

Report to	<b>Planning Committee</b>
Date	<b>15 March 2012</b>
By	<b>Director of Planning</b>
Local Authority	<b>Wealden District Council</b>
Application Number	<b>NP/2011/0026/F</b>
Application	<b>Proposed new farm office and staff facilities</b>
Address	<b>Land adjacent to Rathfinny Lodge, Rathfinny Farm, Alfriston BN26 5TU</b>
Purpose of Report	<b>The application is reported to Committee for a decision.</b>

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**Recommendation: that planning permission consent is granted for the reason and subject to the conditions set out in paragraph 9.1 of this report**

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## **1. Site Description**

- 1.1 The Rathfinny Estate is located to the south east of Alfriston on the south facing slopes of the chalk outcrop which rises gently up from the coast at Seaford to form a landscape of rolling arable fields with close cropped grassland along the ridges and pockets of woodland along the slopes. The Cuckmere cuts through the chalk just to the east of the Estate and there are views out from most parts of the land across the Cuckmere River valley to the sea. The Estate totals some 240 hectares currently operated as an arable farm.
- 1.2 The Estate is accessed by a steeply rising concrete track from the road leading out of Alfriston. The track flattens out as it approaches the first building on the Estate, a brick built bungalow known as Windy Ridge which has an agricultural occupancy condition and has recently been extended and altered and oak cladded. Immediately to the west is a grassed area with native trees and hedgerow to the north and west and a more formal hedge separating it from the front garden area and drive of the bungalow. In front is a lay-by parking area next to the access track that leads down to another red brick dwelling on the estate known as Rathfinny Lodge (and another dwelling in separate ownership) and then on to a group of functional farm buildings and beyond them a ruined flint barn and courtyard.

## **2. Relevant Planning History**

- 2.1 76/2848 outline application for agriculture workers dwelling permitted 06.12.76 with reserved matters application permitted 28.07.77
- 2.2 2011/0025 enhancements and alterations to include external oak cladding, canopy and photovoltaic panels permitted 16.08.11
- 2.3 T2011/0064 temporary office building permitted 01.11.11 for a temporary period expiring on 1 August 2012
- 2.4 NP/11/0093 Winery and associated car parking and turning areas; addition of water storage and treatment tanks, solar array (165 panels) plus additional landscaping permitted 26.01.12

## **3. Proposal**

- 3.1 The overall proposal is for the farm to become a vineyard totalling some 160 hectares with associated winery buildings for making, bottling and storing sparkling and still wine. A master-plan has been submitted setting out the planting programme over the next 10 years

and the buildings that would be needed to support the development of the winery business. These include:

- Refurbishment of the dwelling subject to the agricultural occupancy condition (see 2.2 above)
  - A replacement of the other dwelling which has unrestricted occupancy (application to be made November 2011)
  - The office facilities/secure parking area the subject of this application and a temporary office building in the interim (see para 2.3 above)
  - 2 new buildings for making the wine (application for first building permitted 26.01.12; application for second building to be submitted June 2014)
  - Conversion of the existing grain store and grain dryer for bottling and storage of wine (application to be submitted June 2015).
  - Provision of a new building to provide bunk accommodation for up to 45 on-site seasonal workers and a housekeeper (application to be submitted December 2011).
  - An improved access to the site (application to be submitted November 2011).
- 3.2 A business plan has also been submitted to support the application. If the vineyard develops to its full potential it would produce in excess of 1,000,000 bottles of, mainly sparkling, wine a year storing up to 3,000,000 bottles on site at any one time.
- 3.3 Currently no vines have been planted on the site, though the first phase of planting is scheduled for spring 2012 with the vines currently being grown in Germany. Some wind break trees have been planted to the areas where the first 20 hectares of vines are to be planted.
- 3.4 This application seeks full planning permission for an estate office and garaging facilities for estate vehicles. The office is proposed to be located next to the bungalow occupied by the farm manager to capitalise on the views across the Cuckmere Valley to the sea which is to be used to 'brand' and promote the winery business and for security in that visitors are intercepted before they go too far onto the site. The office is for the day to day running of the estate as well as the wider publicity and marketing related to the sale of the wine produced in the winery. It would include a conference and meeting room.
- 3.5 The application was first considered by Wealden District Council planning committee on 18 August 2011 when it was deferred pending submission of a master plan showing all development proposed to support the vineyard enterprise. When this master plan was submitted a direction was served by the SDNPA as the development in its entirety was considered to have the potential to impact significantly on the South Downs National Park. The building was originally located away from the bungalow on the adjacent raised grassed area. It was cut into the hill side and designed in a contemporary style with a balcony and terrace and undercroft parking. The proposal as submitted was considered to be obtrusive in the landscape because of its location apart from the other buildings on the estate, the way it was cut into the landscape, the inappropriate design and use of materials, the prominence of the parking, and the potential for light pollution.
- 3.6 Following an extensive period of negotiation the proposal has been significantly amended. The building is now relocated and realigned so it appears to be associated with the existing bungalow and is traditional in design to reflect that relationship. It would be a single storey building with a maximum height to the ridge of 4.7 metres, measure 11.22 m x 8 m externally with a floorspace of 90 m<sup>2</sup> and have a hipped roof tiled to match the bungalow and be timber clad in oak. A canopy is proposed on the southern elevation to reduce solar gain. The existing hedge and retaining wall would be retained and further landscaping is proposed to soften the appearance of the building. Glazing on the south elevation would be anti-reflective. Disabled access would be via a ramp into the building. Short term visitor and disabled parking would be at the front on a grass-crete surface.
- 3.7 The application has been submitted with a Design and Access Statement, Ecology Report and Landscaping Scheme.

