

Agricultural and Forestry Statement

Client: The Montreal Estate

Re: Mackerels Plain, Little Norman Street, Ide Hill, TN14 6BN

Date: February 2024

Strutt and Parker has been instructed by The Montreal Estate to submit a prior approval application for the erection of a multi-purpose agricultural/forestry barn alongside an existing forestry building at Mackerels Plain, Ide Hill, TN14 6BN. This statement sets out the agricultural justification for the proposed development and should be read in conjunction with the information submitted with the application.

The Montreal Estate

The Montreal Estate comprises a total holding of c.850 hectares of arable land, managed woodland and pasture within the countryside in Sevenoaks District. The Estate is involved in a range of rural activities including farming a large arable area (circa a total of 365 hectares on the Estate and 400 hectares on neighbouring farms), managing its extensive woodland (circa 400 hectares) as well as a smaller animal venture, principally of pasture fed beef and sheep. These contribute significantly to the rural environment and the local economy. These activities are predominantly in areas of Green Belt and AONB, and help contribute to managing and sustaining the rural landscape.

For harvest 2022, the Estate produced 3,000 tons of combinable crops (wheat, oats, barley, oil seed rape and beans) from its arable operations, 1,800 tons from forestry operations and has currently 137 cattle and around 100 sheep (calving and lambing in progress). The Estate employs 10 full-time and 2 part-time employees, as well as supporting many small businesses indirectly. The Montreal Estate is a significant economic stakeholder and employer in the rural economy.

The Estate comprises several farm holdings including Penn Farm, Brook Place, Coakham Farm, Chains Farm, Winkhurst Farm, Goathurst Common Farm, Green Lane Farm, Long Meadow Farm and Mackerels Plain. The Estate has made significant investments in its infrastructure over the last 10 years. The largest investments have been at Coakham Farm, where a modern grain store and farmyard has been constructed, and at Penn Farm where the outmoded agricultural buildings and dairy have been replaced with modern buildings, principally for machine storage and maintenance. In addition, a forestry store has been built at Mackerels Plain. Wherever possible, the Estate has sought to refurbish existing buildings to extend their working life (notably at Long Meadow Farm and Chains Farm). However, despite these investments, there is still a need for additional capacity.

The Estate has also upgraded farm and forestry tracks to help minimise the number of large/slow moving agricultural vehicle movements on the public highway network, and has incorporated solar and biomass district heating systems to reduce the Estate's carbon footprint by over 120 tons per year.

The Estate's Farmyards

Coakham Farm lies south of Crockham Hill, just outside of the Kent Downs AONB, and within the Green Belt. This farm covers approximately 150 Hectares. In 2014, planning permission was granted (reference 14/02653/FUL) for 'replacement farm buildings (including a new grain store to accommodate 1,500 tonnes of grain that can be properly conditioned) at Coakham Farm. These barns have now been established, and have helped to secure a transition from a farm producing hay for horses, to a productive arable farm. Even now (in March 2023) grain is moving from here with the last 400 tonnes leaving in April. In 2022, the last grain movement was in June.

Penn Farm is located to the north of Ide Hill. In June 2018, planning permission was granted (under reference 18/00635/FUL) for replacement agricultural buildings to include a machine workshop and servicing unit and a machinery store. Part of the machinery store has also been used to store seeds, fertiliser and grain. Haylage is now stored at Long Meadow Farm as it is in close proximity to the cattle. This has freed some barn space at Penn Farm for additional grain storage. However, this is not ideal as the grain cannot be kept in the barns beyond November¹, thus limiting the selling window for grain to between August and November.

The yard at Mackerels Plain is located at the western edge of a parcel of approximately 3.6 hectares of arable fields, surrounded on three sides by Estate woodland. In November 2015, the prior approval process was engaged (reference 15/03401/AGRNOT) for the erection of a forestry store. The forestry building is located towards the centre of the Estate and it is used for the storing of timber products and oil seed rape at different times of the year. The Estate supplies woodchip to various local enterprises, including the Tunbridge Wells Hospital at Pembury.

Mackerels Plain is well connected to the remainder of the Estate via a network of well-established tracks augmented by track routes provided around 10 years ago (reference SE/13/01784/AGRNOT). The Estate has laid 8 km of internal farm and forestry tracks to provide access between the farms. These tracks also link four sites to existing arable fields, woodland and pasture in order to take farm machinery off the public highway. These investments have helped to modernise and improve the efficiency of the arable and woodland operations, therefore improving the viability of the business.

