of the above building as we believe it will be largely screened from view.
- Extension to the existing car park. The existing car park has little impact on the landscape and because the extension is to be at the same ground level the visual impact is likely to be negligible.
- The Society recognises the need for a new access road to the site. It considers the existing access is unsuitable and appreciates the problems for the residents of Wheddon Cross and Cutcombe. For much of its route we consider that the new road will have little impact on the landscape and accept that proposed banks and hedges are likely to minimise such impact. However, we strongly support the reservations expressed by the Head of Conservation and Access, in her concluding paragraph, concerning the 40m of the new road where it will join the B3224. This section will be visible from distant viewpoints open to the public and we press that further mitigation work is done to minimise these adverse visual effects.
- Finally, the Society's strongest concerns are reserved for the new Agricultural Building of 1758 m² to the north-west of the car park. We strongly support the views expressed in paragraph 3 of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. By any standards this is a massive building. Whilst we appreciate the advantages of having it on this site, its footprint and height are difficult to reconcile with the landscape character. It is clear that the new building will be visible from a number of sites open to the public and this is confirmed by the photomontages. Clearly a smaller building or two buildings of considerably less height would reduce the potential damage to the landscape. There needs to be stronger mitigation proposals such as substantial tree planting of copses in the field to the north and that to the south of the building, as well as long term management of mitigation features especially the banks and hedge-rows.

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- Conditions: The Society is keen to see what conditions might be applied should the application be approved and may come forward with further suggestions if not satisfied by the ones proposed. The Society would like to see a condition that limits the use of the existing access road to ensure that is used as little as possible.

PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS

The following is a summary of the representations received in relation to the original submission. Further details in the form of amended plans and amplified and additional details have been submitted. Local residents have been re-consulted and their views will be reported to the meeting along with any other additional information available at that time. Furthermore, any additional comments will be included in any final report when the application comes before the Committee before any final decision is made.

Residents at Putham have raised the following objections and concerns:

- 1 The proposal for an alternative access is welcomed, but with the increases proposed this will still result in a lot of traffic from the Minehead direction still using Popery Lane.
- 2 There is concern with the sheer extent of the scheme. This is heightened by the recent felling of the screen of mature trees set about 2.5m above and about 40/50m long immediately above the access drive to our own and neighbours' properties. The eaves height at the Putham end is approx 3.3m, not 5.29m as referred to on the south side. The trees virtually obscured the size and bulk of the existing sheep shed end and now the screen has been removed. The cross section at this end of the building is not correct and the view at this end of the proposal will have a major impact on amenity.
- 3 The application is for the creation of an industrial park on a "Greenfield" site, on farmland unrelated to the village, and 2km distant, in the middle of the National Park, and requiring a considerable degree of commuting to service it.
- 4 This is not an agricultural project aiding the local community or national park, but a monstrous industrial project, and it should be sited on an industrial estate, not on protected farmland.
- 5 Just because the applicant owns the land does not mean that he can build what he wants on it. If it is not profitable to buy suitable land in a suitable location, then the business is not viable.
- 6 Allowing the expansion would set a dangerous precedent for other applications.
- 7 The NPA should follow its advice on its web site which says that "Exmoor is a unique place with stunning natural environment" and approving this application will not be upholding the responsibility to "Keep Exmoor Special".
- 8 The employment arguments are noted, however it cannot be seen how it would be possible to find the number of additional employees locally, being in mind that some of those already employed travel considerable distances to work. The fact that it is anticipated that the major number of commuters from any one location will be from Taunton – 23 miles away, in itself not a very sustainable solution.
- 9 The business use cannot be tied to Shearwell with any permission and therefore the site could be sold for an alternative non-local use without the need for any further consultation.

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- 10 The NPA will clearly need to make a decision on the principle of whether or not to allow a scheme of this size.
- 11 A scheme of this size should be related to an existing village or settlement and it is unfortunate that the Auction Field site appears to have been ruled out. The scheme indicates other potential areas for a scheme of this size.
- 12 There will be considerable danger created by the installation of an access and exit to the B3224 and the viability of the proposed new road with regard to commercial vehicles and increased staff cars. Surely vehicles coming from the Minehead direction will continue to use Popery Lane and with the proposed increase in traffic, this to some extent defeats the object of the exercise.
- 13 There are concerns with the overall effect of this proposal on the wildlife of the area.
- 14 Given the very sensitive nature of this matter and the close community on Exmoor, does it make sense for the application to be dealt with by a higher authority?
- 15 One respondent comments that if the NPA is minded to approve the scheme, it is requested to review the position of the replacement building as this will contain windows on 2 stories, and towering the approach to Putham. The shed can now be clearly be seen from Kersham Lane, and indeed from approximately 180 degrees from east to west, with virtually no other buildings visible within the whole area.
- 16 It would be possible to extend to the south of the existing main building, albeit at a possible higher level, but with a dramatically reduced impact. The roof of the present building can already been seen from Dunkery, so this proposal will have a marginal impact on that view, but a major impact for the better on the amenity of residents at Putham.
- 17 There is no clear definition of how and where the enormous amount of spoil from the excavations for the extensive parking areas and buildings will be dealt with. There is concern at the loss of another field on this already reduced farm.
- 18 The application does not show a blue line around any other land in the same ownership, is this correct?
- 19 The need for a replacement sheep shed of the proposed size and bulk is questioned, bearing in mind 2 large new sheds have recently been erected at Goosemoor Farm.

The family who own Putham Farm (house) have written to explain;

We have thoroughly examined the plans for the proposed development. The applicant's business employs mainly local and Exmoor people of all age groups and abilities. The business should be commended for its growth, and presence in the local, UK and world markets, bringing valuable financial gain to the local community.

We support the application 100%, and feel that the near and local community should also. Any business is difficult enough, and if stifled without this development, clearly the business will move to other areas of Somerset, where community leaders are bending over backwards to attract more business and jobs for all. Exmoor unfortunately has an ageing population, as there are no jobs or future for the young families to stay and prosper. The loss of this business will only speed this process further.

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The residents at the two houses at the eastern end of Popery Lane, adjoining the present access to the Shearwell site and Putham, have written 3 letters to comment and object on the following grounds:

- 1 The new packaged pumping station appears to be on a wish list and not part of the planning application. This needs to be urgently addressed before any groundworks start.
- 2 In terms of road safety, increased traffic coming from Minehead will continue to use the inadequate Popery Lane and traffic coming from Raleghs Cross may be faced with either a stream of emerging traffic or static traffic waiting to turn right into the new entrance. There should be reassurances through the planning process that suitable measures will be put in place and enforced, taking account of visibility and the fog, ice and snow prevalent at this height.
- 3 In terms of light pollution and the International Dark Sky Reserve it is considered that the proposed office policy of shutting the office blinds at night and closing the door when the light is on is weak. There needs to be assurances through the planning process and measures enforced so as not to compromise the dark sky status.
- 4 Given the large increase in commercial floorspace there should be some planning gain from the project for the benefit of the community. It is suggested that undergrounding the remaining overhead cables, particularly in Cutcombe, should be a priority.
- 5 It is questioned whether an agricultural building of this size is required, especially given the small acreage of agricultural land left at Putham. Will we see a change of use to business use in due course?
- 6 The new agricultural building, apart from the massive amount of earth moving would be in full sight of a large part of Cutcombe village, particularly in the area of Cutcombe Church. It would be better sited on the south side of the proposed access drive and of a proportionate size to the acreage left at Putham.
- 7 The proposed drainage appears rudimentary comprising ditches and soakaways. A SUDS system should be incorporated to take the vast amount of new run-off from the large new roofs. There is no rainwater harvesting proposed.
- 8 Extensive new build is planned on an agricultural greenfield land. There is no evidence that a brownfield site has been examined or the re-use of an existing building elsewhere. There is no evidence with this three site farming enterprise to justify the size of agricultural structure applied for on this site. Now is the time to move the business to another location and return the site to agriculture.
- 9 The current operation has caused no discernible noise pollution however, with the proposed expansion will sound attenuation measures be put in place and will working hours be limited by condition?
- 10 The proposed development will be the largest single industrial development on Exmoor for many years with screening required of up to 6.5m. Will any approval require native species to be exclusively used and mature specimens included to reduce the inevitable time delay while they reach an effective height?

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- 11 There is no reference to upgrading the electrical power systems which will be required. It should be conditioned in any approval that there be no new visible power cables, telecom lines or other services permitted.
- 12 Up to 80 vehicles arriving or leaving the site at approximately the same time will be as visible as a main road from a distance along the proposed new road due to head and tail lights. There should be sufficient screening of banks or hedges specified to limit the impact.
- 13 The application shows speed bumps on the bridleway either side of the tarmac crossing which are clearly not appropriate for a designated tourist route (Coleridge Way) or necessary for its purpose.
- 14 The bridleway is used by horses, walkers and cyclists. There should be gates either side of the new access drive to give priority to bridleway users and to control stock.
- 15 At the proposed new junction with the B3224, downhill speeds are currently between 50-60mph and it needs to be considered in conjunction with the extended breaking distances that downhill or poor conditions will add. Visibility is severely restricted by a bump in the road, which if removed, would greatly improve the visible range. It should be ensured by planning condition that viewing splays are maximised, the B road is re-profiled to remove “the bump” and that sufficient measures are in place to avoid accidents caused by large vehicles or numerous private vehicles waiting to turn right into the site at the same time.
- 16 There have been several accidents on the stretch of road near the proposed new access, including one runaway lorry resulting in serious damage at Wheddon Cross, and another causing two fatalities.
- 17 Given the numerous staff members that arrive daily along the road from Taunton, it must be assumed that the current qualified/employable local labour pool has already been exhausted. It is questioned whether sufficient research has been undertaken for this expansion to justify the case on the grounds of providing local employment.

Another representation raises the following objections (in two letters):

- 1 The NPA is urged to consider its responsibility to protect Exmoor and actively discourage the development of further large scale buildings in the rural countryside, to pro-actively support the principle of “Enhancing the qualities that make Exmoor special” and in addition, take action to support the commitment of reducing the carbon footprint.
- 2 The applicant successfully achieved the removal of an Agricultural Occupancy Condition on his former dwelling at Putham Farm because he claimed he had suffered losses made on his agricultural business over the preceding ten years and that he relied on income provided by his light industrial business Shearwell Data.
- 3 Putham Farm can now only be considered accommodation land as the farmhouse and the former stone barns have been developed to dwellings and have all been sold off. The Shearwell Data Industrial Building is therefore, by definition, not agricultural.
- 4 To reduce the carbon footprint, it would be far more efficient to restore the present industrial building to its original purpose for housing sheep and cattle and explore the viability to create a facility to accommodate the Shearwell Data business within the

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new Market Development at Wheddon Cross, within the village envelope and on the bus route, thus reducing the need to travel to a remote site in the countryside.

- 5 It is agreed that the creation of the proposed access road from the B3224 would be a great relief to the residents of Wheddon Cross and Cutcombe, however, this was dismissed when it was suggested in 2008.
- 6 If the new access road is permitted it seems far more environmentally beneficial to construct earth banks to be planted with native species hedge plants and avoid the need to transport considerable amounts of excavated material on an 8 mile round trip with all the CO2 that would be produced in the transportation to Goosemoor Farm and to the "land at Armour Lane".
- 7 The need for the development to be located at Putham Farm relies heavily on the applicant's claim that it is necessary to incorporate the industrial enterprise within the agricultural unit for product development and testing. This assumption is very questionable as other leading UK manufacturers producing similar products are all on industrial and business parks up and down the UK. The objector has produced a list of such UK companies and their addresses.
- 8 The development is more appropriate to be located on a business park and the obvious solution would be the Cutcombe Auction Field Development. If that is not possible there are business park developments available at Brushford, Williton, Wiveliscombe, Wellington and Deane Cross. The business could continue in its present location until it moves into the business park and then revert the existing building back to agricultural use.
- 9 The only plausible reasons for the present application are wholly for land value gain.

An owner of a property adjoining the Church has commented:

In general I support the proposals but with one exception relating to light pollution.

The Park area was declared a dark sky reserve and I am not certain whether or not Policy LNC2 was re-examined to ensure maximum light protection of this heritage would be appropriately safeguarded in the future.

