

Blackmoor Estate Forestry Building

Forestry Prior Notification

Supporting Information

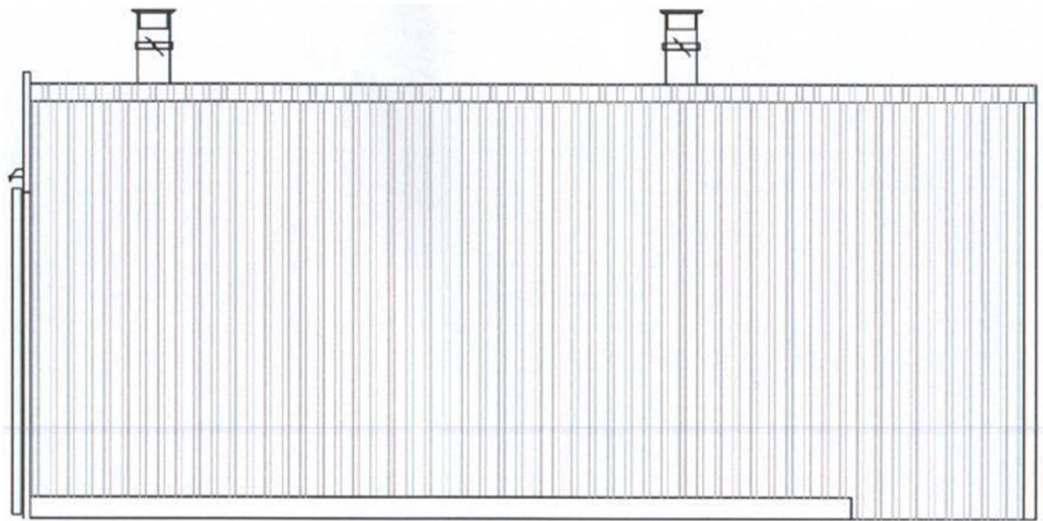
This is a Forestry Prior Notification submitted under Schedule 2, Part 6 Class E of the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) 2015 (as amended) relating to the erection of a log drying kiln and canopy extension to an existing forestry building.

Introduction

The proposals comprise two distinct elements namely:-

A Log Drying Kiln- Technically this is a freestanding and moveable piece of forestry related equipment but will be located in the proposed position on a concrete pad, and there is no intention to move it. This submission therefore treats it as a fixed structure.

The kiln is designed expressly for the drying of firewood. It is housed within a metal clad enclosure, the colour of which is Merlin Grey to complement the adjoining building which is also grey. The overall enclosure is 12.86m in length, 4m in width and 5.46m in height. The actual kilns occupy approximately 10m of the total length of the enclosure with the remainder being occupied by the motor, the inverter and other plant. The following image shows the side elevation of the kiln enclosure.



The heat is provided by a boiler which uses the same technology as a domestic heating system and comprises a fully enclosed oil-fired boiler. The output from the kilns is steam only via roof mounted flues.

The kiln is proposed to be positioned alongside the existing barn and will therefore be viewed against a backdrop of this structure. This part of the site is also well screened.

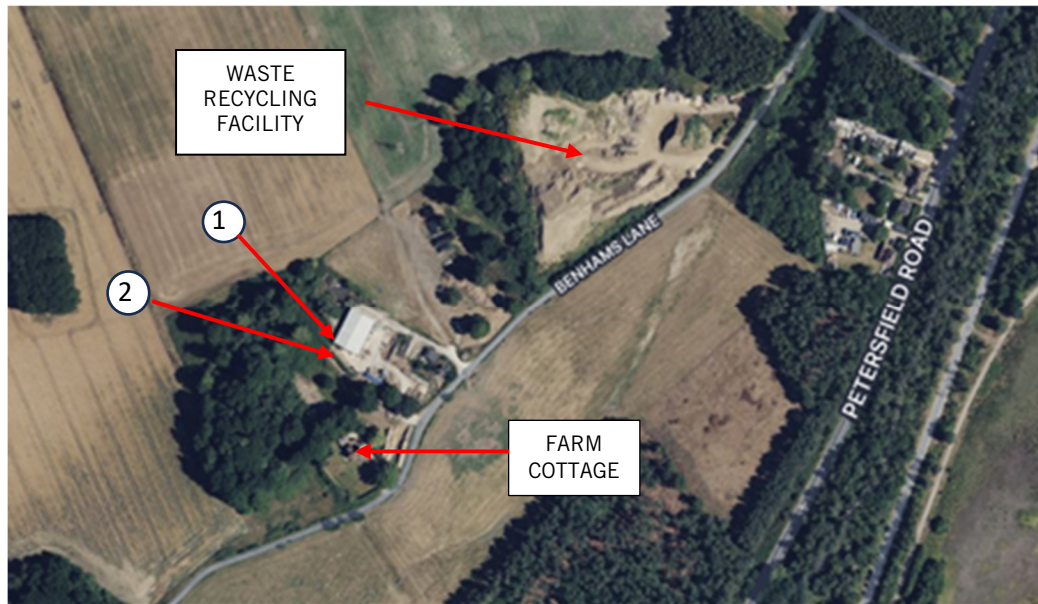
A Canopy Extension. This is a bolt on extension to the existing barn to provide additional shelter for dry working, operation and loading. The structure would be open sided on three sides, with the fourth side being the existing wall of the main barn. The building would be 7.54m in width and 5m in depth, giving a notional floor area of 37.7sq.m. No floor is proposed.

