

Planning Department,
South Downs National Park Authority
South Downs Centre
North Street
Midhurst
West Sussex
GU29 9DH

11th April 2022

Dear Sir/Madam,

Proposed Temporary Modular Prototype Residential Dwelling Structure at Merryfield Farm, Soames Lane, Ropley, Alresford, Hampshire, SO24 0HF

On behalf of the Applicant, Easi-Space Limited, we hereby submit a planning application for *“Erection of a sustainable modular prototype residential dwelling for a temporary period”* at Merryfield Farm, Soames Lane, Ropley, Alresford, Hampshire, SO24 0HF.

The following has been submitted with the application

- Application Form (submitted via the Planning Portal)
- Copy of Article 13 Notice (Certificate B)
- Site Location Plan/Block Plan (Figure 1)
- Floor plan drawing for 5 Bedroom Dwelling Prototype, prepared by Easi space
- Elevational Drawing for 5 Bedroom Dwelling Prototype, prepared by Easi space

The application fee will be paid under separate cover.

Introduction, Site and Proposals

Easi-space Limited are proposing to erect a prototype of a modular 5 bedroom residential dwelling and lay it on the existing concrete pad for a temporary period



as a demonstrator product at Merryfield Farm. They are seeking permission to erect and keep the structure on site for not more than 24 months, which will allow them sufficient time to test as well as showcase their innovations as regards to the house-building construction process to prospective customers.

The residential dwelling prototype is a modular structure. It will be clad in dark (dark grey or black) timber cladding, with some other wood elements around the fenestration. It measures some 13m x 11m, and it will be up to 6.85m at eaves height, with a single pitched roof being 9.850m tall.

It is demonstrator model of the type that has been developed by Easi-space at customer sites and which will be manufactured in pieces and installed on site. It will not be attached to the ground and so it does not have a degree of permanence and physical attachment. This is a trademark process of Easi-space, who have developed other innovative systems to reduce the size of materials required for construction to these more sustainable, and now wishes to apply these methods to residential construction.

The house will be erected on the existing concrete pad on site, which was previously used to test structures, etc. It is located adjacent to their existing exhibition centre and client meeting room, and very close to their existing research and development (R&D) centre that is at Merryfield Farm. It is set within the farm complex, and mostly screened from the public right of way along Soames Lane by the existing converted agricultural barns. The site already benefits from recent hedge and other planting, and this will screen some of the structure from wider views as well.

The house designs and construction methods are highly sustainable, in line with Easi-space's operating ethos to increase safety, reduce financial risk, and enable zero waste whilst reducing carbon and environment impact of the built environment by developing and testing manufacture and assembly systems. The dwelling will meet passive housing standards, in that they aim to be carbon neutral in both construction and operation. If they can roll out their construction methods on a wider scale, this will help the developers of housing in the UK better respond simultaneously to the internationally important climate emergency and the Government's challenge to produce more homes, at affordable prices.

It is noted that the South Downs National Park Authority has adopted a Supplementary Planning Document which relates to Sustainable Construction, and the Local Planning Authority is clearly aware of the need to resolve



construction methods, and the operational nature of dwellings, so they are more efficient. Easi-spaces residential dwelling designs will support this goal.

Planning History

Easi-space Limited has been operating out of converted redundant agricultural barns at Merryfield Farm for several years. This includes the conversion a barn for their main R&D facility (Planning Permission ref: SDNP/19/01106/CND. This barn is referred to as Barn 5/Rams View). A redundant barn and brick building was converted for use as their ancillary demonstration/exhibition centre and client meeting room (Planning Permission Ref: SDNP/19/00012/FUL. This barn is referred to as Barn 3). Most recently, a further redundant barn was converted for the purposes of ancillary storage of the manufactured materials (Planning Permission Ref: SDNP/21/00168/FUL. This barn is referred to as Barn 2).

Most relevant, planning permission was granted for the erection of a temporary structure for the purposes of conducting external testing for a period not more than 24 months (Planning Permission Ref: SDNP/19/00012/FUL, as amended by SDNP/20/01126/CND). That temporary structure was fully-tested, and the results employed by Easi-space as part of their mission to enhance sustainability credentials of the construction and development industries. The structures were much longer and significantly taller (at three stories) than what is being proposed now.