Shearwell lies at a considerable height and therefore does not benefit from limiting of extrusive light obtained at lower height in the valleys and combs. Scanning of the environmental impact statements does not reveal any special study of light extrusion: either of direct light or glow. At this height the area is subject to low lying cloud which may also reflect light glow.

This is a commercial development of a highly successful business with worldwide potential. It too requires office standard lighting and the number of external office windows, some 20 per floor with a few on the third. It is already working a double shift system. Furthermore the business may expand requiring 24 hour shift cover and if the development was ever to be sold we should assume that all floors could be working throughout the hours of darkness. This increases the glare of an increased number of cars approaching and parking in the area which will require Health and safety controls for pedestrian connection to the entrance to the block.

The planning considerations for this development should take account of the possible implications of the lighting controls as a benchmark precedent for any future high level commercial development proposal within the dark sky zone. Conditions to mitigate the

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extrusion of light need to be included in any agreement granted by the Authority. At present the plans do not cover adequately the possibility of sky glow, light spillage or light glare in the hours of darkness.

A letter from an Exmoor resident comments:

1. Stress the importance of the firm to the community, the prospect of extra jobs and that this is a National Park location where best practice should be employed.
2. Original complaints were only regarding the vast size of the new farm shed in relation to the 200 acres at Putham and Lower House.
3. Further concerns regard an extension of Shearwell, as it would soon be, plus the shed, is a vast distance from the original sheep shed plus small firm and car park.
4. It suggested that the sheep tag and data business should be purpose built on the land and parking at Cutcombe Market. This is a preferable location linking in with farmers visiting the market. Manufacturing and display could stay at Putham. The road would not then be necessary.
5. It would not need to deal with so much spoil and spread on the field.
6. Another suggestion is that the manufacturing side of the business could be moved into several empty industrial sites at Cutcombe Market.
7. This would leave the Shearwell building to revert to a large sheep shed with the top of the range stock handling displays included. The office area would be used for displays, entertainment and general publicity with plenty of room for car parking and storage.

Sixteen letters of support have been received from employees of Shearwell.

- 1 Permitting this application will not only guarantee the future of dozens of employees but generate many others and secure the future of the business.
- 2 Without this business I would be forced to move away from Exmoor.
- 3 Without Shearwell I could not find the same level of employment without travelling to Taunton, Bridgwater or even Bristol.
- 4 My job is convenient to me and I have seen the business grow over the past 22 years.
- 5 The new floor space will provide the space to manufacture yet cause minimum disruption to the village as it is within the existing site.
- 6 The new access road will alleviate existing traffic issues through the tight turn at Wheddon Cross which can only benefit residents within the village.
- 7 Contrary to what some objectors have said, the majority of staff live within Exmoor National Park itself, and the remainder live, for example in Minehead, Watchet and Williton, with the exception of only a handful of staff who come from areas outside the wider National Park such as Taunton. There are many people who car share. The company has always sought to employ local people wherever possible.
- 8 This is not an industrial park that is being created. The re-development of the main site will remain within the current footprint of the existing buildings and will therefore have no negative visual impact on the surrounding area. The additional agricultural building is a requirement for the existing farm, as the benefit of having an operational

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farm working parallel to Shearwell itself is invaluable for trialling and developing new products and ideas.

- 9 The barn is in constant use for agricultural purposes, there are about 2,000 sheep (4 flocks) so it is imperative that the barn is replaced as this is a working farm.

A letter of support from Exmoor Farmers Livestock Auctions Ltd comments:

- 1 Shearwell is an important employer in the Wheddon Cross area and a leader in the field of animal identification. It is considered vital that the business is allowed to continue its progress and development at a time of otherwise economic hardship.
- 2 In particular the new entrance and access to the business is supported and it can be seen that the entrance has been designed in conjunction with the County Highway Department. A new access will provide an improvement and provide an access that does not need to go past the school and where the existing access is of very limited width.

A letter has been received from a local business proprietor setting out his support on the following grounds:

- 1 The redevelopment of the site allows this important employer to grow their successful business which is at the forefront of electronic animal identification and data.
- 2 The village of Cutcombe/Wheddon Cross needs an employer such as Shearwell to attract working people to the area to support the school, garage/shop, pub, as well as numerous other businesses in the area.
- 3 The new entrance will provide better access to the company whilst improving safety by significantly reducing traffic through the village past the school and its narrow road.

MAIN PLANNING ISSUES

The main planning issues are considered to be whether the principle of the development is acceptable in this open countryside location in terms of National Park purposes and planning policies, and, if so, whether the specific impacts, such as landscape, highways and amenity are compatible with this location within the National Park.

Planning Policy

The Exmoor National Park Local Plan was adopted in March 2005. The Plan sets out the planning strategy for the National Park. The General National Park Policy LNC1 applies to all applications and states;

Development proposals in the National Park will be expected to be compatible with the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of Exmoor, and the public understanding and enjoyment of those qualities. In considering applications the Authority will give the greatest weight to these purposes and in the case of conflict greatest weight will be attached to the first purpose. Due regard will be had for the economic and social well-being of the communities in the National Park.

The application site is considered to be in open countryside and not located within or adjoining a defined settlement. In terms of the proposed business development Policy E2 concerns "Business Development in the Open Countryside". The Policy states:

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In the open countryside and outside settlements, the erection of new business premises will not be permitted. In these locations extensions to existing commercial premises and the conversion of existing buildings to business use may be permitted where there is no adverse effect on important planning interests which the Plan seeks to protect. Applications for building conversions or adaptations should have specific regard to the requirements of CBS1.

The business element of the application is an extension, albeit substantial, to the present authorised business building on the site. The policy does not limit extensions to a particular size or scale. In this case, for extensions, the policy test is whether there is an adverse impact on important planning interests which the Plan seeks to protect.

It is important to distinguish the difference within the policy between an extension to an existing business, which can be considered acceptable as a matter of principle, and the introduction of a new business in a new building in the open countryside, which is not acceptable as a matter of principle under the policy.

Policy E2 needs to be considered in the context of Policy E4 which concerns large scale or intrusive industrial development.

The supporting test to Policy E4 at paragraph 5.20 explains;

“It is important that employment needs in the National Park are met in a way that is compatible with National Park objectives, and the creation of new large scale employment opportunities such as major industry would be inappropriate and in direct conflict with statutory National Park purposes. The large buildings required, traffic generation, parking and loading operations associated with such uses are likely to make a significant impact on the landscape of the National Park and amenity of local communities.”

Policy E4 states that:

Proposals for large scale, intrusive or environmentally damaging business development will not be permitted in the National Park.

The policy is intended to oppose larger scale business developments that are in conflict with National Park purposes, have a significant impact on the landscape and the amenity of local communities. It is important to judge the business development proposals in this planning application against these tests to see whether the application is compatible with Policy E4 and meets the principles set out in E2 and LNC1.

In terms of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan, which was adopted in April 2000, there are a range of policies which are applicable to this application.

Policy STR6 concerns “Development Outside Towns, Rural Centres and Villages”. This policy says that in such circumstances, development should be strictly controlled and restricted to that which benefits economic activity, maintains or enhances the environment and does not foster growth in the need to travel.

Structure Plan Policy 2 concerns the general principles for development proposals within the National Park and is similar to Local Plan Policy LNC1. Policy 2 explains that National Park purposes should be given priority over other planning considerations and “provision for development should only be made where it would not conflict with the purposes of National Park designation.

The strategic policies seek to direct employment development with significant traffic movements to public transport hubs and the larger settlements. Policy 19 in respect of

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rural areas explains that “in rural areas provision should be made for development which creates or enhances local employment, shopping or community facilities, including development necessary for the purposes of agriculture and development associated with the diversification of agricultural units”.

Representations from some local residents have sought to argue that other locations are preferable to the present application site if the business use was wished to be expanded. They have highlighted possible sites in Wheddon Cross at the Livestock Market and in surrounding towns such as Dulverton, Minehead and Williton. These comments are noted and understood, however, a key issue before the Planning Authority is whether in terms of planning policy and other impacts the application site proposals can be considered acceptable, not whether other sites may be judged more preferable.

In relation to the business element of the application, Policy E2 allows the extension of business premises in the open countryside providing there is no adverse effect on important planning interests which the Plan seeks to protect and Policy E4 will not be breached where the development is compatible with National Park purposes. The key issues in this case are whether the development conserves or enhances the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of this part of the National Park. The consideration of the landscape impact (and any mitigation) is the main planning determinant in terms of the compliance with these planning policies.

There is also the need to consider the wider principles of sustainable development. The NPPF explains that “to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system. The planning system should play a role in guiding development to sustainable solutions”.

The NPPF requires development to be located where it minimises the need to travel but also balances this approach with the need to take account of policies in the NPPF particularly concerning rural areas. In terms of rural areas, the NPPF requires planning policies to support rural economic growth, and to promote a strong rural economy. Local Plans should “support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings”. Supporting rural economic growth is a material planning consideration, the weight to be attached in each situation is a matter for the decision maker having regard to other factors including the location and scale of proposals.

In the case of the present application, objectors raise concerns that the sheer scale of the proposals on this site is not compatible with this being a sustainable development. The site is not accessible by public transport and is not located in a village. However, many Exmoor sites, including some villages do not have a bus service and the applicant argues that the majority of staff come from various locations across Exmoor and the business has been locally based for many years. An important part of the applicant’s case is the link between the production, testing and demonstration of the products in the adjoining agricultural building and this generates a requirement for a rural location. (Objectors dispute this need). The applicant argues that this is an established business with the potential to expand and that the proposals have been thought through with care. Furthermore, it is argued that the proposals can be accommodated on this site without harm to National Park purposes, and with the provision of the new access, the impact of traffic on Wheddon Cross will be reduced. The applicant believes that given the hi-tech nature of the business, its need for a link to a farm building that necessitates farm land, and the location of the

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present employees, this is a sustainable location for this building in its expanded form. The Committee will need to consider this issue of rural sustainability and link this with the scale of the proposals which form the application to come to a view on acceptability.

Separate from the issue of sustainability is the question of whether the scale and therefore the impact of the proposals is compatible with National Park purposes. Large scale does not necessarily equate with harm and the Committee will need to judge, having regard to all the information and advice, as to whether the proposals can be accommodated satisfactorily within this landscape such that there is compatibility with National Park purposes.

To conclude on this issue, the Local Plan policies allow for the principle of an extension to an existing business building providing the scheme is compatible with National Park purposes and there is no adverse impact on important planning interests that the Local Plan seeks to protect. The scale and impact of the application proposals are key components as to whether these requirements are met.

In terms of the agricultural building, this is only required because the business building is proposed over its redeveloped footprint. It is in effect displaced from its existing site but this additional floorspace overall is a component of the plans. Local Plan Policy A1 sets out the policy tests against which new agricultural buildings are to be judged. This policy requires that;

- There would be no unacceptable adverse impact on the landscape, wildlife, or historic environment of Exmoor,
- There would be no unacceptable level of noise, water or air pollution, or conflict with neighbouring land uses
- Access and traffic circulation can be adequately catered for, and
- The proposals comply with the elements of Policy CBS12 concerning the need to protect, and respond to opportunities to enhance, landscape character and incorporate landscape design appropriate to the site and character of the area.

The analysis for the need for the agricultural building and landscape impacts are considered below. It is important that an agricultural building of this scale and bulk is judged against National Park purposes and in particular its compatibility with the landscape.

Landscape Impacts

While it is important to analyse each element of the proposals it is also important to consider the overall impact of the changes to the landscape and the compatibility with National Park purposes. The works are substantial, in that they entail a further 2,496sqm of floorspace, a new access road, and a car park extension and associated landscaping works, in addition to the present buildings and car park.

The main buildings part of the site is visible from a number of locations to the south, east, north and north-west. The rising land to the south-west prevents views into the main site from that direction. There are a variety of lanes in the vicinity that will allow views into the site and public footpaths in the mid distance to the north and east. The site is visible from Dunkery Beacon. The Beacon is approximately 5km to the north-west and the Shearwell site is seen in a very wide open landscape in the context of the village and other isolated development.