The extension would not extend the full width of the building and therefore its height at its tallest point would be 6.6m against the total height of the existing barn of 7.2m. The height to

eaves would be 4.5m which aligns with the existing barn. The roof would be clad in profiled panels to match existing.

Description of Existing Site

The site comprises a rural building group including a large modern barn and a smaller building which is independently used as a cabinetry workshop. A smaller barn has recently been removed and will be replaced by a new forestry building recently approved under planning reference SDNP/23/04357/FUL. The immediate area around the buildings is extensively used for the external storage of timber. To the south of the site is an Estate worker's dwelling house, whilst the surrounding land is pasture and grazing land, with some arable.



Site context showing position of proposed kiln (1) and canopy extension (2)

Access to the site is via an unnamed lane which connects to Benhams Lane to the west. The track is a well maintained albeit unmade farm track which links to Blackmoor Lane to the north-east. The first 50m of this track also provides access to the adjoining waste management facility located to the east of the application site. The Petersfield Road (A325) is located some 100m to the east of the junction of Benhams Lane and Blackmoor Lane and allows ready access onto this main road, which in turn connects Bordon to the south with Farnham to the north.

Agricultural Justification

The Blackmoor Estate has a long-established forestry operation which relocated from a less suitable site at Albury Dairy GU33 6BX within the Estate, to this site in late 2021 and has provided a highly valued income stream for the Estate.

The Estate has completed a 10 year Higher Level Stewardship agreement (HLS) and is nearing the end of a 5 year Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship Scheme, with a new 5 year scheme starting this year. The Estate is characterised by a wide range of landscape areas including extensive areas of woodland.

The estate has recently had a new ten year Woodland Management Plan approved by the Forestry Commission with an approved felling licence and programme for the period. From 2024 it enters into a new Woodland Improvement programme based on this plan which aims to improve the biodiversity of its woodland through active management and make it more resilient to climate change. This includes:

- • Selective thinning of woodland;
- • Coppicing and re-coppicing woodlands;
- • Monitoring and managing deer and squirrel populations;
- • Managing woodland rides;
- • Creating and maintaining appropriate levels of deadwood habitat; and
- • Allowing natural regeneration and tree replanting where necessary.

The existing forestry operation is seeing a rapid increase in demand for firewood for a multitude of reasons, including:-

- Higher gas and electricity prices;
- Increased awareness of sustainable fuel options;
- Increased supply of timber which has arisen through a combination of enhanced woodland management practices, ash die back and climate change which has resulted in dryer summers and more severe storms, both of which result in increased tree fall;
- Increased leisure use of firewood and outdoor living post covid;
- Changing dining patterns including the expansion of both commercial and home-based wood fired ovens; and
- Demand for small batch firewood for homes with limited storage capacity and occasional fires.

A further issue is that the sale of firewood is now more regulated and must have a moisture content not exceeding 20%. The natural 'air' seasoning of wood to achieve this figure can take up to 2 years depending on storage conditions, which generates a significant income lag and imposes substantial demands for storage space. The kiln drying of logs provides firewood which is well below the moisture level that can be achieved through natural seasoning of wood, and this occurs in a very condensed period of time. The end product burns cleaner, hotter and is more efficient. The benefits of kiln dried logs is now more widely known and the market has responded accordingly.

The requirement for increased kiln capacity is therefore a direct response to the increase in demand for kiln dried wood and the inability of the Estate to manage demand through the provision of seasoned logs as an alternative.

The ability of the forestry enterprise to meet customer demand is an essential strand of the Estate's overall approach to woodland management, which ultimately must be viable in order to support the beneficial, but non-essential, woodland enhancement measures captured in the Woodland Management Plan.

The canopy extension is simply additional space in response to increase demand and the need for more handling space to cope with increase quantities of firewood. The Estate also has a statutory obligations under Health and Safety regulations to provide safe working areas which, in the context of this operation, needs to include some cover.

Impacts

The proposed building will be well screened and can be accommodated on the site without requiring any tree removal; only limited shrub clearance which has already been undertaken as part of the wider management of the site. The kiln enclosure will be light grey which complements the colour of the adjoining building, whilst the roof of the canopy will match the materials used in the main roof.

In landscape terms, the kiln would be viewed against the backdrop of the existing building. As a smaller structure than the adjoining barn, it will not break the skyline from any accessible vantage point. There is heavy woodland screening along the site's northern boundary. The main barn also provides a high level of screening as both the proposed kiln and canopy extension are 'tucked away' within the site. Whilst not fixed features, existing stacks of cord wood also provide further screening, and whilst the size and location of these change over time they will always be present in some form.

In these terms the proposals will have a negligible landscape impact.

No new tracks or hardstanding would be required beyond the concrete pad for the kiln which would also accommodate a fuel tank. No external lighting is required, and the canopy will have a solid roof (i.e. without rooflights) and will therefore not impact on dark night skies.

Conclusion

The proposed kiln and canopy extension are considered to be reasonably necessary for the purposes of forestry and is designed expressly for that purpose. Specifically, it will allow the existing forestry enterprise to continue to meet consumer demand and in so doing support its wider sustainable woodland management practices.

In these terms the proposals fully meets the requirements of Schedule 2, Part 6 Class E of the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) 2015 (as amended) and therefore Prior Approval should be granted.

February 2024