



**HORTICULTURAL APPRAISAL
SUPPORTING STATEMENT
FOR A
PERMANENT WORKER'S DWELLING
AT
SULNEY NURSERY
STATION ROAD
UPPER BROUGHTON
LE14 3BQ**

On Behalf of Messrs Carrier

Landscape Land and Property
Village Farm
Thorncote Green
Sandy
Beds
SG19 1PU

May 2023

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1. Introduction

1.1 Sulney Nursery is a family business based around the main holding, which has an area of approximately 10 hectares (25 acres). This is a horticultural nursery but for purposes of the Town and Country Planning Act of 1990 the site can be considered agricultural under Section 336. However, in more recent times a significant expansion of the site has occurred with the purchase of The East of The Railway site.

1.2 The nursery was purchased 28 years ago and during that period the proprietor has transformed the site into a modern, progressive business. This is a Planning Application for the provision of a permanent agricultural workers dwelling at Sulney Nursery, to be sited at the rear of the site. In addition, the site also accommodates Carrier Landscaping which is a sister company co-owned by the directors of Sulney Nursery. Sulney Nursery produces the vast bulk of its produce for Carrier Landscaping.

1.3 This would allow one of the proprietors, Eva Carrier, and her partner to closely supervise the nursery enterprise and ensure the integrity of the stock and buildings, especially at times of sudden disruptions of water and electricity supplies, unforeseen emergencies as well as other operations which would ensure continued business expansion and a supervisory presence over a part of the site close to vehicles, equipment, and mechanical plant storage sheds, which have previously been subject to break-ins, theft, and damage.

1.4 At present Duncan Carrier lives on site with his wife and solely responsible for security and night-time intervention when issues, emergencies of security problems arise. With the recent significant expansion of the site this is now unsustainable, and a second responsible person needs to be on site.

1.5 This report in support of the proposal has been compiled by Sam Franklin, following a site visit and meeting with Duncan Carrier and his daughter Eva Carrier.

2. Location

2.1 The nursery is located approximately a half mile west of the village of Upper Broughton and is adjacent to the railway line. The proposed Planning Permission would site the permanent workers dwelling in a corner of the site used for storage and staff parking, but will be close to the vehicle and machinery storage sheds and the surface planting beds, thus creating an effective 24hr security presence in an area where none exists currently.

2.2 The nursery site is located well away from any significant residential catchment areas and is not within sight and sound of Upper Broughton.

3. The Nursery Unit

3.1 The unit has been operating as a nursery for many years. Since the formation of the business in 1989, the nursery has expanded to include a substantial range of buildings for the storage packaging and propagation of horticultural plants. There are a number of greenhouses and polytunnels across the site as well as open air stored plants.

3.2 However, Messrs Carrier must tread a fine line between the amount of stock they can reasonably be expected to hold without exposing the business to the possibility of significant losses from disease, frost, drought and system failures, as well as theft. These safety systems are at their optimum when working in conjunction with experienced people working and living on site, who can either adjust or shut down operations to mitigate production losses. Eva Carrier is required to be on site to supervise the large stocking capability so that she can protect them from overheating, under watering, snow loading or frost damage, breakdowns and mechanical failures; this is not work that is able to be undertaken off site.

3.3 A total of 113,000 trees and shrubs are in stock at any one time with most of the stock being produced by the nursery. In support of this the following specific concerns and activities which require a presence to deal with problems and emergencies:-

Pest and disease outbreaks included the following serious attacks

- Vine Weevil attacks.
- Green Fly invasion.
- Black Fly invasion.

- Several Botrytis outbreaks on a variety of plants.
- Several Phytophthora outbreaks (blights) on some flowering plants.