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The main building lies alongside the Putham access and is a linear building. It is cut into the slope and runs along the approximate contour line. The section of the building to be demolished and replaced will have a very similar footprint but has a higher ridge. The replacement materials, including a less reflective roof material, are considered to have a beneficial impact in terms of its wider appearance in the landscape compared with the present situation. The application gives the opportunity to manage the planting along the lane side of the building. The building will be clearly seen across the valley from Kersham Ford approximately 800m away. The existing business building is visible from the Cutcombe Church area, but this is predominantly the front section and not the side of the building and from this view the business floorspace will be added to the rear end of the structure and therefore less visible.

The car park will be cut into the existing grazing field and extend further to the north-west. The present car park is generally well screened by boundary vegetation and the proposed car park will be cut into the slope at the same level.

The agricultural building is substantial. It will follow the contour line around the hillside to the north-west and be visible in view from parts of Cutcombe. It is set behind a hedgebank but will be clearly visible across the valley from the Cutcombe Church area.

The access track for most of its length follows existing field boundaries, and where there is a wire fence boundary this is proposed to be replaced by hedgebanks to mitigate the potential impacts. The alterations to improve the agricultural access onto the B3224 will be significant as the bell mouth will be widened and splays provided.

The application has been considered by the Head of Conservation and Access, as a qualified Landscape Architect, and who is very familiar with the National Park. Her detailed assessment is attached to this report in full.

As explained, the landscape impact, and whether the proposals are compatible with National Park purposes, is a very key issue as to whether the planning policies are complied with and whether the application is acceptable. This report has been prepared to set out the key issues and allow the Committee to begin to judge the impact of the proposals.

Design, Materials and Layout

The existing Shearwell building has been converted from an agricultural building permitted in 1989. While the front elevation has been re-faced much of the character and materials of the sheep shed still remain. The application proposes to re-roof the existing converted element of the building and to use the same materials for the extension to the business building. It is considered that the materials are acceptable for a business building and that the arrangement of windows, together with the stepped roof and vertical darker cladding elements will help to reduce the impact of the building. The height and bulk of building given its substantial floorspace is considered the best that can be achieved. The extension could in theory be cut into the hillside to the west of the existing building; however, this would result in further very substantial excavations, be more visible from the north and the Dunkery direction and may lead to more internal rooms without exterior windows. The proposed footprint of the building follows very closely the existing footprint. This minimises the impact of the building from the Dunkery direction, however from across the valley the building will be as long as the present structure. This business building, being approximately 80m in length, is a substantial structure in a rural location. The business building incorporates renewable elements such as cladding that facilitates warm air to

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circulate and 40kw PV panels would provide an important contribution to renewable energy generation in a way that has an acceptable landscape impact.

The storage building is proposed to be enlarged by extending down the roof to form a cat slide. The present cladding materials will be retained and used for the extension. The building is grouped with the main building and faces into the site such that any activity will be screened in the wider landscape.

The agricultural building is designed to be clad with Yorkshire boarded elevations and an anthracite cement fibre roof, and these are materials for farm buildings that have been considered acceptable within the National Park. The stepped ridge and overhanging eaves are helpful design features. The eaves, roof pitch and ridge have been reduced from the plans as originally submitted; however the size remains the same. The ventair cladding to the west elevation will be largely screened so may be judged to be acceptable on this occasion. The main issue is the landscape impact resulting from the size and bulk of the proposed building and this is a separate matter from the design and appearance. If this size of building is necessary on this section of the farm holding at Putham, then the siting is the best that can be achieved. Nevertheless it will be necessary to judge whether the landscape impact is acceptable such that the agricultural building meets National Park purposes and the related planning policies.

In terms of the car park, this is sited in a logical position between the business building and the proposed agricultural building. The hillside to the west provides a backdrop and the boundary planting to the north and east help to soften the appearance of this element of the proposals. A car park of this size, to accommodate approximately 100 cars, is a consequence of the business space increase and is considered acceptable if the landscape impact is compatible with National Park purposes.

Highways and Traffic Impacts

At the present time, unless coming from Cutcombe itself, all vehicles have to access the application site via passing by the School and then Popery Lane, which is narrow with occasional passing places. In addition, as there is only one point of access to the site, many employees and commercial vehicles must use the crossroads in the centre of Wheddon Cross. The Highways report with the application sets out the traffic movements to the site.

While the business expansion will increase traffic movements to the site, the provision of the second access will help mitigate any highway consequences. The access off the B3224 has been designed to the specifications of the Highway Authority and this will enable all traffic coming to and from the Taunton and Dulverton directions to avoid the centre of Wheddon Cross. This is a significant highway and amenity benefit for that village location.

The new access has been designed with passing places so is, for the majority of its length, only single width. There are alterations proposed to the crossing with the bridleway to ensure there is inter-visibility and that vehicles are required to slow down and have regard to potential users of the Coleridge Way. Both the County Highway Authority and the ENPA Access Team are satisfied with the details of the proposals and that they will safeguard bridleway users.

Local residents have raised concerns regarding the access off the B3224 and in particular the potential for vehicles to be waiting on the carriageway to turn right into the new access

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and the potential highway danger that this will pose. There will be times when vehicles will have to wait on the highway and the application seeks to minimise the hazard by the siting of the access with appropriate sight lines, a slow warning sign and ensuring that the agricultural entrance is widened, tarmac-ed and improved, so that a lorry turning into the new access can pass a lorry waiting to come out onto the B3224. The County Highway Authority has confirmed that it has no objection to the application proposals. These matters were examined at the site visit.

To conclude, in terms of highway safety and the capacity of the road network to accommodate the traffic movements, it is considered that the proposals are acceptable and are judged beneficial in reducing the need for vehicles to traverse the crossroads in the centre of Wheddon Cross.

Impact on Neighbouring Amenity

There are residential properties at the hamlet of Putham that use Popery Lane/Lower House Lane to access their site. These residents must pass along the lane immediately to the east of the main Shearwell building and the new development will be very apparent. The land drops to the south and the extended business building will be raised up from the adjoining lane. The established vegetation along that boundary has been cut back but the agent has explained it will be retained as part of the construction works and will be allowed to grow back and will partially screen the extension. The enlarged car park and agricultural building, if permitted will be visible to the residents of Putham as they drive past. There will clearly be an increase in the activities on the Shearwell site, however, it is not considered that it will affect their amenities such that material harm is caused.

In terms of the impact of the extended business buildings and the combined impact of activities on the site in relation to the dwellings at Putham themselves; the houses are generally set away from the business site. The end of the extended building will be approximately 100m to the north of the nearest dwelling. The business activities fall within the B1 use class which is compatible with a residential amenity. The agricultural yard at the south-east end of the present agricultural building will be replaced by a yard which will serve the business building. There will be large roller shutter doors and areas for the storage of waste and the packaged sewerage treatment plant. However, given the separation to the residential properties, the screening and the overall nature of the proposals, it is not considered that the business activities and specific siting and details in the application will cause material harm to the amenities of the neighbours at Putham.

The semi-detached cottages at the end of Popery Lane are the other properties that are also close to the access of the Shearwell site. While the agricultural building will come within a field of these properties, and the yard approximately 170m from their curtilages, it is not considered that the use of the building and yard for agricultural purposes will so affect their amenities that a refusal could be justified on these grounds. The West Somerset Council Environmental Health Section raise no objection on this issue.

In terms of traffic movements, these semi-detached properties are visible from Popery Lane and the provision of the second access, which should accommodate the majority of the commercial vehicles, may reduce the traffic passing their properties, despite the overall increase in traffic resulting from the proposed enlarged facilities, if permitted.

The new access track from the B3224 does not pass any residential properties and it is not considered that the use of the track by vehicles will materially affect the residential amenities of the properties at Putham.

In conclusion, while it is acknowledged that if the application is permitted there will be more activity, buildings, an enlarged car park and a new access drive, because of the siting and relationship to adjoining properties it is not considered that there will be a material impact on the residential amenities of neighbours.

Lighting

The prevention of light pollution, especially in the open countryside, is an important planning consideration within the National Park.

Policy LNC2 in respect of lighting explains that:

Applications for development which include external lighting will not be permitted where:

- i. The lighting scheme proposed is excessive to achieve its purpose;
- ii. There would be sky glow, light spillage from the site or unacceptable glare;
- iii. There would be an adverse impact on local amenity, landscape, wildlife or the historic environment of the National Park.

The car park has one light that the applicant considers is suitable. The proposals do not involve any further external lights.

The proposals incorporate design features to assist with the prevention of light spillage from the site such as the internal specification of lights to the barn and solid doors. The Yorkshire boarding has been amended so that it overlaps to prevent light spillage and the rooflights halved in number on the northern side of the barn roof. In respect of the business building there are no rooflights and blackout blinds are proposed to the windows which the applicant says will be used after the hours of darkness.

The issue of light spillage from the site has been highlighted by a local resident and the Parish Council. Further external lighting can be controlled through the addition of a condition in any permission. While the application papers show that the applicant and his advisors have thought through and included design and other features to minimise light spillage from the site, it is usually the day to day management of the site that is just as important.

If the Committee is minded to approve the application, it is recommended that a condition be attached that requires the applicant to set out in a protocol how the site will be managed to minimise light spillage. This would include practices such as use of the blackout blinds in the office building, minimising artificial lighting in the barn, closure of external doors, and other simple approaches to ensure that the site operations respect the dark sky of Exmoor. If the site were not operated in accordance with the protocol, then action could be taken for a breach of a planning condition.

Ecology

The application papers include an ecology report which sets out recommendations. The National Park Conservation Adviser (wildlife) is satisfied that the proposals will have no material impact on wildlife providing the recommendations of the report are followed. Indeed the proposals include much longer sections of new hedgebank than will be lost and therefore there is the potential not only to compensate but to improve the potential habitats on the site.

Agricultural justification

The application site presently contains two agricultural buildings; a substantial part of the south-east section of main building and the free standing storage building. These provide a total floorspace of approximately 1,749sqm. Both would be lost from agricultural use as part of the application proposals.

A replacement agricultural building with a total floorspace of approximately 1,883sqm is proposed.

The application site is surrounded by grazing land predominately in use for sheep. The land at Putham amounts to approximately 64 acres and the site is farmed in conjunction with the farmland and buildings and Lower House Farm which amounts to approximately 141 acres. The two areas of farm land are close by but not contiguous.

The agent has submitted a detailed analysis of stocking rates and building sizes to justify the need for the agricultural building proposed. The applicant has set out a detailed case to seek to show that having regard to stocking rates, agricultural floorspace requirements and land size, that there is a need for the application agricultural building.

The argument is also raised that there is a need for an agricultural building on the Shearwell site not only to farm this land but also to be able to trial and demonstrate products. The applicant has explained that this does not make the agricultural building bigger but the business use is incidental to the farming and uses the agricultural space in a complementary way. Additionally the applicant has set out the case that the farms at Armoor Lane and Goosemoor operate independently.

Officers have sought independent advice on the agricultural justification for the size and location of the building proposed, the relationship between the two farm units and the case for this size of building on the Putham Farm site. Smiths Gore, on behalf of the Authority, have visited the site, analysed the farming case and reported on the agricultural justification in respect of the application proposals. Their report is attached in full as an annex to this report (Annex 3).

The Smiths Gore report explains the relationship between the farming activities at Putham and Lower House and that it is a mix of a suckler cow herd and a sheep enterprise. The report makes a number of key points and findings:

- The farming policy adopted by the applicant is an intensive rearing and fattening unit (and while the applicant disagrees) would not be considered “typical” of an Exmoor farm.
- The stocking density at Lower House and Putham is higher than the ‘industry standard’; the number of farm buildings at Lower House and Putham allow the applicant to house all the stock during the winter, which enables the farm to keep a greater number of livestock on the holding, resulting in a higher density per acre.
- At the current stocking levels the additional grass keep of 230 acres is very important to allow the holding to accommodate all the livestock when they are turned out in the spring.
- A ‘typical’ farming business would usually have a core holding around the main farmhouse, so the farmer can be on hand to tend to livestock at most times of the day and night.

