

**Planning Committee:** 31 March 2004  
**Application No:** W20040349

**Principal Item Number:** 05

**Town/Parish Council:** Stoneleigh

**Registration Date:** 26/02/2004

**Expiry Date:** 22/04/2004

**Case Officer:** Martin Haslett  
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**NFU, National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh Park, Stoneleigh.**  
New office building and associated external works. (Revised Application).  
FOR National Farmers Union

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### **SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS**

**Parish Council:** objection-'Inappropriate development in green belt area.'

**Neighbours:** one resident of Ashow has written to object, on grounds of green belt, development inappropriate for the area.

**English Heritage:** no objection to the revised drawings. 'Given the curvature and elongation of the building's elevations, its relatively low height and the slight fall in ground levels to the north we do not now consider that the new office block will have a significant impact on the historic park or the setting of the Abbey itself. The careful selection of facing, glazing and roofing materials will assist the mitigation of the building's impact. The location of the car parking within the showground to the north of the new building and the proposal for landscaping immediately around the offices will also help to reduce its impact on the more sensitive parkland.... It is clear, from both site inspection and examination of the landscape assessment material... that the new building will nonetheless be visible from the historic park. This will be most obvious from the south west corner of the site where the existing planting is thinnest. We understand that the applicant is willing to reinforce this planting both here and generally along the boundary of the park. This might be the time to address the now permanent division of the landscape between the remaining historic park and the showground and establish a new formal boundary with an appropriate selection of parkland hedgerow species.....' 'English Heritage suggest that if your Council is minded to grant planning permission for this development it should be subject to stringent conditions covering the choice of materials, colour of glazing and roofing materials of the new building. We also consider that there should be very full conditions covering landscaping in the immediate vicinity of the new building as well as planting of semi-mature specimens to give instant height where appropriate and for the creation of a parkland boundary between the application site and the historic park. A management framework to provide for the long term upkeep of the landscaping should also be a condition of any permission'.

**WCC(Ecology):** no objection, subject to condition on protection of trees, bat and bird notes.

**WCC(Highways):** no objection in principle, detailed comments awaited.

**WCC(Structure Plan):** note that whilst the development is in the green belt in a location not easily served by public transport, the location of the NFU headquarters on this site does have logic in the interests of enhancing what is the centre for British farming as recognised in the planning permission for the Showground back in 1980. They also note the economic and social benefits of relocation of a prestigious national institution to Warwickshire from the south - east. They therefore raise no objections on structure plan policy grounds.

**WCC(Archaeology):** no objection.

**Environment Agency:** no objection, subject to conditions on facilities for the disposal of foul and surface water, the storage of oils, fuels and chemicals and provision of an oil interceptor. (Comments on application W20031965- comments on current application awaited.)

**CPRE:** objection, on grounds of green belt and special landscape area, development should only be permitted in 'very special circumstances', encroachment on the setting of Stoneleigh Abbey, proposal is premature when the district council is considering a development brief for the site and policy is under review in the draft local plan, unacceptable pressure on the road network, and in view of inadequate public transport services the proposal is unsustainable, Environmental Impact Assessment should be requested, sub-let area should be related to agriculture.

## **RELEVANT POLICIES**

(DW) C1 - Conservation of the Landscape (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)  
(DW) EMP9 - National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)  
(DW) ENV12 - Protection of the Setting of Listed Buildings (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)  
(DW) ENV27 - Ecological Development (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)  
(DW) ENV3 - Development Principles (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)  
(DW) C2 - Diversification of the Rural Economy (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)  
(DW) C8 - Special Landscape Areas (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)  
(DW) ENV1 - Definition of the Green Belt (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)  
(DW) ENV18 - Historic Parks and Gardens (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)  
DP6 - Access (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)  
DP7 - Traffic Generation (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)  
DP8 - Parking (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)  
DP11 - Drainage (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)  
DP1 - Layout and Design (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)  
DP3 - Natural Environment (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)  
DP3 - Natural Environment (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)  
DP2 - Amenity (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)  
DAP1 - Protecting the Green Belt (Warwick District 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)  
DAP6 - Protection of Listed Buildings (Warwick District 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)  
DAP13 - Protecting Historic Parks and Gardens (Warwick District 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)  
SSP2 - Major Developed Sites (Warwick District 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)  
SSP3 - Stoneleigh Park (Warwick District 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)  
RAP7 - Directing New Employment (Warwick District 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)  
The NAC and its future were the subject of a draft policy produced in 2003 and reported to Planning Committee on 18 June 2003. The Brief set out proposals for the Open Countryside Initiative which was approved for the purposes of public consultation. Subsequently, the ideas set out in that Brief have come to form part of the emerging local plan.