Whether the proposals are ‘Development’ that requires planning permission?

The temporary nature of the proposals raises questions as to whether the proposals fall within the statutory definition of ‘development’, and whether planning permission is in fact required.

It is noted that the officer stated in the 2019 Delegated Report associated with the original application Ref: SDNP/19/00012/FUL that, in relation to Easi-space’s previous temporary structure: *“It is not clear if such work would be subject to planning control, as the structures are only temporary and may not meet the legal definition of development.”* The proposed prototype dwelling is equally as temporary in nature, and it is not significantly different in that it represents a demonstrator for testing and sales purposes. In this regard, it appears that it would fall outside of planning control, in accordance with Town and Country



Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (the GPDO, as amended) Schedule 2, Part 4 (Temporary Buildings and Uses), Class A.

Laister Planning considers that this proposed structure would fall under the classification of 'temporary structures' do not require planning permission, particularly due to its temporary nature. It is not a building, in that it fails to meet the three tests of a building as laid out in the court case at *Cardiff Rating Authority 1949*, by way of a lack of permanence and physical attachment to the ground.

However, notwithstanding this, the applicant understands that there might be ambiguity around this that requires planning judgement, hence they have made the planning application for the avoidance of doubt. If the Local Planning Authority agrees that the planning application is unnecessary for the reasons set out above, we would kindly request that the planning application is returned.

If the Local Planning Authority considers that the structure requires planning permission, we set out below how the proposals comply with the Development Plan and material considerations and why planning permission should be granted.

Policy Context

According to Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, planning applications should be determined in accordance with the statutory Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan comprises the South Downs Local Plan. Material considerations include the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021).

South Downs Local Plan

The Local Plan was adopted in July 2019 and sets the framework and specific policies for development within the National Park.

Core Policy SD1: Sustainable Development states that the Authority will take a positive approach when considering development proposals that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development. It sets out the National Park 'purposes' which are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the area; and to promote opportunities for the understanding and special qualities of the National Park by the public. In pursuit of the purposes,



the National Park Authority will pay due regard to its duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of the local communities within the National Park.

Strategic Policy SD4: Landscape Character indicates that proposals will only be permitted where, among other things, the location of the development is informed by landscape character, and where they will safeguard the amenity of the landscape.

Strategic Policy SD5: Design indicates that proposals will be permitted where it respects the local character, and integrates with, respects, and sympathetically complements the landscape character. The policy also requires that the designs are appropriate and sympathetic to its setting by way of various architectural details.

Strategic Policy SD34: Sustaining the Local Economy sets out that development proposals that foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park will be permitted provided that they promote and protect businesses linked to the National Park's key sectors of farming, forestry, and tourism; provide for and support small and micro-businesses and provide flexibility for established businesses to secure future resilience and protect local jobs.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021)

Paragraph 81 states that *"...decisions should help create conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter and weaknesses and address the challenges of the future..."*

It is clear that the NPPF significantly supports economic growth and development, as well as innovation.

Chapter 11 relates to making effective use of land. The proposals seek to utilise an existing concrete pad previously used for similar purposes.

Chapter 15 relates to conserving the natural environment. Paragraph 176 confirms that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscapes. The extent of development should be limited, and development should be sensitively located within their setting to minimise adverse impacts on designated areas.



Main Assessment

There are key issues related to the proposals:

1. Principle of development
2. Impact on landscape character
3. Other issues

Principle of Development

The proposals seek to introduce a temporary building to support an existing local business's innovation and expansion. Support is gained from both the Local Plan (Policies SD1 and SD34) and NPPF (Paragraph 81), where significant weight should be attached to proposals which support local businesses grow. Clearly, this will support jobs, as it will help a local business in opening up new opportunities to grow their sales.

The concrete pad, on which the modular dwelling will be located, has previously been lawfully used (by way of planning permission if not by permitted development rights) to allow the stationing of a larger temporary structure for testing purposes, also for a temporary period. The proposed use is not dissimilar to what was previous permitted, albeit the proposed dwelling will not be as tall or as wide as the previous structure. There is no material change in planning policy to indicate that this current proposal should not be acceptable in principle given the previous one was granted.