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- When constructing a new agricultural building, it would be an opportunity to amalgamate the holding but the limiting factors of the site at Lower House combined with the needs of Shearwell would be an overriding factor to continue to split the farming operations.
- The split is not an ideal situation from an efficient farming perspective; it will require someone to travel to Putham everyday to feed and check stock. During the lambing season, someone will have to be on site during the day and night to provide husbandry.
- If only the 64 acres were available at Putham, at the stocking densities set out by the applicant, this holding would require an agricultural building in the region of 650-750 sqm. If the holding were stocked at the industry standard stocking levels, the livestock numbers would be less and the requirements for shed space would also be proportionately less.

The report concludes by explaining:

- “In our opinion, the applicants have demonstrated the functional requirements for the proposed replacement agricultural building at Putham Farm. However, the requirements of agricultural building space on the holding directly relates to the intensive rearing and fattening farming policy adopted by the applicant. It is clear that the type of farming system adopted by the applicants is more intensive than would normally be seen in the locality. The current requirement relies entirely upon the current farming system and in the event that such an intensive system is not continued in the future, the proposed replacement agricultural building would be considered larger than the needs of the holding when considered in isolation under a typical upland farming regime”.

Excavated Material Assessment

The application proposals include details of how the excavated materials will be dealt with. The car park and the agricultural building were they to be permitted and undertaken would produce large amounts of spoil. Topsoil is proposed to be spread in the field to the north-west and it is considered that the final appearance will have an acceptable impact on the wider landscape.

There is extensive use of the resulting spoil in the form of new hedgebanks, along the proposed access drive, to the west of the business building, in the yard and to the boundary of the yard in to the south-west corner of the site, as well as with hedgebanks to the south of the new agricultural building.

These proposals will utilise a substantial quantity of the material on the site in a way that is acceptable in landscaping terms, provides new habitats and will form structural planting and features appropriate to the area.

There are also two separate applications to spread material on sites elsewhere; one at the farm at Armour Lane and the other on a track at Goosemoor. Both these applications are subject to separate considerations and were they not to be acceptable alternative off site means of disposals would need to be arranged by the applicant.

Flood Risk Assessment and Surface Water Drainage

It is not considered that the site is prone to flood risk given the location and surrounding agricultural land; and the Environment Agency identify the area in the lowest flood risk

category. The Environment Agency has asked for the measures set out in the consultant's report to be the subject of conditions to ensure they are implemented as part of any development.

The application papers set out proposals to address surface water drainage. At the present time there is a relatively simple system of ditches that leads to water being culverted and piped into a nearby area of woodland. The application seeks to upgrade the system and provide a series of soakaways to address water run-off from the proposed agricultural building and French drains alongside the access track.

The Environment Agency comments that "it is pleasing to see sustainable drainage methods (SUDS) used to manage surface water arising from the development particularly the French drains along the access road and the soakaways". The Environment Agency has sought further clarification on whether the soakaways have been sized to meet a calculation on critical storm duration as well as information on infiltration speed which may need testing.

The application also includes details on the packaged treatment system which is proposed in the south-eastern yard of the site which will serve the business building and replace the septic tank in the field to the east. The Environment Agency has been consulted on the details of this element of the proposals and their views are awaited.

The plans show that the system of drainage from and through the south-eastern yard will be improved to minimise the possibility of run-off draining towards the properties at Putham.

It is considered that the treatment plant will have a material impact upon the residents of Putham. The plant is separated from these houses, substantially underground and will meet modern standards.

To conclude on this issue, subject to the final clearance of the Environment Agency on the outstanding issues, it is considered that these aspects of the proposals are acceptable.

Other Planning Issues

One resident has raised the issue of a planning and community gain that could come from the proposed development and highlights that a contribution could be made to the undergrounding of cables in Cutcombe. The Authority has not adopted a Community Infrastructure Levy and the requirements of any Section 106 Agreement and/or related payments are required to be directly related to the development in hand. In this case there are no off site works that are required to facilitate the delivery of the development and therefore it is not considered that there is a case or policy requirement for any commuted sum to be provided as part of the development.

The Architectural Liaison Officer at Somerset and Avon Police has made a series of suggestions to assist with crime prevention. It is acknowledged that the site lies within a very low crime area. It will be possible to include a thorn mix in the planting around the site and the additional planting to the banks adjoining the proposed business building will increase the potential security of the site.

While increased external lighting may increase the potential security of the site there are other planning implications which are considered to carry greater weight and link to National Park purposes.

All the matters have been raised with the agent and he is conscious of the need to ensure that the site is safe and secure. It has been explained that measures will be put in place and the applicant intends to discuss these as necessary with the Police Liaison Officer rather than setting them out publicly in the application papers.

Having regard to the rural nature of the site and the natural security of the car park from the front of the building and other measures which can be put in place without the need for planning permission, it is considered that the issue of crime prevention has been addressed acceptably in this case.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This application proposes substantial development in an open countryside location within a National Park and therefore requires very careful consideration. The report details the main planning issues as well as the policies and representations. In terms of the technical issues, such as highways, drainage, ecology, historic environment, with the exception of some further specific extra details submitted to satisfy the Environment Agency, all the technical matters have been addressed.

The key issues revolve around the application of the policies and the compatibility with National Park purposes. These are matters of judgement and involve weighing the various planning considerations and impacts to reach a decision.

In terms of planning policies, the starting point is National Park purposes and Policy LNC1. For completeness this policy states;

Development proposals in the National Park will be expected to be compatible with the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of Exmoor, and the public understanding and enjoyment of those qualities. In considering applications the Authority will give the greatest weight to these purposes and in the case of conflict greatest weight will be attached to the first purpose. Due regard will be had for the economic and social well-being of the communities in the National Park.

Local Plan Policy E2 allows the extension to existing commercial premises where there is no adverse effect on important planning interests which the Plan seeks to protect. Policy E4 seeks to resist large scale or intrusive industrial development.

There are strong arguments and representations both in favour and against the proposals and these are set out in detail in this report.

The applicant argues that this is a sustainable location to expand this established business, that there are close links with the land requiring a farm location and the works can be accommodated in the landscape without harm, such that the proposals comply with Policy E2 which allows extensions to business premises in the countryside.

Objectors argue that the sheer scale of the proposals mean there is a fundamental objection in principle to the expansion of a business use on this National Park site and that the impact of the activities is not compatible with this open countryside location. It is argued that now is the time to relocate the business to a more sustainable site in a nearby location.

In terms of landscape, the Head of Conservation and Access has concluded

“Overall, the proposals are substantial and will change the character and appearance of the application site as it is seen in the wider landscape. In terms of the individual elements, the proposal to demolish and rebuild a large section of the existing Shearwell

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building is likely to have a positive impact on the landscape at the site and on surrounding views into the site. The proposal to extend the car park is unlikely to have negative visual impacts. The proposals to construct a new access road can largely be mitigated across the length of the track but at the entrance the impacts will be adverse and significant. Finally, the proposed new agricultural building is considered to have an adverse visual impact in a number of views of the site, mainly due to the scale of the structure. The proposed hedgebanks help to mitigate these impacts. A smaller building or series of smaller buildings with broken outlines and roof lines is likely to be easier to integrate into the landscape.

To conclude, the scale of the proposals, and in particular the replacement agricultural building and the improved vehicular access, will result in adverse visual impacts, despite the proposals being carefully designed and landscaped to reduce their effect. It is acknowledged that the overall impact is restricted to a limited number of viewpoints and it will be necessary for the Committee to weigh up the scale and harm of the landscape change against other planning considerations in coming to its conclusions on the overall acceptability of the scheme.”

One of the key issues in terms of landscape is the size and impact of the proposed agricultural building. It is acknowledged that the eaves and ridge of the agricultural building has been reduced since the original submission and the removal of approximately half the rooflights on the northern roof elevation, and the moving down of the remaining rooflights on that roof slope, all help to reduce the visual impact. The Committee will be able to view the photomontages which have been produced. The photomontages rely on the retention of the hedge along the northern field boundary to help screen sections of the building. Nevertheless despite all the efforts to reduce the impact of the building, the agricultural building is large, has a long ridge line and will be apparent in the landscape. The Head of Conservation and Access has commented that she would prefer to see a smaller building or a series of smaller buildings with broken outlines and roof lines which would be easier to integrate into the landscape.

There has also been much comment and investigation in respect of the justification for the size of the agricultural building and its location at the Putham Farm site. It is acknowledged that there is an existing agricultural floorspace on the Putham site in the existing barn which is similar to that to be replaced in the proposed new building. However, the original floorspace was permitted at a time when the applicant owned a dwelling at Putham, and at the present time the dwelling that is linked with the farm unit is now at Lower House. Lower House is located on a prominent and sloping site and while there is considered potential to accommodate a larger replacement barn at the eastern section of the site it is acknowledged that there would be greater landscape harm if a building the size of the barn proposed at Putham was sought to be sited at the Lower House site.

Smiths Gore has been commissioned to look independently at the farming issues. Smiths Gore advise that the size of the agricultural building at Putham is justified on the basis of the higher stocking levels that take place on the holding and that these stocking levels are not typical of such upland farm holdings – although the applicant disputes this conclusion. Smiths Gore also advise that the size of the building, wherever it is located is only justified on the basis of the combined holding with Lower House and that the level of stocking is dependent on having the additional grazing land available. If the Committee were to be persuaded on the application proposals as submitted it is important to be aware that were the land at Lower House to be separated from the land at Putham then the agricultural

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building would be too large for this 64 acre unit. If the Committee is persuaded of the need for the proposed farm building to be located at Putham in conjunction with the combined holding then it is an option to consider a Section 106 Agreement to ensure that the building is tied to the wider land holding.

The economic and employment benefits which are anticipated to accrue from the application are material planning considerations; however, if there is any conflict between any planning issues then compliance with National Park purposes is the overriding planning consideration. The Shearwell business is an established and major employer that is seeking to expand. That expansion is substantial but if the landscape and farming case can be made then the principle may be considered to comply with Local Plan policies. There is the issue as to whether this is an appropriate and sustainable location. In terms of sustainability the applicant makes the point that he draws many workers from the Exmoor area and importantly there is a close link between the development and trial of products and the location on the farm. This is said to provide a commercial advantage and has helped the business to be successful. The applicant wishes to have all his business activities in one building and the Committee will need to consider the planning weight to be given to the economic and employment benefits and the case that this business needs to have a farm location to be most successful.

The business has grown over the past 20 years based on this site and has developed an international reputation, and the applicant has set out his expansion proposals for the future in this application. However, it is not possible to guarantee what the future may hold for any business. The Committee needs to be aware that it is not possible to limit the activities to a particular type of business or a named company and that in the future the building could potentially be put to another type of B1 business use. If the building were to be occupied for a different activity then it would also employ staff. However in the future, were the site to be empty and not able to be let, then the building would be considered as Previously Developed Land – a “brownfield” site. (The definition of Previously Developed Land in the NPPF excludes land that is or has been occupied by agricultural buildings).

In addition to the planning balance, is the consideration of the potential benefits of the second vehicular access to the site. While there is a landscape impact with the improved access which is necessary to meet highway safety requirements, there is the opportunity to reduce traffic movements through the crossroads at Wheddon Cross, despite there being more traffic proposed from the application proposals.

Also relevant in the decision making process is the advice in the National Planning Policy Framework, which is a material planning consideration. The key areas of guidance are set out in the main body of this report. In particular the great weight to be attached to National Park purposes is the starting point, together with the need to promote sustainable development, and the promotion of the rural economy.

To summarise, the Committee will need to very carefully consider all the planning issues and the weight to be attached to each consideration. The starting point is the first National Park purpose and in particular the landscape impact. It is acknowledged that the scheme, while substantial, has been designed to minimise its visual impact, and the key landscape impacts will result from the agricultural building and the improved access onto the B3224. The overall scale of the scheme, taking into account the car park, business extensions, barn and roadway need to be considered.

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If the Committee believe that the landscape impacts are compatible with National Park purposes then there is policy support for the proposals in terms of the employment planning policies.

There is much information on the justification and siting of the agricultural building and the Committee will need to have regard to the independent advice from Smiths Gore and the nature of the farming processes, their sustainability going forward and the dependency on other land together with any potential for smaller or alternatively sited buildings.