Sevenoaks District Council's Agricultural Advice

The improvements to the farmyards at Penn Farm, Coakham Farm and Mackerels Plain reflect a multi-site strategy for the Montreal Estate. Sevenoaks District Council has previously sought advice in relation to Montreal Estate proposals, and its consultant (Richard Lloyd-Hughes) has recommended that the Estate progress a multi-centre approach. The Estate has since

¹ The Estate is part of the Red Tractor farm assurance scheme, which limits the time that grain may be kept in temporary storage conditions.

developed this with the internal track network connecting existing sites and operations. This has helped to improve the efficiency and financial viability of the Estate's farming and forestry activities.

Proposed Building at Mackerels Plain

The proposed development is for the erection of a new building for use as a multipurpose agricultural/forestry building. Temporary grain and timber product storage are the principal needs, with other activities reliant on the space from time to time. The building is proposed to be located immediately adjacent to the existing forestry building, and includes an area of associated hardstanding which extends from the existing apron serving the current building.

The proposal is necessary to provide further storage space in line with the successful arable and forestry enterprises on the Estate. Aside from the grain store at Coakham Farm (which is fully deployed, with capacity for around a half of total product), the Estate's current building stock is unsuitable for grain storage. The proposed multipurpose building will make space for additional machinery storage at Penn Farm, as it will enable the grain that is currently tipped in the agricultural buildings at Penn Farm to be stored at Mackerels Plain under the same conditions. The space released in the existing barns at Penn Farm will allow additional machinery to be stored securely under cover. This will reduce the need for servicing and limit depreciation.

The existing building on site at Mackerels Plain is currently used for the storage of woodchip produced solely on the Estate. However, it has also been necessary to use it for the storage of oil seed rape and oats on a temporary basis during the late summer. The rotation of the two products (combinable crops and woodchip) at different points in the year is both impractical and inefficient. It means that in June, the woodchip present has to be sold and removed from the barn and the barn cleaned in order to make space for combinable crops at harvest. Following the early collection of the harvest, the barn would be refilled with timber before the winter and if possible, before the wood becomes too moist for chipping. The Estate struggles to find the time to chip wood in September as having just completed the harvest, arable land is being prepared for planting next year's crop (drilling typically starts mid-September and may not finish until December or later, depending on weather conditions). Chipping wood requires a full team of employees and will fill the existing forestry barn. The current barn capacity is around 1,000m³ and the Estate chips around 4,000m³ per annum. An additional barn for the storage of combinable crops would allow woodchip to be stored in the existing forestry barn through the summer months and provide a year round supply of woodchip for buyers.

The competing calls on the Estate's building stock have meant that Mackerels Plain has been used for the external storage of some of the Estate's farm machinery when necessary, in order to make room for further grain storage. As a result of this practice, there has been a recent theft of a valuable piece of machinery from Mackerels Plain. The Estate wishes to keep machinery in secure internal storage where possible. A new multipurpose building will support grain storage and allow the reinstatement of internal machinery storage space at Penn Farm (and potentially Mackerels Plain once the grain has been sold, subject to available space).

Current building provision across the Estate means that there is insufficient capacity to store grain for the optimum period of time post-harvest. In addition to increased handling costs, the Estate has been a forced seller of grain in unfavourable market conditions. Additionally, the

Estate has been unable to sell woodchip in the autumn (a time of high demand) because the timber has not sufficiently dried, partly due the lack of summer storage but also to the restricted timing as to when it is able to chip.

The proposed multipurpose agricultural building barn, which measures 680.4sqm, is therefore necessary in order to improve the efficiency of both the arable and forestry enterprises, and will help address machinery storage issues, in line with the needs of the Estate. The existing building on site, which measures 472.5sqm, would be retained for the storage of woodchip, whilst the proposed building would be used for the storage of grain, woodchip and machinery. The proposed building will also free up space in the buildings at Penn Farm for the storage of machinery (including that presently stored in the open at Mackerels Plain).

Conclusions

The proposed building and hardstanding is reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture on the holding and the proposal is designed appropriately for its intended purpose.