
Ightham Ightham	557667 155361	8 May 2013	TM/13/01382/FL
---------------------------	----------------------	-------------------	-----------------------

Proposal:	Erection of new agricultural/nursery dwelling and demolition of existing buildings
Location:	Crown Point Nursery Sevenoaks Road Ightham Sevenoaks Kent TN15 0HB
Applicant:	Reuthe's Nursery

1. Description:

- 1.1 Members may recall that this application was previously reported to Area 2 Planning Committee on 30 October 2013. At that meeting, the Committee resolved to defer consideration pending further information being submitted by the applicant to support its case of justification for the new agricultural/nursery workers dwelling.
- 1.2 A "Fact Sheet" has been submitted by the applicant to summarise what it considers to be the key issues and to address the concerns raised at A2PC on 30 October 2013. A summary of the key information submitted is as follows:
- Mr & Mrs Tomlin will occupy the new dwelling to manage the improvements they are so keen to implement. They have stated that living on site is essential if Reuthe's Nursery is to flourish – they are very enthusiastic to make Reuthe's the leading Rhododendron nursery in the UK, others have closed and there is a real opportunity to take it to new levels. Mr & Mrs Tomlin have stated that they have the option to lease their present home (in Edenbridge) to a former employee;
 - The new dwelling provides a nursery office where customers can be met and a staff welfare area can be provided;
 - Problems in the past have largely been due to no on-site supervision. These problems have included: electricity failure due to 'tripping'; irrigation failure due to water or electric failures; excess bills due to vandalism/leaks (example water bills of £2,570 whereas normally it would cost around £1,000); plant vandalism (particularly with valuable species); snow damage on greenhouses from sudden snow falls during recent winters; and arson (Chelsea exhibits were burnt by arsonists in 2007);
 - Propagation is vital – the owners do this personally and re-iterate the need to live on site to do this successfully;
 - Track record of the owners (Mr & Mrs Tomlin) – Mr Tomlin worked at Reuthe's Keston Nursery with two generations of the Reuthe family, has 30 years experience at Director level of nursery management, was a Member of the Royal Horticultural Society, Rhododendron and Camellia Committee from

1995-2010, from 2010 to present is a Committee Member of the new RHS Rhododendron and Camellia Magnolia Committee and a Judge and Steward at RHS shows. Mrs Tomlin has 30 years experience at Director or Partner level of nursery management dealing with all aspects of sales and accounts;

- Reuthes Nursery is profitable – figures have been provided demonstrating a net profit in 2013 of £24,530 and 2012 of £13,063.
- Mr & Mrs Tomlin acquired Reuthe's Nursery in 1992 when sufficient funds were accumulated to build a dwelling but the application was refused under reference TM/99/01792/OA. The Reuthes company funds were then put into another property in the West Country and that has now been sold at £143,000. This is company capital which is available for Reuthes Nursery; and
- Additional projected turnover (5 year business plan) will increase due to on-site propagation. In Year 1 this is estimated to be £23,250 and by Year 5 it is estimated to be £36,000. This additional income will not all be profit, but it is expected that approximately 35 – 40% of this will be profit.

1.3 I have included a copy of the previous Committee report and Supplementary Report as an Annex. Whilst additional information has been provided by the applicant, the proposals themselves remain unaltered.

2. Determining Issues:

- 2.1 I note the further "Fact Sheet" information submitted by the applicant in response to the concerns raised during the Area 2 Planning Committee on 30 October 2013. I understand the concerns that Members expressed at the previous meeting, however there is nothing in the additional information now submitted that could lead me to alter my original recommendation. If anything, this additional information can be seen as strengthening the applicant's case. There is some further explanation as to why the applicants consider the provision of residential accommodation to be "essential", in the terms set out in NPPF paragraph 55. This appears to have been the principal question in Members' minds at the previous meeting.
- 2.2 However, Members should note that there has always been some degree of doubt as to the existing level of profit (as outlined in paragraph 1.2 above) which relates solely to Crown Point Nursery, as opposed to the wider Reuthe's Nursery business which also covers the owner's existing nursery in Edenbridge. Therefore, I consider that limited weight should be given to the detailed financial background that has now been provided in the determination of this application.
- 2.3 It should be noted that the original recommendation (as set out in my original report which can be found in the Annex) was altered to include the requirement for the applicant to enter into a satisfactory Planning Obligation (either a legal agreement or unilateral undertaking) to tie the occupation of the new dwelling to

the operation of the agricultural unit (Crown Point Nursery). This approach is still necessary and would be consistent with that adopted by the Borough Council in relation to other recent permissions granted for agricultural workers' dwellings of a similar nature in this locality in recent years.

2.4 I therefore present the following recommendation as set out below.

3. Recommendation:

3.1 **Grant Planning Permission** as detailed by the plans and other documentation as set out in paragraph 7.1 of my original report (see Annex), subject to:

- The applicant entering into a satisfactory Planning Obligation (either a legal agreement or unilateral undertaking) to tie the occupation of the new dwelling to the operation of the agricultural unit (Crown Point Nursery) and
- The conditions as set out in my original report (see Annex)

Contact: Julian Moat