This is an established Exmoor firm, with an international reputation, that is seeking to expand and the employment and economic benefits are material planning considerations. In terms of the sustainability of the location the Committee will need to judge the weight to be attached to the case that the business benefits from a farming location because of the close inter-relationship between the activities for demonstrating and trialling of products on site.

The application proposals will increase traffic movements to the site; however the new access from the B3224 will lead to a decrease in the likely movements through the crossroads in Wheddon Cross.

The application has been considered over a series of months, with an interim report, a Committee Site Visit, and technical issues examined in detail. There are comprehensive representations from many parties which articulate the views both for and against the application.

The planning issues are balanced and the outcome of the application is dependent on the weight to be placed on the various planning considerations by the Committee. In this respect the Annex 4 to this report includes both a potential reason for refusal and conditions were the Committee minded to approve the application.

RECOMMENDATION

The views of the Committee are sought.

Application No: **6/8/12/105** Grid Ref **292787 138452**

Applicant: **Mr R Webber, Shearwell Data Ltd, Putham Farm, Wheddon Cross, Minehead, Somerset**

Location: **Putham Farm, Wheddon Cross, Minehead, Somerset**

Proposal: **Proposed re-development of the site to replace an existing agricultural building and workshop lean-to with a purpose built B1 office, research and development and light industry workspace (2,159m² gross external area), 40kw roof mounted solar photo voltaic array, change of use and extension of existing agricultural storage building to B1 light industry (371m² gross external area), extension of car park, erection of replacement agricultural building (1,758m² gross external area) and associated yard area, landscaping together with the provision of a new access drive (approximately 830m) from the B3224 to existing business building including crossing Public Bridleway No. WL 6/22 supplemented by an Environmental Statement received 18/05/12.**

PLANNING COMMITTEE SITE VISIT

17 SEPTEMBER 2012 at 9.30am

PRESENT:

Exmoor National Park Authority Planning Committee Site Visit Group Members:

Mr R C Edgell (Chairman), Mr J Bray, Mr W J Dyke, Mr J Freeman, Mr N Holliday, Mr S J Pugsley, Mr I Rigby, Mr T Taylor, Dr E J Wibberley

Exmoor National Park Authority Officers: Mr D Wyborn (Head of Planning and Sustainable Development), Mrs S Bryan (Head of Conservation and Access), Ms D Crabtree (Planning Officer), Mrs C Carder (Corporate Support Officer)

Applicant: Mr R Webber, Ms A Reynolds

Applicant's Agents: Mr B Dinnis (Acorn Rural Property Services), Mr R Holland (Reed Holland).

Somerset County Council Highway Authority: Ms A Goodall

Exmoor Society: Dr D Jeffray, Mrs R Thomas

Cutcombe Parish Council: Mr E Clabull, Mrs L Atkins

Exton Parish Council: Mrs L Howe, Mrs C Slade

Members of the Public: Mr R Whittall, Mr G Trinkle

1. Introduction

An interim report setting out details of the proposals, consultee responses and representations, together with the main planning issues had been presented to the Planning Committee at its meeting on 4 September 2012. At that meeting and in line with the Planning Officer's recommendation, the Committee had resolved that the application be deferred for a site visit to take place on 17 September 2012.

It was confirmed that the site visit was a public meeting. Its purpose was to provide Members of the Planning Committee with a fact-finding opportunity; the ability to consider all relevant planning issues while on site; and an understanding of the potential landscape impacts of the proposal. The application would be determined at a future meeting of the Planning Committee following presentation of a further report from Planning Officers.

2. Applicant's Comments

The Applicant advised that the proposals had potential to create a further 30-50 jobs at Shearwell Data Ltd, bringing additional, highly skilled employment opportunities to Exmoor.

3. Existing Business Premises

The front elevation to the existing business premises would be unchanged. For reference purposes, the height of the rectangular element at the centre of the front elevation was noted to be approximately 6.8m, with the top of the flagpoles being at an approximate height of 9.4m.

4. Application Proposals

In the conference room of the existing business unit, the meeting viewed plans of the application proposals which comprised the following elements:

- Demolition of the agricultural part of the existing premises and replacement with purpose built office accommodation and research and light industry space.
- Extension of an existing agricultural storage building by 3.5m and change of use from agricultural to B1 business use.
- Extension of the existing car park to increase parking capacity from 50 to approximately 97 cars.
- Creation of a vehicular access track to the application site from the B3224.
- Construction of a new agricultural building to the western part of the application site.

From the windows of the conference room, the meeting noted the site of the proposed car park extension and the approximate position and angle of the proposed agricultural building. The meeting also noted the setting of the application site in the wider landscape, including in relation to Dunkery Beacon.

5. Shearwell Data Ltd

It was explained that Shearwell Data Ltd ("Shearwell") developed products associated with the electronic identification of cattle and sheep which it sold to an international market.

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The meeting visited various areas in the existing business premises including administrative offices, product assembly room, software development office and tag printing room, and received demonstrations of a number of products and assembly processes.

The meeting was advised that the company's products had been developed in response to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001 which had highlighted a need to improve the speed and effectiveness of the monitoring and reporting of livestock movement. The original aim of developing electronic identification of animals had been to help to reduce the risk of a similar spread of disease in the future. The company's products had since become general management tools for those working with livestock and included the following:

- Electronic identification tags for cattle and sheep.
- Electronic reading and recording equipment such as a stick reader: a handheld stock recorder enabling automatic data capture and the uploading of information to the national livestock movement database.
- Electronic identification sheep management crate for use with reading equipment to allow automatic hands-free data capture, including digital weighing of livestock.
- Automatic drafting crates to enable the drafting of animals based on any saved criteria, in addition to drafting by an animal's weight.

The meeting was also advised that the company was working on the development of a national sheep movement database and was a member of the International Standard Organisation.

In addition to staff involved with product assembly activities, the company employed a software development team and customer service personnel.

The applicant confirmed that the farming business and the business of Shearwell were run as separate enterprises. The applicant believed it was important to the commercial success of Shearwell that the two elements remained in proximity as this arrangement provided opportunity for the efficient testing and development of products, as well as an on-site facility to demonstrate products to potential customers. It also ensured that the farm's livestock could be accessed quickly when required.

6. New extension to the existing business premises

The meeting then moved to the agricultural building located to the rear of the existing business premises. The application proposed the demolition of this area and replacement with a new extension for use as additional office accommodation and product processing space. The meeting was advised as follows:

- This area was currently used for agricultural purposes including as a lambing shed.
- The space was also used for the testing of Shearwell products during development stages and for demonstrating products to customers, allowing the simulation of conditions on a farm or at a livestock auction or abattoir.
- The agricultural and product demonstration functions would be relocated to the proposed new agricultural building to be sited on the western side of the application site.

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- The replacement extension would link with the existing business building. The extension would be approximately 50m in length, with a width of approximately 27m, increasing to approximately 28m at the south east end. The ridge height of the extension would be approximately 8.6m (being approximately 0.5m higher than the existing business premises to be retained, and approximately 1.6m higher than the ridge of the agricultural element to be demolished).
- The extension would be two-storey for approximately 19m of its length. This space would be used as office accommodation to enable the recruitment of additional staff and to allow the existing office environment to be modified and improved.
- The single storey, double height area of approximately 31m in length would be used to accommodate injection moulding equipment (allowing this processing activity to be brought in-house) and would provide storage for associated equipment including forklift trucks, tools and plastics.
- The 8.6m ridge height was required to accommodate gantry equipment to allow the electronic feeding of the injection moulding machinery; the use of this equipment would increase efficiency and reduce health and safety risks to staff.
- The south east elevation leading to the double height production area would be accessed from the yard area to the rear via two large roller shutter doors.

7. Yard area to the rear of existing building

The meeting moved to the yard area at the rear of the agricultural element of the existing premises and was advised as follows:

- The yard area would be extended to the hedge boundary to the south east, with new planting to fill a gap in the existing hedge.
- Lower ground levels would be raised to create an extended, level yard area.
- The increased yard would allow lorries to access the production end of the new extension and provide adequate turning space for large vehicles.
- The location of the proposed new track and access to the yard was noted, together with a proposed area of structural planting adjacent to the field to the south.

8. Landscape considerations and views from the yard area

- Outward landscape views looking northeast from the yard area and inward view points from private land at Kersham Hill and the locations of Kersham Farm and Stowey Farm were noted.
- It was explained that mature trees had been removed along the boundary between the existing premises and the private access road to Putham; the size of the trees and their proximity to the building having been considered unsafe.
- The Head of Conservation and Access advised that the trees were a mix of Ash and Hazel and would now have a large root system supporting approximately one year's regrowth. The trees were therefore in the best possible condition to withstand any root damage caused by development works. The meeting was further advised that the Ash trees would grow back quickly and would require future management. Light growth at lower levels together with some larger trees was recommended to soften the impact of the proposed replacement extension.

- It was noted that the access road to Putham which ran adjacent to the existing building was a private road and was not a public right of way.

9. Higher Putham and Putham

Mr G Trinkle, owner of Higher Putham, joined the meeting and advised as follows:

- The buildings at Higher Putham comprised his dwelling house, a small building converted to accommodate a chiropractic clinic and three further dwellings, one of which was currently unoccupied.
- As a local resident, Mr Trinkle expressed concern about the current level of traffic using the access road to Putham.
- The relationship and the difference in levels between the application site and the buildings at Higher Putham and Putham were noted.

10. Storage Building

The meeting noted the location of the existing agricultural storage building and was advised as follows:

- The application proposed extension of the storage building by approximately 3m and a change of use from agricultural to B1 business use. The building would be insulated.
- The proposed new access track would curve to the rear of the storage building and then extend to the car parking area.

11. Car Park

The meeting moved to the site of the proposed extension to the existing car park and was advised as follows:

- The extent of the new car park area was indicated by marker posts.
- The car park would be extended by approximately 35m.
- The site would be excavated by approximately 2.2m and the additional parking space would be at the same level as the existing car park, with a landscaping element providing separation between the two areas.

12. New Agricultural Building

The area of the proposed new agricultural building was indicated by marker posts and the meeting was advised as follows:

- The building would run parallel with the hedge boundary on the northern side of two fields.
- An existing gateway in this boundary would be removed and planted with new hedge growth and a replacement gateway created a short distance along to allow easier vehicular access.
- The new agricultural building would measure approximately 72m in length.
- At the eastern end, the building would be approximately 23m wide and excavated to a depth of approximately 1.1m. The ridge height would be approximately 7.4m and the eaves height approximately 4.5m. This end of the building would include a mezzanine floor to allow sheep to stand on slats above the ground for animal

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husbandry purposes. The mezzanine height would be adequate to allow cleaning and maintenance below.

- The larger western end of the building would be excavated to a depth of approximately 3.2m. It would be approximately 28m wide, with a ridge height of approximately 8m. This area would be used for cattle handling and demonstration of Shearwell products.
- The roof would be in two distinct sections to achieve a break in the visual appearance.
- At the higher ridge height, the building would be approximately 2.2m higher than the top of the flagpoles on the existing business premises and approximately 4.8m higher than the square roof level in centre of the front elevation of the existing building.
- On the southern side, the building would be cut into the rising hillside to a depth of between approximately 3m and 4m depending on the position, with the excavated material being relocated at the application site.
- The total excavated area of the building including a yard area would be 120m x 45m.
- The western elevation of the building would be finished in a dark grey metal ventair system to reduce rain ingress; with the remaining three elevations to be clad in vertical timber Yorkshire boarding. It was noted that details of the finish of the elevations could be a condition of any planning permission.
- The length of the proposed building would straddle two fields. A hedge boundary running north/south would be removed and a new hedge would be planted to the south of the proposed building.
- The applicant advised that the new agricultural building would be used for agricultural purposes including as a lambing shed, and that it was important to have the building in proximity to the Shearwell premises so that stock could be accessed quickly without the need to travel through Cutcombe village to alternative premises. It would also be likely to be used on at least a weekly basis for Shearwell product demonstration purposes.