## **PLANNING HISTORY**

This piece of land does not have any specific planning history, although it lies within the confines of Stoneleigh Park and closely adjoins built-up parts of the National Agricultural Centre.

The site was the subject of one previous application, in December 2003, for development very similar to that now proposed, but on a smaller site, with the building's long axis close to and parallel with the western boundary of the site, adjoining the grounds of Stoneleigh Abbey. This revised application has been submitted to meet the concerns of English Heritage, regarding the setting of Stoneleigh Abbey, a grade I listed building.

## **KEY ISSUES**

### **The Site and its Location**

The land adjoins the western boundary of Stoneleigh Park and is approached through the National Agricultural Centre. The major part of the site is presently a formal park, with lawns and planted borders. Within this park, there is a line of major mature oak and cedar trees which are an important visual feature of the area. To the east there are the buildings of Stoneleigh Park, whilst to the west the site boundary is co-terminus with the boundary fencing and hedging of the grounds of Stoneleigh Abbey. The Abbey itself lies only about 250 metres away and the Stables are at about half that distance.

### **Details of the Development**

It is proposed to construct an office building, curved in shape, two storeys high (with a ridge height of a maximum of 11.7m). The building would be 105m long, of contemporary design, with elevations of stone and glass and a slate roof. A brise soleil on the south west elevation would reduce solar gain and emphasise the contemporary design of the building.

Externally there would be 106 parking spaces set out in a semi-circular pattern to reflect the ground plan of the building. The existing mature trees would be retained and would form an important part of the setting of the building. Access would be provided through the existing NAC site. The building is proposed to be the National Headquarters of the NFU which wishes to relocate from its original headquarters in London.

### **Assessment**

The issues to be considered are the principle of the scheme, given its location within the green belt and special landscape area, the impact of the proposals on the setting of Stoneleigh Abbey and the traffic implications.

Policy EMP9 of the adopted Warwick District Local Plan allows for development at the NAC/Stoneleigh Park and sets out four criteria for judging proposals. Three of these requirements are clearly met, in that the proposals are related to the promotion of agriculture, they harmonise with and minimise impact on the special landscape area, and their impact on the local highway network can be accommodated to the satisfaction of the highway authority.

The remaining issue concerns green belt policy. Although this is not a category of development that would normally be acceptable in green belt areas, its location within an established showground with significant built development would minimise any additional

impact on the openness of the green belt and accordingly I consider the degree of harm to the openness of the green belt to be acceptable.

It is of note that the form of development proposed also accords generally with the evolving concept of the Open Countryside initiative, upon which initial consultation took place during 2003. The concept, to respond to fundamental changes in agriculture and the rural economy is not yet finalised, though policy SSP3 of the emerging local plan allows for the development of the ideas and their implementation to form a revitalised showground. However, as the local plan is only at its early stages, it is not possible to give any more than very limited weight to this policy and the application falls to be determined in the context of the existing policy, with which it largely complies.

The second major issue is that of the impact of the proposals on the setting of the listed buildings. This issue has been examined in some detail by English Heritage and their discussions have resulted in the amended application which has moved the building further from the boundary and thereby reduced its impact upon Stoneleigh Abbey. The comments of English Heritage have been quoted at some length in an earlier section of this report and it is clear from these that they consider the amended proposal satisfactory, subject to conditions.

The boundary between the showground and the Abbey is presently comparatively open and English Heritage's suggestion that it be strengthened is helpful. The result in the long term could be an improvement in the setting of the listed buildings. I agree with these conclusions.

The remaining issue is that of traffic. The highway authority has indicated that there is no objection in principle to the proposals but that a green transport plan will be required so as to ensure that sustainable transport modes are promoted by the occupiers of the new building.

In conclusion, I consider that the proposals are ones which can be supported, but the application is a departure from the Development Plan and will therefore need to be referred to the Secretary of State. The proposals need to be supported by a legal agreement which would ensure that uses of all parts of the building are related to agriculture, (not least since part of the building may be sub-let to another user) and that a green travel plan is promoted.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

That permission be GRANTED, subject to conditions on use, materials, landscaping (including long-term upkeep), details of disposal of foul and surface water, storage of oil and chemicals, provision of oil interceptor, bat and bird notes; after completion of a legal agreement on use and green travel and reference to the Secretary of State as a departure from the development plan.

### **REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION**

The proposal is considered to comply with the following policies:

(DW) C1 - Conservation of the Landscape (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) EMP9 - National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) ENV12 - Protection of the Setting of Listed Buildings (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) ENV27 - Ecological Development (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) ENV3 - Development Principles (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

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