Most Likely Mechanical and systems problems

- Early frost damage to plants, causing serious economic loss.
- Several breakdowns of heating system with no offsite alarm system causing germination and budding problems, leading to late germination or growth of plants and serious economic loss.
- Several water supply problems due to supply burst watermain/roadworks, causing problems with watering plants and leading to serious economic loss.
- Overheating in summer of glasshouses and poly tunnels, as windows and doors need to be opened/closed manually and sun screens erected. In severe cases causing death of plants and serious economic loss generally. The design of the greenhouse does not allow the incorporation of an electronic louvre system. There is no automatic sun screen.
- Power cuts also cause serious economic loss and inability to operate electrical mechanisms, including automatic lighting, automatic heating trays, electric potting system, water pumps and power tools.
- Automatic watering and heating system failures requiring manual intervention and repairs.

Out of Hours Activities

- Need to hand spray up to 30 different plant types at different times of year and at different stages of growth, requiring early morning (before 6.30am) and late (after 6pm) treatments. All plants are hand sprayed using portable knapsack sprayers.
- Attending to recorded break-in attempts including cut fences, broken doors and theft of tools, equipment and valuable plants.
- 4am starts May to September.
- 11pm finishes May to September.
- 2am starts to attend markets to buy goods to ensure full working day at nursery.
- 7 day working week hours 6am to 9pm.
- First manual watering normally 6am, last watering normally 10pm.

Other 'routine' activities:

- Need to individually treat plants with fertilisers and compost.
- January and February disinfection, repairs and cleaning, overhaul heating systems. Recover poly tunnels.

Crops and varieties routinely grown from seeds or 'plugs'

- Wide range of flowers, trees/shrubs, bedding plants and perennials, herbaceous border plants, garden herbs including lavender, sage, rosemary, thyme and bay trees. In addition to these named plant types there may be up to 10 or 20 different varieties or colours of flowers in any one group. The total number & types of plants grown exceeds 100.
- Several different propagation systems including cuttings, from seed and from 'plugs'. All are grown on to semi maturity before use. No mature or semi mature plants are bought in. The green house has automatic heating trays for seeds and automatic heating systems for young plants in late winter, early spring for propagation and frost protection.

- Normal growing season ranges from February to End November. As such the operation is a full 12 months with two significant seasonal peaks in Spring to Summer and Summer to Autumn, taking 7-8 months of the year when work is routinely operating out of normal hours and when plants are particularly at risk.

Automated and Non-Automated Systems

- Sprinkler is on timer but significant irrigation is manually operated for individual plant groups. Site based alarm, but no remote contact.
- Heating is on thermostatic and timer control, with site based alarm, but no remote contact.
- Ventilation; thermometer and on site alarm only.
- Frost warning; thermometer, weather forecast and on site alarm only.
- Sun scorch and heat warning, thermometer and on site alarm only.
- Wind and storm warning, no warning other than weather forecast.
- Snow loading, no warning other than weather forecast.
- Hail damage, no warning other than weather forecast.
- Fire damage, on site alarm and fire extinguishers no remote alarm.
- Water pressure failure, no alarm.
- Gate/intruder alarm, remote alarm, but does not monitor the fences, which have been breached. No CCTV, as previously damaged in break-in. Most break-ins have caused more loss through crop damage than through actual thefts as greenhouse doors are broken in attacks and automatic systems have been tampered with causing failures, leaks etc.

Response Times

Without remote alarms response times can sometimes be upwards of 8 hours, which has occasionally proven disastrous. Particularly where excessive temperature, droughting or over watering occurs. Contrary to some advice, many plants have very short tolerances to extremes and significant economic damage can be done in quite short periods of time.

4. The Business, Sulney Nursery

4.1 The site operates primarily to produce plants and trees for the sister company Carrier Landscaping. There are small sales of plants to the public from the site. There is some wholesale to other landscaping firms, but even this is relatively modest.

4.2 The system in operation is currently based upon the Carriers reputation for providing a wide range of quality household plants/trees/shrubs for commercial scale landscaping. Cuttings, seeds and young stock are placed in all of the available greenhouses, sheds, poly tunnels and greenhouses during late winter/early spring and grown on through the spring and summer. This particular part of the operation has now been extended in response to commercial demand.