13. Excavated Material

The meeting noted the area where it was proposed to spread excavated topsoil to level dips in an adjoining field. The dips were thought to be features of the local geology or were possibly the result of 19th century mining activity.

14. Landscape considerations

From the gateway in the northwest corner of the field beyond the extent of the proposed agricultural building, the meeting noted views to Cutcombe Church and Cutcombe Hill beyond. The Head of Conservation and Access advised that long views of the application site would be possible from Forestry Commission open access land. Being an area of forestry, views were unlikely to be extensive and would be set against the backdrop of the wider landscape.

15. Applicant's Landholdings

The meeting was shown a map indicating the extent of the applicant's landholdings including at Lower House Farm. The applicant advised of a further 30 acres currently held on a farm business tenancy.

The applicant also advised that the route taken from Putham Farm to his holding at Lower House Farm would vary depending on the vehicle used. Provided there were no parked vehicles, it was possible to travel in smaller vehicles along Lower Park Lane, thus avoiding Cutcombe village. The route for larger vehicles would generally be through the village.

16. Agricultural Appraisal

Members of the Planning Committee commented that further information was required from Smiths Gore in relation to their assessment of the applicant's agricultural appraisal. In particular, details were required about the reasonableness of the size of the proposed new agricultural building to serve agricultural purposes on the applicant's combined landholdings at Lower House Farm and at Putham Farm and in relation to serving the single landholding at Putham Farm.

Members were asked to advise the Head of Planning and Sustainable Development of the aspects of the Smiths Gore report on which they required clarification.

It was questioned whether there was an option to split the Shearwell business operations from the agricultural business. The applicant advised that he felt the investment associated with the proposals could not be justified without the ability to retain an integrated approach to the running of the two businesses; and that the expansion of Shearwell at Putham provided an opportunity to bring additional, highly skilled employment opportunities to Exmoor.

17. Access Track

The meeting walked the approximate 800m route of the proposed access track and was advised as follows:

- To the southwest of the existing building, the track would cross a gateway in a field boundary which would be widened. The track would then continue in a westerly direction towards the B3224, with the field boundary hedge on its north side.
- The location of view points to the north at Dunkery Beacon and Dunkery Hill were noted.
- A post and wire fence would be erected along the southern side of the track to ensure that livestock were contained within the adjacent field. It was questioned whether it would be preferable for this to be an additional hedge. The Head of Conservation and Access advised that in the context of views from the north and the existing hedge boundary on the northern side of the track, any landscape benefits achieved by an additional hedge would be marginal.
- Where the field boundary on the northern side of the proposed track changed to post and wire fencing, this would be replaced with hedgebank planting for a distance of approximately 160m.
- There would be five passing places along the length of the track.
- The track would cross a bridleway running north/south which formed part of the Coleridge Way. There would be speed humps on the track on the approaches to the crossing point and further speed ramps down on either side of the bridleway crossing point. The hedgebank boundaries on both sides of the bridleway would be lowered and chamfered back to allow inter visibility between the two routes.

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- On either side of the track crossing, the bridleway surface would be improved to remove a low area and to add new sections of compacted stone surface.
- Appropriate signage would be erected warning users of both routes, with priority given to bridleway users.
- The track, including the section crossing the bridleway, would be 3.05m wide, with a sub base, base and tarmacadam layer construction, and finished with tar and rolled chippings. There would be French drains of 0.5m width on either side of the track.
- The design of the access track had been prepared in consultation with the Authority's Landscape Officer who had advised that elements such as kerbstones were not appropriate for this rural setting.
- It was questioned whether given its tarmac surface, overall width, and the size of some of the vehicles that would use it, the proposed access should more accurately be described as a road (rather than a track). Ms A Goodall of Somerset County Highway Authority advised that this was a matter of interpretation; however she confirmed it was not proposed to create a public highway and the route would not be adopted by the Highway Authority. Ms Goodall also confirmed that the proposals were of adequate design and quality for use by large vehicles such as 40 ton articulated lorries.
- The applicant advised that access by larger vehicles would be relatively infrequent, perhaps one vehicle every 3 weeks.

18. Junction with B3224 Public Highway

The meeting assembled at the proposed junction of the new access track with the B3224 public highway. The meeting was advised as follows:

- It was confirmed that Somerset County Council Highway Authority had been consulted and raised no objection to the proposals. Ms A Goodall of the Highway Authority advised that the proposal had been considered in the light of results of a speed survey carried out on the relevant stretch of public highway. Ms Goodall further advised that the proposal met the Highway Authority's requirements in terms of visibility splay, sight lines, width of entrance and bell mouth; and that the visibility splay would alert drivers to the junction and to the likelihood of traffic movement in/out of the entrance. There would be a 'slow' warning sign on the northwest bound carriageway towards Wheddon Cross, where traffic was likely to be travelling at higher speed. It was considered that traffic heading southeast towards Summerway Cross would be unlikely to be moving at high speed, having recently negotiated the junction at Wheddon Cross and travelling uphill.
- Ms A Goodall continued that the Highway Authority would require signage that would be visible in poor weather conditions to indicate that the junction provided access to Shearwell Data Ltd. This would avoid vehicles missing the turning and having to turn round at Wheddon Cross. The type of signage would need to balance the safety considerations of public highway with relatively low traffic flow but travelling at relatively high speed, and the location of the proposed junction in a National Park setting. It was suggested it would be preferable for the detail of signage to be agreed and specified as a condition of any planning consent, rather than being erected under relevant permitted development rights.

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- It was commented that a new junction may have a traffic calming effect on vehicles heading downhill towards Wheddon Cross.
- It was confirmed that in the Wheddon Cross direction, 94m of the hedgerow boundary adjacent to the public highway would be removed. Behind the northern side of the visibility splay and immediately in front of a second hedge boundary set back from the public highway, there would be an area of new tree planting.
- In the direction of Summerway Cross, 5m of hedgerow would be removed and the hedgerow realigned for a distance of a further 23m.
- The entrance splay would be approximately 40m wide at the junction with the public highway, then curving in gradually to allow sufficient space for 2 large vehicles to pass within the bell mouth. It would then narrow to a width of 6m and then beyond the field boundary, narrow again to a width of approximately 3.05m.
- The proposed hedgerow removal/realignment works would achieve approximately 120m visibility towards Wheddon Cross and 160m visibility towards Summerway Cross from the centre of the splay. The approximate visibility distances were indicated to the meeting.
- It was noted that the standard requirement for highway visibility was a distance of 215m; Ms Goodall described this as a 'gold standard' and confirmed that in the particular circumstances of this application, the Highway Authority considered the proposed visibility distances acceptable.
- The telegraph pole to the northern side of the proposed entrance would be relocated or the services undergrounded.
- It was noted that the access would at times be used by large vehicles such as 40 ton articulated lorries and concern was raised about the size and height of such vehicles and their visibility as moving features in a landscape setting.
- The applicant advised that the principal objective of the new access was to allow employees in private cars to access/leave the site without the need to travel through Wheddon Cross.

That part of the meeting held at the application site was then closed.

A site visit group comprising the following then visited viewpoints of the application site from Cutcombe Church and the public footpath between Cutcombe and Cutcombe Hill.

Exmoor National Park Authority Officers: Mr D Wyborn (Head of Planning and Sustainable Development), Mrs S Bryan (Head of Conservation and Access), Ms D Crabtree (Planning Officer), Mrs C Carder (Corporate Support Officer)

Exmoor National Park Authority Planning Committee Site Visit Group Members: Mr R C Edgell (Chairman), Mr W J Dyke, Mr J Freeman and Mr N Holliday.

Applicant: Mr R Webber, Ms A Reynolds,

Applicant's Agents: Mr B Dinnis (Acorn Rural Property Services)

Cutcombe Parish Council: Mr E Clabull, Mrs L Atkins

19. Cutcombe Church

The meeting assembled in the churchyard of Cutcombe Church and was a shown photomontage representing the proposed new agricultural building as viewed from this location.

- The applicant's agent explained the photomontage methodology (marker poles topped with red balloons to indicate the eaves and ridge heights of the proposed new agricultural building and photographed with a 50mm lens and then used to create a composite image of the application site).
- It was commented that from this viewpoint, and as represented by the photomontage, the proposed agricultural building did not have the appearance of being significantly higher than the flagpoles on the existing business premises (the approximate heights of the two buildings having been previously noted).
- Options for hedge management at the application site were considered and the Head of Conservation and Access advised that in landscape terms, rather than laying the hedges it would be preferable to keep them trimmed to a specified level.

20. Public Footpath from Cutcombe to Cutcombe Hill

The meeting then assembled on the footpath from Cutcombe to Cutcombe Hill and was shown a photomontage representing the proposed new agricultural building as viewed from this location.

- The Head of Conservation and Access advised that in terms of landscape sensitivity, this viewpoint from a public footpath would be considered highly sensitive.
- The photomontage did not extend to include a representation of the proposed access track and new hedgebanks, and the applicant's agent agreed to submit an additional photomontage to Planning Officers.

A site visit group comprising the following then visited the applicant's holding at Lower House Farm.

Exmoor National Park Authority Officers: Mr D Wyborn (Head of Planning and Sustainable Development), Mrs S Bryan (Head of Conservation and Access), Ms D Crabtree (Planning Officer), Mrs C Carder (Corporate Support Officer)

Exmoor National Park Authority Planning Committee Site Visit Group Members: Mr R C Edgell (Chairman), Mr J Freeman and Mr N Holliday.

Applicant: Mr R Webber, Ms A Reynolds

Applicant's Agents: Mr B Dinnis (Acorn Rural Property Services)

21. Lower House Farm

The meeting noted the extent, use and condition of farm buildings at the applicant's holding at Lower House Farm. It was noted that the buildings were primarily used for storage of hay and straw, with one building used as a sheep shed.

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A site visit group comprising the following then visited a viewpoint at Dunkery Hill.

Exmoor National Park Authority Officers: Mr D Wyborn (Head of Planning and Sustainable Development), Mrs S Bryan (Head of Conservation and Access), Ms D Crabtree (Planning Officer), Mrs C Carder (Corporate Support Officer)

Exmoor National Park Authority Planning Committee Site Visit Group Members: Mr R C Edgell (Chairman), Mr J Freeman and Mr N Holliday.

Applicant: Mr R Webber

Applicant's Agents: Mr B Dinnis (Acorn Rural Property Services)

22. Views from Dunkery Hill

The meeting then travelled to view the application site from Dunkery Hill.

- The Head of Conservation and Access advised that the views comprised a number of different landscape characters including open moorland, plantation hills at Croydon Hill and Wootton Hill, and low rolling hills with a variety of field sizes. Buildings and settlements tended to be located in sheltered areas with the exception of Cutcombe and Wheddon Cross which had built up around the highway junction.
- The applicant's agent agreed to prepare and submit to Planning Officers a photomontage representing views of the application site from Dunkery Hill.

The site visit closed at 2.30pm

Application No: **6/8/12/105** Grid Ref 292787 138452

Applicant: **Mr R Webber, Shearwell Data Ltd, Putham Farm, Wheddon Cross, Minehead, Somerset**

Location: **Putham Farm, Wheddon Cross, Minehead, Somerset**

Proposal: **Proposed re-development of the site to replace an existing agricultural building and workshop lean-to with a purpose built B1 office, research and development and light industry workspace (2,159m² gross external area), 40kw roof mounted solar photo voltaic array, change of use and extension of existing agricultural storage building to B1 light industry (371m² gross external area), extension of car park, erection of replacement agricultural building (1,758m² gross external area) and associated yard area, landscaping together with the provision of a new access drive (approximately 830m) from the B3224 to existing business building including crossing Public Bridleway No. WL 6/22 supplemented by an Environmental Statement received 18/05/12.**

Review of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Introduction

I have reviewed the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment as presented by Acorn Consultancy in conjunction with the plans, drawings and photomontages submitted.

The main effects of the proposal on the landscape and scenic beauty of Exmoor are likely to be:

- 1 The creation of a new access road including entrance and visibility splays.
- 2 The construction of a business building on the site of the existing business /agricultural building.
- 3 The new agricultural building of 1758m² to the north west of the existing car park.
- 4 Extension of the existing car park to accommodate up to 97 cars (currently 45).