#### 4. Consultations

4.1 **Environment Agency:** no comment

4.2 **Highway Authority:** no objection

4.3 **Southern Water:** no objection

4.4 **East Sussex County Council:** Condition required to secure a programme of archaeological works as the site is located within an area of prehistoric activity, including settlement areas, human burials and an extensive field system.

4.5 **Wealden District Council:** The application was considered by the Planning Committee South meeting held on 18 August 2011 when it was resolved to defer determination to enable the following:

- Submission of a master plan;
- Submission of a more detailed business plan to enable officers to make a full assessment of the visual impacts and appropriateness of the design, scale in relation to the functional need, traffic impact and impact on the SDNPA;
- Officers to obtain the views of the SDNPA design officer regarding what form and design of the office building would be acceptable.

4.6 **Waste Authority:** Provision would need to be made for the storage of waste on the site and access for a licensed waste disposal operator

4.7 **Alfriston Parish Council:** support

4.8 Seaford Town Council: **no objection**

#### 5. Planning Policy Context

5.1 The following national policy documents are relevant to this application:

PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development  
PPS4 Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth  
PPS5 Planning for the Historic Environment  
PPS7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas  
PPS9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation  
PPG13 Transport  
PPS25: Development and Flood Risk.

5.2 Applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The statutory development plan in this area in the South East Plan and the Wealden Local Plan 1998.

5.3 The South East Plan was adopted by the Secretary of State on 6th May 2009. The Coalition Government's revocation of the Plan in July 2010 has been found to be unlawful so the Plan remains part of the development plan at this time but the intention to revoke could be a material consideration. The following policies are relevant to this application:

C2: The South Downs - states that the purposes of designation should be a material consideration in the making of any planning decision that would affect it.

CC1: Sustainable development – states that the physical and natural environment of the south east is conserved and enhanced

CC4 Sustainable Design and Construction

CC6: Sustainable Communities and Character of the environment – requires new development to respect the character and distinctiveness of landscapes and use innovative design to create a sense of place.

SP3: Urban Focus and Urban Renaissance – states that the prime focus for development in the South East should be in urban areas.

NRM5 Conservation and Improvement of Biodiversity

T4 ParkingW2 Sustainable Design, Construction and Demolition

## C4 Landscape and Countryside Management

### BE6 Management of the Historic Environment

5.4 Wealden District Council is in the process of preparing its Local Development Framework, which would be jointly adopted by the South Downs National Park Authority until our own Core Strategy and Policies are in place. Certain policies of the adopted Local Plan have been 'saved' via Direction of the Secretary of State dated 25 September and these have essentially been inherited by the South Downs National Park Authority as part of the Development Plan for that part of the National Park which lies within Wealden District Council. Wealden Local Plan policies relevant to this application are:

GD2 - development outside settlement boundaries

EN1 - sustainable development

EN2 – maintaining settlement patterns

EN12 – retention of trees

EN14 – landscaping

EN25 - archaeology

EN27 – layout and design

EN29 – light pollution

EN28 – disabled access

CS2 – surface and foul water drainage

DC3 – new farm buildings

TR3 – traffic, access and public transport

TR16 – car parking

5.5 In December 2005 Wealden District Council adopted an interim guide for development control, the Non Statutory Wealden Local Plan. This interim document refreshed certain policies of the Wealden Local Plan, in line with national guidance, and enabled housing allocations to be made to meet the 5 year housing land requirements. Appeals have attributed material weight to this non statutory document. Relevant policies are:

GD2 - development outside settlement boundaries

BE1 – design

BE1 – design for people with mobility difficulties

DC3 - new farm buildings

NE15 – retention of trees

CS5 – surface water drainage

TR5 - parking

5.6 Under the provisions of saved policies EN1 and EN27 of the adopted Wealden Local Plan, the Council has also formally adopted the Wealden Design Guide, November 2008, as a Supplementary Planning Document. Part 5 of Chapter 5 is relevant to consideration of this application.

## 6. National Park Purposes

6.1 The two statutory purposes of the SDNP designation are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of their areas;
- To promote opportunities for the public understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of their areas.

If there is a conflict between these two purposes, conservation takes precedence. There is also a duty to foster the economic and social well being of the local community in pursuit of these purposes. Government policy relating to national parks set out in PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas and Circular 20/10 is that they have the highest status of protection in relation to natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and their conservation and enhancement must, therefore, be given great weight in development control decisions.

## **7. Planning Assessment**

- 7.1 Policy DC 3 of Wealden District Local Plan 3 requires farm offices to be reasonably necessary for the purposes of the holding and be clearly designed for such a use, to be integrated with existing structures as far as possible, and to have a siting, design and external appearance which are not intrusive in the landscape. Special mention is made of the need to take particular care in protected landscapes.
- 7.2 The site is within one of the winding dry valleys that are a key landscape characteristic of this location and the western areas of the estate are within the more remote and undeveloped area of the Firlie and Bishopstone Downs area of the East Sussex County Council Landscape Assessment. In the absence of any significant built form within the valley it contributes strongly to the Natural Beauty of the National Park and is deemed sensitive to any new development.
- 7.3 The site is prominent from a number of public vantage points within the SDNP, specifically the local footpath network to the south and the Alfriston/Seaford Road. The topography allows direct views into the site from the south and from the highly important landscape feature of High and Over identified as such within the East Sussex County Council Landscape Assessment. From these viewpoints the buildings on the Estate are seen in 4 separate locations, these being the group of functional farm buildings, the ruined flint barn, and the red brick dwelling known as Rathfinney Lodge. The bungalow, Windy Ridge, next to which the office is proposed to be sited, is the least prominent being furthest to the west and not in the direct line of sight of stationary receptors at the viewpoints referred to above.
- 7.4 The building as now proposed is modest in appearance and takes its design context from the adjacent bungalow so that it appears subservient in the landscape. Most views of this building next to the existing bungalow would be oblique or screened. It is only from immediately south in the High and Over car park that the building would be seen directly. From this viewpoint it would be well below the skyline and there would be trees rising behind it above the roofline so with oak cladding that had silvered with age and a tiled hipped roof it would be 'read' against the existing building and would not appear obtrusive. As such the proposed location is considered to be the most appropriate and the design and materials acceptable particularly in the context of the proposal to clad the adjacent bungalow with oak panels which has recently been granted planning permission.
- 7.5 There are no highway objections and the building is some distance from the nearest residence therefore there are no amenity issues. There are no protected species affected by the proposed development so there would be no impact on nature conservation interests or biodiversity. There is potential for archaeological interest but this could be mitigated by condition.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 Although a new farm office would normally be grouped with the other functional farm buildings on a holding, in view of the particular circumstances relating to this type of agricultural development and the reduced impact on the landscape, a location next to the existing bungalow is acceptable in this case. The design and materials are appropriate to the landscape context and the provision of office facilities would support the agricultural use of the land, and as such the national park duty to promote the economic well being of the community in this area, whilst conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape as required by the first purpose of designation.

## **9. Recommendation**

- 9.1 It is recommended that planning permission be granted for the following reason:
1. The office is reasonably necessary to support the development of a winery on the land and the location, design and materials are appropriate to the landscape context. As such the development complies with Policies C2 of the South East Plan and Policy DC3 of the Wealden Local Plan.