4.3 The unit employs 140 staff across the 25 acres over the two sites: either side of the railway. Of necessity the two sites are run by two teams but are fully integrated. At present it is necessary to visit the other site from the public highway. A bridge exists further along the railway but does not yet allow access to the site. Around 15 staff are employed on the nursery production side, with seasonal peaks.

5. Buildings

5.1 The nursery consists of poly tunnels suitable for plant propagation, glasshouses with further outdoor production facilities placed strategically around the site.

5.2 There is a substantial office area with staff rest and training facilities, as well as landscaped areas for demonstration and example. The offices for Carrier Landscapes Limited were built in 2012, and extended in 2014, with a further addition in 2021/2.

5.3 East of the railway line a 9.15 metre x 18.3 metre (30' x 60') building and 2 No. 900 square metre poly tunnels have been constructed.

5.4 By siting the dwelling at the rear/side of the site it would be ideally situated in order to supervise and monitor all the greenhouses, poly tunnels, propagation areas and would enable Ms Carrier to be on hand day and night to protect stock from adverse events such as a system failure leading to loss of plantings which are the backbone of the business.

6. Nursery Income

6.1 The accounts dating back to 30 years show steady profits and substantial business growth, which has been built upon solid reputation for quality and performance. This illustrates a strong, vibrant business, which will be able to sustain the operation going forward.

6.2 The scale of the business has changed and grown over that period, but remains a family run enterprise with a number of the Carrier family in senior roles in the organisation. Carrier Landscapes is run by Mr Carrier (jnr) and the Nursery by Eva Carrier, with Mr and Mrs Carrier being active in both parts.

7. Labour

7.1 Currently the whole enterprise employs 140 workers. Many of these work in the landscape division and whilst 'based' at the nursery in one of the offices, the majority of their time is spent out on site undertaking landscape work. The core nursery workers are around 15 permanent staff who are based permanently at the nursery and a range of seasonal and temporary workers drafted in at busier times from other parts of the operation. In effect the equivalent of around 20 full time workers are employed, on site, but this varies due to the season. Remaining staff work on the landscaping side of the business.

7.2 Sulney Nursery works closely with a number of local colleges where horticulture is a specialism, and they offer apprenticeships and work experience and they have a dedicated formal training area for new recruits.

7.3 Eva Carrier attended an agricultural university and has relevant skills and training having worked at the nursery for most of her career. The expansion of the business allows the opportunity for the two 'halves' to become separate and Ms Carrier is now responsible for the nursery operation, going forward.

8. Residential Accommodation

8.1 A permanent dwelling is proposed as part of this application. Ms Carrier currently lives 5 miles away in Ab Kettleby and now needs to be on site to meet the operational standards that the site requires. The out of hours work is too much for one person and whilst Mr Carrier senior has managed in recent years to meet the needs of the site, with the growth of the 'East of the Railway' area, it has become necessary for a second worker to be resident.

9. Capital investment

9.1 Over a long period of time a substantial amount of investment has occurred at the site, particularly in the provision of physical infrastructure but also in the sheer scale of plants, trees and shrubs at the nursery. The purchase of the eastern half has also seen substantial growth.

9.2 The capital investment stems directly from the profits of the business and the proprietor's willingness to re-invest with confidence in the future of the business. This, together with commitment and hard work ensures the longer-term sustainability of Sulney Nursery. However, support is required in the form of a dwelling in order to underpin the next generation in their efforts to take the business forward.

10. Turnover and Profitability

10.1 Accounts illustrate that the business is expanding, increasing turnover and the net profit margins. These financial statements suggest that with further support, together with the expansion will ensure the unit's continued financial viability.

10.2 The business has no debts and is trading profitably. Messrs Carrier has stated, and indeed re-iterated that the future of the business is growing in line with their expectations and financial forecasts.

11. National Planning Policy Framework

11.1 Messrs Carrier has invested new production space, which gives Messrs Carrier the capability to increase their production capacity by up to 40%. As a result of this there is a current identifiable existing functional need for someone to be on site to manage the specialist horticultural activity and environmental control systems at the site.