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) drafted by Acorn Rural Property Consultants looks at;

- changes to landscape character (ie physical and other characteristics of the site) and
- changes to views into the site from the surrounding landscape (visual impacts)

Photomontages submitted at the request of Members have helped to illustrate the potential impacts of the proposed building and new hedgebanks.

I am content that the applicant has carried out the LVIA in accordance with best practice as set out by the Landscape Institute and in discussion with officers of ENPA. The assessment includes a clear description of the methodology and process of assessment. The quality of images is generally good.

Landscape Description

The landscape in this part of Exmoor is described in the document including extracts from the ENPA Landscape Character Assessment, 2007. The site lies within the landscape type "*Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*". This landscape type is found across the national park, covering much of the southern slopes of the Brendon Hills as well as the farmed landscapes that stretch west to Challacombe and Combe Martin.

Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons is characterised in the Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment 2007 as follows:

- "A medium scale landscape defined by broad rolling terrain (of hills and ridges).
- Land cover defined by permanent pasture enclosed by beech hedge banks. Areas of open commons occur with fields demarcated by post and wire fencing.
- Elevation range of approximately 250m to 450m AOD. Defined by an underlying geology of mudstones, sandstone and slates giving rise to fine loamy/silty well-drained soils.
- Agricultural land use defined by pasture – sheep are prevalent but cattle and horses are also present. There are some areas of arable land but these are very much the exception.
- Strong influence of adjacent landscapes of *Open Moorland, Incised Wooded Valleys* and *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves*.
- Irregular pattern of enclosure of medium-sized fields divided during the 18th to 21st centuries and defined by prominent beech hedge banks on highest ground and mixed species hedges on lower slopes.
- Fields become noticeably smaller towards the adjacent valleys. Where hedge banks are degraded, post and wire fencing has frequently been used to replace sections.
- Narrow rural lanes and tracks flanked by tall beech hedges create a strong sense of enclosure, restricting views and contrasting markedly with the adjacent areas of Unenclosed Moorland.
- Villages and hamlets are, for the most part, located within the adjacent valley landscapes."

The site at Shearwell is typical of this landscape type. The field pattern is of a medium scale with a mix of beech hedgebanks on higher ground, with more complex, older field patterns and mixed hedges on the slopes. The landscape becomes wooded in character in the adjacent valleys. The landscape has a strongly

farmed character, mainly sheep and beef with little arable. The character of farmland in the immediate vicinity is well managed, predominantly pastoral, with a good pattern of traditionally managed hedgebanks. Altitude is fairly high, 300m at the application site, steadily rising to 370m at Summerway Cross which is about 1km to the south.

The adjacent *Open Moorlands* at Dunkery are clearly visible from Putham as are the *Incised Wooded Valleys* (the Aville Valley) and *Plantation Hills* (Croydon Hill and Wootton Ridge). At Cutcombe and Wheddon Cross the settlement pattern varies from much of Exmoor in that the buildings are on high land, open, fairly exposed and visible in the wider landscape.

Assessment of Effects

In order to assess how the changes proposed will affect the character of the landscape and views in the area, the applicant has analysed

- the impacts on the character of the local / wider landscape and
- the impact on 30 Viewpoints in the area.

In accordance with best practice the viewpoints have been derived from an assessment of the Zones of Visual Influence, identifying where this overlaps with publically accessible land such as rights of way, roads and Open Access land. The landscape types and the viewpoints have been assessed for their level of sensitivity to change and the magnitude of impact has been recorded leading to an overall "Impact Significance". The more sensitive the viewpoint or Character Type and the greater the Magnitude of Impact, the higher the Impact Significance recorded.

The report describes a range of impacts from Negligible to Substantial. For brevity I have drawn attention to the most significant effects.

1 The creation of a new access road including entrance and visibility splays

In order to create a new route into the site, thereby reducing congestion at Wheddon Cross and on Popery Lane, the plans show the creation of a new tarmac track into the site from the B3224, approximately 500m south east of Wheddon Cross. This would involve the removal of about 94m of hedgebank to the north of the access to provide a 2.4m by 120m visibility splay. To the south, the proposals involve the removal of 5m of bank and realigning 23m of the boundary to deliver a 2.4m by 160m sight line. The width of the access into the site will be widened to 40m. The access then curves in on both sides until the width of the first section of the road is 6m. This is required for about 26m into the field. The access layout is required so that a lorry preparing to leave the improved access can be passed by a lorry turning into the site. The proposals also include the erection of entrance warning signage to the east of the entrance on the roadside verge and slow markings within the west bound carriageway.

The LVIA notes that this will result in a Moderate/Substantial effect on the local landscape character and Moderate / Adverse visual impact at viewpoint 1. I would suggest that this underplays the visual effects which are likely to be Substantial at this viewpoint. This is due to scale of the new road which (for the

first part) needs to allow two vehicles to pass. The bell mouth is very wide and the proposed road is as wide, if not wider, than the B3224 at this point. The engineering curves do not reflect historic landscape patterns – older roads and junctions having much tighter curves and angles. The need to make the junction safe on this relatively fast road has put demands on the applicant to respond in terms of scale and layout and this is likely to erode the rural road character and sense of enclosure. This is difficult to mitigate – however the proposals to seed with grass, and to have no curb stones are welcome. If the proposal is approved it may be appropriate to consider further planning conditions to restrict signage, fencing or planting in order to maintain a low key, agricultural appearance.

As it crosses the field the new track will impact on the bridleway aesthetically and practically (viewpoints 2 and 3) imposing changes upon the user experience. Practical constraints have largely been covered by use of surface materials, ramps and realignment, however the LVIA identifies Moderate/Substantial (and adverse) impacts on the view. If approved I would welcome further detailed discussions with the applicant and users on how these impacts could be minimised by hedgebank management and minimal signage.

There are potentially significant visual impacts from longer distant views (for example from Dunkery). The photomontage shows that this is largely mitigated with the proposed hedgebanks.

2 The construction of a business building of similar size on the site of the existing business building/agricultural building

The LVIA identifies a minor beneficial effect on landscape character – I agree with this assessment. The building is well located in the landscape and the new build is a higher quality design. The use of matt black pv panels is welcomed. The visual impacts are identified as Low, Moderate and beneficial

3 Construction of a new agricultural building of 1758m² to the north west of the carpark

The applicant has proposed the construction of a new, timber clad building cut into the slope, approximately 75m by 23m. The proposal includes the removal of a 65m of hedgebank.

This aspect of the development will impact upon the landscape character through the physical alteration of the natural topography and increase in building mass resulting in the loss of agricultural land and weakening of the 'traditional' enclosure pattern. The loss of a length of hedgerow is partly mitigated by the proposed new banks.

This is a large and elevated building which is visible from many of the viewpoints, particularly from Cutcombe to the north. Photomontages showing the impact of the barn have been provided illustrating the visibility of the roof from viewpoints in Cutcombe and the impact of the whole building in views from the east at Kersham. The applicant's most recent amendments show reduced numbers of roof lights on the north elevation. This is welcomed as the roof lights are eye catching and potentially reflective, drawing attention to the

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building in the landscape. The suggested lowering of the roof makes little overall difference to visual impact and may in fact make the building appear less “barn like” and more industrial (having a flatter roof). Visual impacts have been assessed by Acorn as Moderate or Minor from a number of viewpoints (eg 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19) at lanes and footpaths in the area. From viewpoint 30, the Church, the overall impact is assessed as Moderate / Substantial.

My assessment of these views is that for many, and including 5, 6, 7, 11, 15, 18, and 19, the Magnitude of Impact is likely to be Moderate (ie “Moderate - a change in a view that is clearly visible and forms an important but not defining element of the view”) rather than Low ie “Some change in the view that is not prominent but is visible” ref Table 4 LVIA). This would result in a Moderate / Substantial Impact when the sensitivity of receptor is classified as High. In summary, from a number of viewpoints, I suggest that the impact of the large agricultural building may have been under represented.

Wider views from the east and north, for example 5, 6, 14, 15a and b show how the new building will extend the development footprint along the contour and into the wider landscape. Two very large buildings would be seen extending along the contours of the hill. Viewpoints from sites such as Stowey Ball have not been included as these are not publically accessible land. However from this part of Exmoor, views would be possible into both the existing farmbuildings and the proposed new build.

In closer views such as 20, from Cutcombe, the building is visible and elevated. It is of a large scale, geometric and regular in appearance against the natural rolling profile of the landscape. The proposed planting and hedgebanks, once established, will help to mitigate the impact in these views.

Viewpoint 23 shows the visibility of the existing buildings in the landscape from longer views and the need to ensure materials and scale are appropriate. The refurbished building will be better camouflaged than the existing. The materials proposed for the new agricultural building are welcomed.

In the important long views from the north west (Dunkery), the distance and context reduce the impact, which is assessed as Minor (as shown in the photomontage). I agree with this assessment.

4 Extension of the existing car park to accommodate up to 97 cars (currently 45)

It is proposed to extend the tarmac car park to accommodate up to 97 cars. Little specific reference is made in the LVIA to the new parking. The creation of a larger car park will impact upon the landscape character with a loss of pastoral ground cover and impacts upon natural topography and enclosure pattern.

I anticipate that the parking will largely be screened from wider viewpoints.

Mitigation

The applicant has not been advised to carry out substantial tree planting to screen the new development. In order to conserve the character of the landscape it is important that new buildings relate to the scale, materials, pattern and grain of the existing landscape. Introducing new features or elements in an area (currently characterised by pasture fields) would potentially detract from the character of the site and draw attention to the feature. While woodland has numerous benefits in the long term, in the establishment phase the change in the appearance of the planted field (tussocky grass, plastic tubes, “weedy” growth) can be detrimental to the appearance of the land. In this case the applicant has been advised to integrate new development using characteristic beech hedgebanks, particularly to the south of car park and refurbished building, and along the track to provide structure and integration into the landscape.

If the application is approved I would recommend that topsoil is retained and carefully stored and used at the top of the banks to help encourage root growth and tree establishment.

To the north of the existing building it is proposed to allow some standards to grow up. This will help break up the outline of the roof and soften the impact in longer views.

Conclusions

Overall, the proposals are substantial and will change the character and appearance of the application site as it is seen in the wider landscape. In terms of the individual elements, the proposal to demolish and rebuild a large section of the existing Shearwell building is likely to have a positive impact on the landscape at the site and on surrounding views into the site. The proposal to extend the car park is unlikely to have negative visual impacts. The proposals to construct a new access road can largely be mitigated across the length of the track but at the entrance the impacts will be adverse and significant. Finally, the proposed new agricultural building is considered to have an adverse visual impact in a number of views of the site, mainly due to the scale of the structure. The proposed hedgebanks help to mitigate these impacts. A smaller building or series of smaller buildings with broken outlines and roof lines is likely to be easier to integrate into the landscape.

To conclude, the scale of the proposals, and in particular the replacement agricultural building and the improved vehicular access, will result in adverse visual impacts, despite the proposals being carefully designed and landscaped to reduce their effect. It is acknowledged that the overall impact is restricted to a limited number of viewpoints and it will be necessary for the Committee to weigh up the scale and harm of the landscape change against other planning considerations in coming to its conclusions on the overall acceptability of the scheme.

Sarah Bryan, Head of Conservation and Access

19 October 2012

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EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK PLANNING COMMITTEE – Excerpt from Minutes of Planning Committee meeting on 6 November 2012

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

52. Application No. 6/8/12/105

Location: Putham Farm, Wheddon Cross, Minehead, Somerset

Proposal: Proposed re-development of the site to replace an existing agricultural building and workshop lean-to with a purpose built B1 office, research and development and light industry workspace (2,159m² gross external area), 40kw roof mounted solar photo voltaic array, change of use and extension of existing agricultural storage building to B1 light industry (371m² gross external area), extension of car park, erection of replacement agricultural building (1,758m² gross external area) and associated yard area, landscaping together with the provision of a new access drive (approximately 830m) from the B3224 to existing business building including crossing Public Bridleway No. WL 6/22 supplemented by an Environmental Statement received 18/05/12.

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning and Sustainable Development.