Indeed, the location of the site is found within the existing farm complex, most of which comprises converted barns that support Easi-space's R&D centre. The proposed use is ancillary to the existing exhibition centre and client meeting room, and adjacent to their main R&D operations. It clearly remains the most logical location for any structure that supports the R&D operations.

The structure's existence is temporary, and by way of a lack of attachment to the ground and permanence, it would not normally constitute a building. As such, it may not require planning permission. In any event, the principle of the development is acceptable given its temporary nature and the LPA's previous support for the installation of temporary structures on the site.

Impact on Landscape Character

Policy SD4 requires that proposals reflect the landscape character and safeguard its amenities. Policy SD5 requires that proposals are of a high standard design and respect their setting.



The modular dwelling will be stationed adjacent to an existing, long agricultural barn and its adjoining tall brick building. These act as shields which make the proposed structure less visible from the public highway running adjacent to the farm complex to its north. It is acknowledged that the top end of the structure, as well as some of its edges, might be seen from behind the existing agricultural barns. It will also be seen from wider viewpoints from the south, although these are also limited due to recent hedgerow planting that has been installed around the edges of Merryfield Farm. In this regard, the applicant proposes materials (the dark timber cladding) which will reduce its visibility, particularly during winter months. Any distant views will be seen within the context of an existing set of agricultural barns found within the farm complex.

Any impact on the landscape character from the erection of the structure will be limited as a result of the mitigations proposed, noting that it is also limited due to its 2-year lifespan. There will be no lasting effect on the site or the landscape character by the proposals and all effects are short-term.

The proposals comply with Policies SD4 and SD5 as a result.

Other Issues

There are no other known issues arising from the proposal.

In terms of transport, the proposals are ancillary to the existing operations on site. It will not result in any significant increases in the intensity of the use of the site, noting that the adjacent barn is already used as an exhibition centre and meeting room for client purposes. The previous testing structure that was erected on the site had caused no material impacts on the highway, and it is unlikely that the current proposals will result in any different circumstances given its use is not too dissimilar.

With respect to amenity issues, the nearest neighbours are located some distance from the proposed structure (about 75m to the north), and there are several agricultural style barns found in between the two. The proposals are unlikely to cause any loss of privacy or overshadowing.

The impact on the National Park with respect to tranquillity will be negligible. There will be some work to install the modular demonstrator on site, but this would be short-term and only during normal business hours. The materials will come from on site operations. The appearance of the building within the landscape has been discussed above, and whilst there would be some limited harm, it is temporary, and mitigations have been put in place to ensure that the impacts are indeed



limited. The impacts are similar to what were approved with the previous temporary structure.

The site is current occupied by a concrete pad and as such, there are unlikely to be any ecological impacts arising.

Conclusions

The proposals are temporary and may not require planning permission. However, if the Local Planning Authority considers that planning permission is required, the applicant considers that the proposals comply with the Development Plan and other material considerations.

There is history of erection of temporary structures on the site, and the proposals are not too dissimilar to what was previously approved, albeit smaller and shorter than what was erected previously. The principle of its development is acceptable; the Local Plan and NPPF provides significant support for the expansion of local business operations and the Local Planning Authority has previously permitted the stationing of temporary structures on this land.

In terms of technical matters, there will be some limited landscape impacts arising from the erection of the structure on site, but these are primarily limited to wider distance views as the structure has been hidden from key viewpoints by intervening structures. The use of dark timber materials helps to reduce the visibility of the structure, and it will be stationed against the backdrop of existing farm buildings. There is some existing landscape planting which will act to reduce the visibility of the structure. The impacts will be equally temporary as the life of the structure itself.

There are no other technical constraints to the development; the structure will be operated in conjunction with the existing R&D facility (as a demonstrator dwelling), so there will be no additional transport impacts. There would be only very short term potential effect on tranquillity of this area of the National Park, during its construction. Residential amenity and ecology would not be affected by the proposals.

As such, we consider that the proposals accord with the relevant Development Plan policies and other material considerations. Planning permission should be granted without delay.



We look forward to hearing from the Local Planning Authority as to their views on whether the proposals require planning permission. We would be happy to discuss the proposals with you as required.

Yours sincerely,



Nayan Gandhi
Director

Enc