National Planning Policy

11.2 Paragraph 84 of the NPPF also offers considerable support to rural business development including new farm development.

Supporting a prosperous rural economy

84. Planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*
- b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*
- c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and*
- d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.*

85. Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.

11.3 There is clear support in the National Planning Policy Framework document for new dwellings for rural workers as set out in Paragraph 80 and it is considered that this policy is relevant in this particular case. Paragraph 80 of the NPPF states that:-

80. Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply:

- a) there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside;*
- b) the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets;*

- c) the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting;
- d) the development would involve the subdivision of an existing residential building; or
- e) the design is of exceptional quality, in that it:
 - is truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and
 - would significantly enhance its immediate setting, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.

11.4 The issue of Essential Need is addressed in Local Plan Policy 22 where it is recognised that when something is essential for agriculture it is considered appropriate in the open countryside.

11.5 There is a clear need for an additional skilled operator, to be permanently resident on site in order to supervise the wide range of specialist plants. Only an onsite presence is considered suitable to meet the needs of the site as a fully functioning nursery and therefore dwellings in the local area are too far away to be of benefit to the site.

11.6 It is considered that there are unlikely to be any dwellings locally that would become available and be suitable to operate the site. In addition, all the current buildings on the site are utilised for the purposes of plant propagation or for the storage of equipment machinery and stores and there are no buildings suitable for conversion to residential at this time. Therefore the only realistic alternative is a new build construction.

11.7 Recent guidance in the Planning Practice Guidance (July 2019) has provided technical advice on how to assess section 80 of the NPPF, it states:-

How can the need for isolated homes in the countryside for essential rural workers be assessed?

Considerations that it may be relevant to take into account when applying [paragraph 79a of the NPPF](#) could include:

- *evidence of the necessity for a rural worker to live at, or in close proximity to, their place of work to ensure the effective operation of an agricultural, forestry or similar land-based rural enterprise (for instance, where farm animals or agricultural processes require on-site attention 24-hours a day and where otherwise there would be a risk to human or animal health or from crime, or to deal quickly with emergencies that could cause serious loss of crops or products);*
- *the degree to which there is confidence that the enterprise will remain viable for the foreseeable future;*
- *whether the provision of an additional dwelling on site is essential for the continued viability of a farming business through the farm succession process;*
- *whether the need could be met through improvements to existing accommodation on the site, providing such improvements are appropriate taking into account their scale, appearance and the local context; and*
- *in the case of new enterprises, whether it is appropriate to consider granting permission for a temporary dwelling for a trial period.*

Employment on an assembly or food packing line, or the need to accommodate seasonal workers, will generally not be sufficient to justify building isolated rural dwellings.

11.8 This policy and interpretation envisages the provision of a dwelling to support the viability of the business and to allow a partner or director to take over the business, as is the case here.

Plant welfare, protection from crime and the viability of the business are relevant to the assessment process. In this case there is an established need which is growing, there are crime and plant welfare related issues, and the business has been trading for a long time.

11.9 A nursery enterprise has been on this site since 1993. When Messrs Carrier bought the unit it did not have a dwelling associated with it. There is now a dwelling on site occupied by Mr Carrier who will remain on site for management, but the workload and responsibility requires a second resident person who is also at managerial level for decision making and responsibility.

11.10 Ms Eva Carrier is a full time worker and now requires to live on site. Whilst the site employs a number of full and part-time workers, as well as ones that specifically work over the weekends and busy periods, she is now to become primarily responsible for site management out of hours.

12. Sustainability

12.1 The use of pesticides and other harmful chemicals at the nursery is carefully controlled and managed such that the environmental management of the site is undertaken to a very high standard. All the staff employed on the site have training and qualifications in relevant skills and disciplines which together with considerable practical knowledge and experience ensures that environmental protection is strong.

12.2 Water is sourced from boreholes and from a stream where a collecting pond allows temporary storage. Rainwater is also harvested from rooftops and re-used.

12.2 In terms of financial stability, the business has attained strong levels of profitability in recent years despite Covid and the business continues to trade effectively with a range of seasonal and year-round plants and horticultural products.