Subject to the following conditions:

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

Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

2. No development shall take place until the developer has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work, in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation which has been submitted to and approved by the South Downs National Park Authority in writing.

The scheme of investigation shall include an assessment of significance and research questions; and:

- a) The programme and methodology of site investigation and recording
- b) The programme for post investigation assessment
- c) Provision to be made for analysis of the site investigation and recording
- d) Provision to be made for publication and dissemination of the analysis and records of the site investigation
- e) Provision to be made for archive deposition of the analysis and records of the site investigation
- f) Nomination of a competent person or persons/organisation to undertake the works set out within the Written Scheme of Investigation.

Reason: To ensure that the archaeological and historical interest of structures on the site is safeguarded and recorded to comply with Policy EN25 of the Wealden Local Plan.

3. The building hereby permitted shall not be brought into use until the site investigation and post investigation assessment has been completed in accordance with the programme set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation approved under condition 2 and the provision made for analysis, publication and dissemination of results and archive deposition has been secured.

Reason: To ensure that the archaeological and historical interest of the site is safeguarded and recorded to comply with Policy EN25 of the Wealden Local Plan.

4. Any historic or archaeological features not previously identified which are revealed when carrying out the development hereby permitted shall be retained in-situ and reported to the South Downs National Park Authority in writing within 5 working days. Works shall be halted in the area/part of the building affected until provision has been made for the retention and/or recording in accordance with details submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure that the archaeological and historical interest of structures on the site is safeguarded and recorded to comply with Policy EN25 of the Wealden Local Plan.

5. In the next planting season following commencement of the building works the proposed landscaping shall be implemented in full in accordance with a maintenance programme submitted to and approved by the SDNPA in writing and any plants that die or are removed within the first 5 years shall be replaced with plants of the same species and size.

Reason: To enhance the appearance of the development and its integration into the landscape of the SDNPA and to enhance biodiversity to comply with Policies DC3, EN14, EN27 and EN12 of the Wealden Local Plan.

6. Before development commences details, including samples, of all roofing and facing materials, materials to be used for windows and doors, and any means of enclosure or retaining walling shall be submitted to and approved by the South Downs National Park Authority in writing. The development shall be constructed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure adequate provision for disabled access to comply with Policy EN28 of the Wealden Local Plan.

7. Before development commences a scheme for the prevention of light pollution from the office and details of any external lighting shall be submitted to and approved by the South Downs National Park Authority in writing. The approved scheme and details shall be implemented as approved from when the building is first brought into use.

Reason: To ensure prevent light pollution in this sensitive and remote area of the SDNP to comply with Policy ENV29 of the Wealden Local Plan.

8. Before development commences details of the measures for disposing of surface water and foul drainage shall be submitted to and approved by the South Downs National Park Authority in writing. The approved measures shall be implemented in full before the building hereby permitted is first brought into use.

Reason: To ensure adequate measures are in place to dispose of surface water and foul drainage and to comply with Policy CS2 of the Wealden Local Plan.

9. Before development commences details of the facilities to be provided for storage of refuse shall be submitted to and approved by the South Downs National Park Authority in writing. The approved facilities shall be provided before the building hereby permitted is first brought into use thereafter retained .

Reason: To ensure adequate measures are in place to store refuse in the interests of the amenity of the area and to comply with Policy DC3 of the Wealden Local Plan.

## **9 Crime and Disorder Implications**

- 9.1 It is considered that the proposal does not raise any crime and disorder implications.

## **10 Human Rights Implications**

- 10.1 This planning application has been considered in light of statute and case law and any interference with an individual's human rights is considered to be proportionate to the aims sought to be realised.

## **12. Equalities Act 2010**

- 12.1 Due regard, where relevant, has been taken to the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equalities Act 2010.

### **TIM SLANEY Director of Planning**

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Appendices 1.location map  
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#### Background Documents

Letters of representation from members of the public  
Applicant's Masterplan and Business Plan  
Observations of Highway Authority and Southern Water  
Observations of East Sussex County Council, Wealden District Council, Alfriston Parish Council and PPS1, PPS3, PPS4, PPS5, PPS7, PPS9, PPG13  
Circular 20/010  
Wealden District Local Plan 1998  
South East Plan 2009