Public Question Time (1) Mrs Rachel Thomas (Exmoor Society); (2) Dr D Jeffray (Exmoor Society); (3) Mr David Croydon; (4) Mr George Trinkle; (5) Ms M Wilkinson; (6) Mr Richard Whittall; (7) Mr Eric Norman; (8) Mr Eric Clarbull (Cutcombe Parish Council); (9) Mr Richard Webber (Applicant)

The Committee's Consideration

This agenda item was chaired by Mr R C Edgell, Deputy Chairman of the Planning Committee, Mr R J Webber having declared a disclosable pecuniary interest and withdrawn from the meeting room.

The Head of Planning & Sustainable Development advised that technical issues relating to highways, drainage, ecology and the historic environment had been resolved to the satisfaction of the relevant statutory consultees, and it was now for Members to judge the weight to be attached to each of the relevant planning considerations including advice contained in the National Planning Policy Framework; Local Plan policies; farming justification; potential economic and employment benefits; and the compatibility of the application with National Park purposes, in particular its potential impact on the landscape. He further advised that had the application included a proposal for a smaller replacement agricultural building, Planning Officers would have recommended that it be approved. In relation to the application before the Committee, Officers considered the planning considerations to be balanced and therefore a recommendation had not been made.

During a lengthy debate, the need for Shearwell Data Ltd to be sited in proximity to the applicant's farming activities was questioned and it was suggested that the business might successfully relocate to an alternative site more suitable for a manufacturing and retail operation in terms of landscape setting, access arrangements and infrastructure. There was also concern about the impact on highway safety of the junction of the proposed new access track with the B3224.

In relation to the farming justification for the replacement agricultural building, it was questioned whether additional agricultural building space could be achieved through the utilisation of existing structures at the applicant's holding at Lower House Farm. It was also noted that farming practices on Exmoor had developed over time and continued to evolve; and that an independent report had concluded that the applicant had demonstrated a functional requirement for the building which relied on the current farming system adopted over the combined landholdings of Putham Farm and Lower House Farm. It was therefore suggested that any grant of planning consent should be

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subject to the signing of a legal agreement to tie the replacement agricultural building to this combined landholding. It was noted that without such an agreement, and were the larger part of the landholding at Lower House Farm to be separated from the land at Putham Farm, the size of the proposed agricultural building could not be justified in planning terms.

Taking account of Local Plan policies on employment and economic development, it was considered that the proposals would allow expansion of an established family business, with potential to achieve increased job opportunities in the greater Exmoor area. It was also noted that the local community as represented by the Parish Council supported the application.

In relation to the impact of the proposed development on the landscape, reductions of the eaves and ridge heights of the replacement agricultural building were welcomed; however it was questioned whether the application represented the best that could be achieved in terms of mitigation of landscape impact. It was noted that the report of the Head of Conservation and Access advised that the proposed redevelopment of existing buildings would be likely to have a positive landscape impact; that the proposed car park was unlikely to have a negative visual impact; and that the replacement agricultural building and access track would be likely to result in adverse visual impacts in a number of views of the site. The report's conclusion that the overall impact of the proposed development in the wider landscape would be restricted to a limited number of viewpoints was also noted.

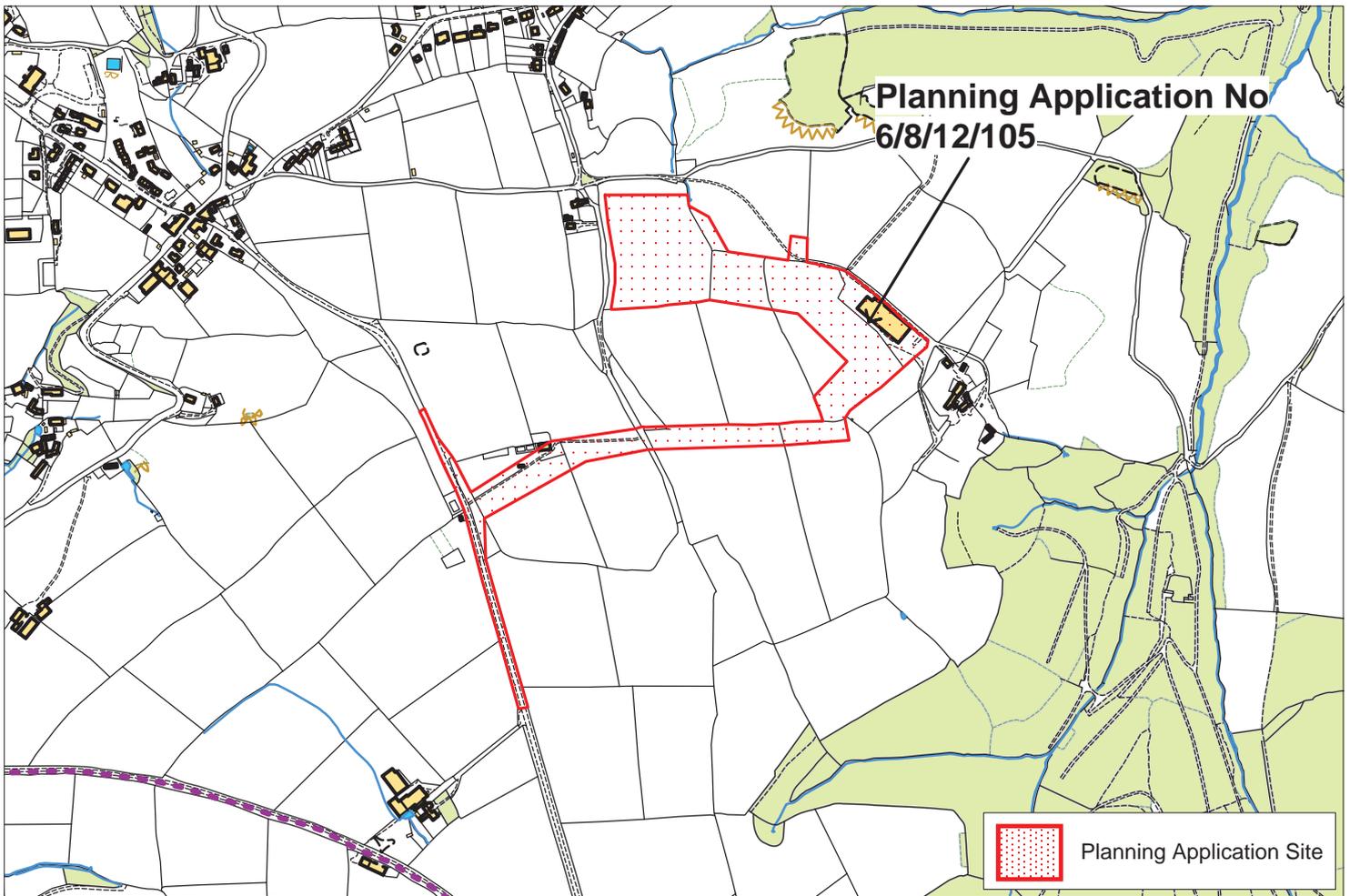
It was acknowledged that a development of the size and scale proposed would cause change to the character and appearance of the landscape. Having considered the application in detail, including photomontages of the proposed replacement agricultural building, the majority of Members considered that the landscape impact would not be unacceptable or of such a degree that it would violate the first purpose of the National Park to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.

A motion to refuse planning consent was defeated. A motion to grant planning consent subject to the signing of a legal agreement to tie the replacement agricultural building to the applicant's wider landholding at Putham Farm and Lower House Farm was carried by a majority.

RESOLVED:

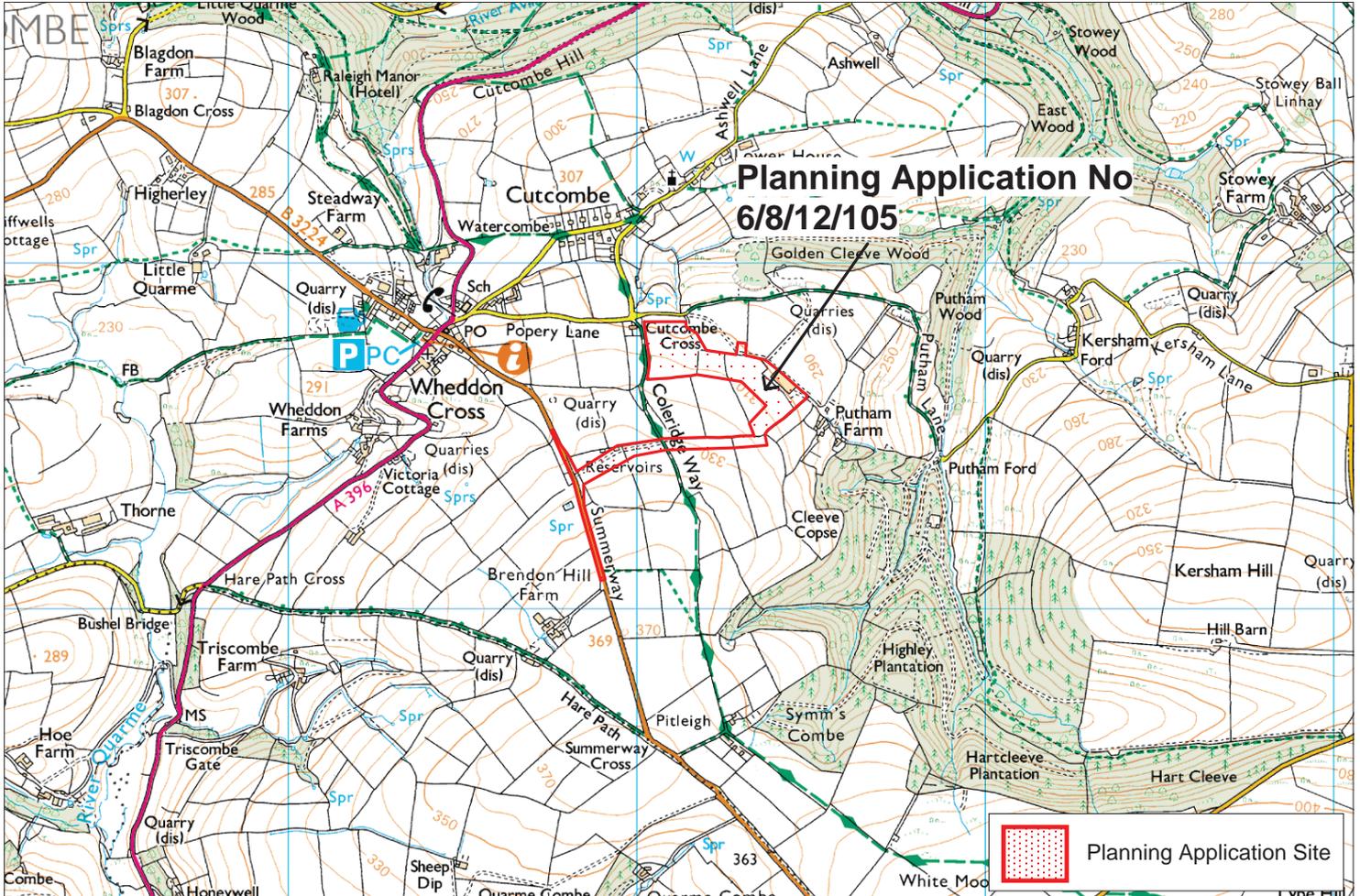
- (1) To grant planning consent subject to the signing of a S106 legal agreement to tie the replacement agricultural building to the applicant's wider landholding at Putham Farm and Lower House Farm and subject also to the conditions set out in Annex 4 of the report.
- (2) Following receipt of any additional information, to delegate amendment of the conditions set out in Annex 4 of the report to the Chief Executive.

SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR GRANTING PLANNING PERMISSION: The Local Planning Authority, having regard to all planning considerations material to the determination of this application, including particularly landscape, highway network and safety, amenities of neighbours, economic circumstances, agricultural justification, ecology, archaeology, pollution, surface water, design, materials, layout, lighting and crime issues, and all consultations and representations made in connection with the application, conclude that the proposals accord with the provisions of the Development Plan as applicable to it and there are no material planning considerations that justify its refusal.



Site Map
1:10000

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Overview Map
1:20000

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