13. Rushcliffe Local Plan

13.1 The local plan sets out policy for rural workers dwellings.

6.16 Applications for workers accommodation related to agricultural, equestrian, forestry or other business operations that require a rural location must be supported by evidence that the operation is economically viable, there is a firm intention to develop the enterprise, there is an essential long term need for permanent and full time labour, there is a necessity for the worker to live in close proximity, and there is no existing dwelling available or suitable. Temporary accommodation should be applied for prior to any application for permanent accommodation, as this would enable the applicant to establish need and economic viability. The size of dwelling should be appropriate for the needs of the worker, its location should not provide an obvious opportunity for infill development, and it should not require public expenditure on infrastructure.

6.17 The Council will impose an occupancy condition on any permission granted for any agricultural dwelling. Occupancy conditions are necessary to ensure that dwellings that would not normally be granted planning permission are used by people who because of their work have to live in the countryside.

POLICY 22 DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE COUNTRYSIDE

1. Land beyond the Green Belt and the physical edge of settlements is identified as countryside and will be conserved and enhanced for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty, the diversity of its landscapes, heritage and wildlife, the wealth of its natural resources, and to ensure it may be enjoyed by all.

2. Within the countryside development for the following uses will be permitted subject to the requirements set out in (3) below:

a) agriculture, equestrian, forestry and other uses requiring a rural location, including, where justified, associated workers dwellings;

b) the re-use and adaptation of buildings for appropriate uses, including housing;

c) exception sites for affordable housing;

d) extension and replacement of dwellings;

e) expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;

f) small-scale employment generating development, retail and farm diversification;

g) community services and facilities meeting a proven local need;

h) recreation, wildlife conservation, leisure, tourism, and sports development which requires and is appropriate in a countryside location; and

i) renewable energy in accordance with Policy 16.

3. Developments in accordance with (2) above will be permitted where:

a) the appearance and character of the landscape, including its historic character and features such as habitats, views, settlement pattern, rivers, watercourses, field patterns, industrial heritage and local distinctiveness is conserved and enhanced;

b) except for replacement dwellings, conversions and changes of use, it does not constitute isolated residential development which is separated from the physical edge of the settlement;

c) it does not create or extend ribbon development;

d) built development is well integrated with existing buildings, where appropriate; and

e) the development will not seriously undermine the vitality and viability of existing district and local centres, and centres of neighbourhood importance.

13.2 Sulney Nursery extends to approximately 10 hectares (25 acres) which is surrounded by mature boundary and hedging to the rear of the site. Due to the physical characteristics of this site, all the buildings are located in close proximity to each other.

13.3 The proposed dwelling will be sited within sight and sound of the greenhouses, polytunnels and other infrastructure of the site. It is considered that there would have a minimum impact on the character and appearance of the countryside and on the existing infrastructure as a result of the addition of this permanent structure. A dedicated independent below-ground foul water packaged treatment plant will be installed to serve the new dwelling.

13.4 We have carefully considered the siting, design and external appearance of the development and believe that it will not unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the landscape or any settlement in the countryside. At this juncture we do not believe a landscaping scheme is necessary.

13.5 There are no known features at this location and therefore there is unlikely to be any impact.

13.6 This is a modest structure in terms of scale; therefore the impact on the surroundings will be minimal.

13.7 The purpose of this permanent dwelling is to oversee a current nursery enterprise, which employs 15-20 staff and has grown substantially in recent years. The introduction of this proposed dwelling would not create any amenity traffic, access or any other environmental problems associated with this site.

14. Assessment of the Proposal

14.1 Messrs Carrier has been steadily expanding this enterprise over a long period and have recently invested heavily in new greenhouses, poly tunnels and buildings. This has increased the production capacity by approximately 40%. Environmental support systems have been installed to protect the stock, products and plantings but can only be managed on a semi automatic basis. The site is rural and relies on borehole water. Electricity is vulnerable in this rural location, in terms of supply disruption.

14.2 Under the current set of circumstances should the system fail then Messrs Carrier would lose significant levels of stock, as there are no contingencies within the system to warn of such an event. The necessity to run the site from two sites across the railway line has created some logistical and management issues which this dwelling will resolve.

14.3 As a result of this situation the immediate impact upon the business would be a substantial loss of income from the nursery and this would impact on the jobs and livelihoods of 140 workers.

14.4 The nursery is a well-managed and tidy unit clearly set up and maintained for the intended use. The facilities for plant rearing are those one would expect on the site of a professionally managed nursery; the unit is suitably equipped with appropriate poly tunnels, bed systems and irrigation facilities. I consider that the intentions of the applicant are genuine and given the right circumstances this business will continue to be sustainable and profitable.

15. Conclusions

15.1 This application relates to the provision of a permanent agricultural worker's dwelling to supervise and oversee the production and integrity of the Sulney Nursery enterprise. We can confirm that this business is profitable and sustainable and it is clearly illustrated through recent accounts.

15.2 Due to the introduction of new greenhouse and polytunnel production, capacity has increased by 30-40% it is now apparent and quite clear that Eva Carrier needs to live on site in order to protect her stock from any adverse events surrounding the supporting environmental systems that have been introduced onto the nursery site.

15.3 The siting design, appearance and location of the permanent dwelling will not give any adverse impact on its surroundings as it will be integrated with the existing structures currently on site. Positioned as proposed, the dwelling will provide additional security and surveillance of vital and valuable assets, to deter future incidents in the current scourge of rural crime.

15.4 This is a genuine application for a permanent dwelling based on the strict criteria laid out in the NPPF, the Council's Local Plan and is in line with National Policy.

15.5 Whilst the guidance contained in the NPPF no longer discusses financial matters, we are assuming that the financial sustainability of the business is an important component of the assessment of whether a permanent dwelling is appropriate. The unit has now been in operation in its current form for around 30 years with profitability and financial sustainability prevalent for the majority of that time. Financial information in the form of accounts from recent years could be made available should there be any doubt about the financial stability of the business.

15.6 Messrs Carrier the applicant have established a strong track record of success locally, Eva Carrier is a partner in the business and is now responsible for running the nursery day-to-day. She has established a strong working relationship with trade suppliers and wholesalers and has the requisite skills and experience to take on the role. Her ability with a large team of dedicated staff to produce a large range of horticultural plants for the family business is to be commended. The provision of this permanent dwelling will ensure the ongoing success of the business.

Landscape Land and Property
May 2023

Sulney Nursery



Biography of Horticultural Consultant: SJ Franklin

Relevant academic qualifications include

- Certificate in Horticulture (Royal Horticultural Society)
- Certificate in Arboriculture (Royal Forestry Society)
- BSc (Hons) Agriculture
- Diploma in Marketing
- MSc in Marketing

Membership of Professional bodies include

- British Society of Soil Scientists (MISoilSci)
- Fellow of British Institute of Agricultural Consultants (FBIAC)
- Chartered Surveyor (MRICS)
- Agricultural Valuer (FAAV)

Practical horticultural experience includes

- Member of the Landscape Committee restoring a Humphrey Repton landscape with £1million HLF grant at Moggerhanger Park (a Grade 1 Listed building in Bedfordshire)
- Managing an agricultural restructuring project in Ukraine working with fruit, horticultural and agricultural units, including glasshouses, irrigation, vineyards and top fruit
- Manor Farm, (AR Beck & Sons). Commercial horticultural and salad crops: lettuce, potatoes, marrows, Brussels sprouts, beetroot, cabbage, cauliflowers and other field vegetables.
- Work with John Fielding landscape gardener, building 18 hole golf course and full size match standard cricket pitch
- Farm work growing potatoes, Brussels sprouts, Moxhill Farm, (FW Vinson & Sons)
- Considerable practical farm and horticultural experience on family farm, including potatoes and brassica crops.
- Over 30 years of practical horticulture and agriculture, including work with glass houses field operations, fruit, vegetables and other crops.