

Planning Statement for new potting shed at Hortus Loci Nursery, Hound Green. May '24

Introduction;

This Planning Statement is submitted to support a re-application for Prior Approval for a new (replacement) potting shed building at the applicant's commercial plant nursery. It follows the refusal of Prior Application ref: 24/00559/GPDafb dated 15th April 2024.

The officers delegated report for this refusal contained errors and inaccuracies and did not address the correct nature and use of the existing commercial nursery business nor the requirement for the new building as being applied for.

In relation to the above referenced Prior Approval refusal for the potting shed, the officer's delegated report incorrectly stated that the proposed potting shed will be;

" sited to the southeast of the existing plan display/storage area and to the north east of existing polytunnels.....The building subject to this application is proposed rather central in the outdoor display area accessed by customers to walk around and select their plants".

This is not the case. Attached as Appendix A is a plan based on an aerial view of the nursery, showing its relationship with the main wholesale business part of the grounds and next to the recently approved new glasshouse. This location is as per the previously submitted location and block plans.

This area is not accessible to the public on health and safety grounds. The proposed shed location also ensures for good screening for the new building from public realm views by existing buildings and planting.

The requirement;

The following statement contains additional information about the requirement for the new building and the related structure and nature of the nursery's business and sets out additional explanation and evidence to support the re-application for Prior Approval of the replacement potting shed building.

Notwithstanding the matters as outlined within this statement the case officer is also urged, as part of their consideration of the proposal, to visit site such that matters outlined below can be best demonstrated and clarified by on site evidence.

The Nursery is c.5.6ha. in area. It contains c. 0.3Ha of covered greenhouses, glasshouses and polytunnels and c.4.5ha of outside growing / storage space. The businesses ancillary retail 'plant centre' occupies only c. 0.55ha which constitutes only c.10 % of the overall site area. See plan attached as Appendix A.

The proposed new potting shed's design and structure fully meets the requirements for this commercial nursery operation and its location relates well to the nursery's other buildings including the latest glasshouse as approved under Prior Approval HDC ref: 23/00474/GPDafb .

Both are in an area largely screened from public realm views and in an area where access by the public is strictly prohibited for health and safety reasons.

S336 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) states that “agriculture” includes;

*... " **horticulture**, fruit growing, **seed growing**, dairy farming, the breeding and keeping of livestock (including any creature kept for the production of food, wool, skins or fur, or for the purpose of its use in the farming of land), the use of land as grazing land, meadow land, osier land, market gardens **and nursery grounds**, and the use of land for woodlands where that use is ancillary to the farming of land for other agricultural purposes, and “agricultural” shall be construed accordingly;*

The nursery site's business falls entirely within this definition of agriculture and the potting of plants and seeds for 'growing on' is the key and fundamental part of their business which needs to be accommodated within the new building designed for the purpose carried on therein and which has been designed to accommodate the staff and equipment required and where it can also be sited in close proximity to the existing glass houses, polytunnels, and seed beds.

Every commercial horticultural business will accommodate a potting shed as a main part of its facility as the potting of plants is a fundamental part of the horticultural operation. Small plants, pots and compost go in one end and larger potted plants emerge at the other from where they head out onto the nursery to be grown on for a minimum of 3 months before they can be sold, often for 6 months plus and sometimes a year or more. This runs to the heart of any horticultural nursery.

The building as proposed - which is purpose designed will include;

- provision for potting benches,
- forklift access and manoeuvring to deliver compost plants and pots,
- areas for small plants going on trolleys, and
- for larger plants exiting on trailers towed by electric buggies,
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It is a replacement for an existing building within the nursery which has become unfit for purpose as it is cold, draughty, and leaks rainwater and includes elements of asbestos.

This existing facility will be re-purposed for storage of bagged compost and other items that are not adversely affected by temperature, damp and other such conditions.

The new building will provide for much improved (insulated dry and heated) conditions for staff involved in the potting processes to be accommodated much more satisfactorily.

Hortus Loci Nursery business.

Hortus Loci is first and foremost a wholesale nursery. It contract grows for other garden centres like Wisley and Exbury with most of the remaining plants grown being for contract grows for larger off site planting schemes that are often planted by the nursery's own landscape company. (see site Photos at Appendix B)

The nursery also supplies all of the RHS Shows throughout the year with stock grown 6 months in advance and sometimes longer. The nursery also delivers plants for schemes and events throughout the UK and Europe. The nursery's sales breakdown can be summarised is as follows (with year by year variations)

- to Other Garden Centres 20-25%
- to Shows and events 35-45%
- as Contract Grows for large projects 30-45%
- for Our own Plant Centre c.10%

Bringing in young plants and growing them on into larger pots is horticulture as stock needs looking after, feeding and pruning to take it on to its next stage and much of the 10% of the nursery's stock that goes to the Plant Centre is done in this way.

In turnover terms the retail plant sales element of the site accounts for less than 20% of yearly sales. This retail area is separately rated by the Council and forms only an ancillary part of the overall nursery business and trade which concentrates on growing of plants / trees and hedging for onward sale to other centres, shows, landscapers and developers both within the UK and overseas.

The business employs 45 staff, only two of whom are full time plant centre employees supported by 10no. part time staff.

As a key part of the commercial nursery's operation and trade there is an urgent requirement to improve the efficiency and employee conditions involved in the potting and re-potting of plants, trees and shrubs,

This operation which forms a large part of daily operations on site requires a dry and warm environment for staff to pot seeds and pot and re-pot plants, shrubs and trees as they 'grow on' and this activity is a key part of the business that has to occur all year round and in all weathers.

The nursery has, on site, its own a chiller unit where seeds are sown in seed trays in the chiller unit. This is needed for germination of certain seeds. Some will be collected seed from stock plants and other seeds will have been bought in. It is typical for horticultural businesses to both gather their own seed with others being bought in.

Once germinated seed trays move into smaller glasshouses to be grown on. Similarly, the nursery also propagates their own plants from cuttings. Thereafter, seedlings/rooted cuttings are potted on into plug trays and accommodated within small polytunnels which also have mist benches. Once the plants are rooted through in the plugs they are potted up into small 9cm diameter pots in trays.

This is the stage where the pressure mounts for space as a tray of 24 x 9cm pots takes up the same space as 104 plugs so more than a fourfold increase of space needed. As well as being assisted by the larger potting shed the recently approved new glasshouse will also help alleviate this current bottleneck.

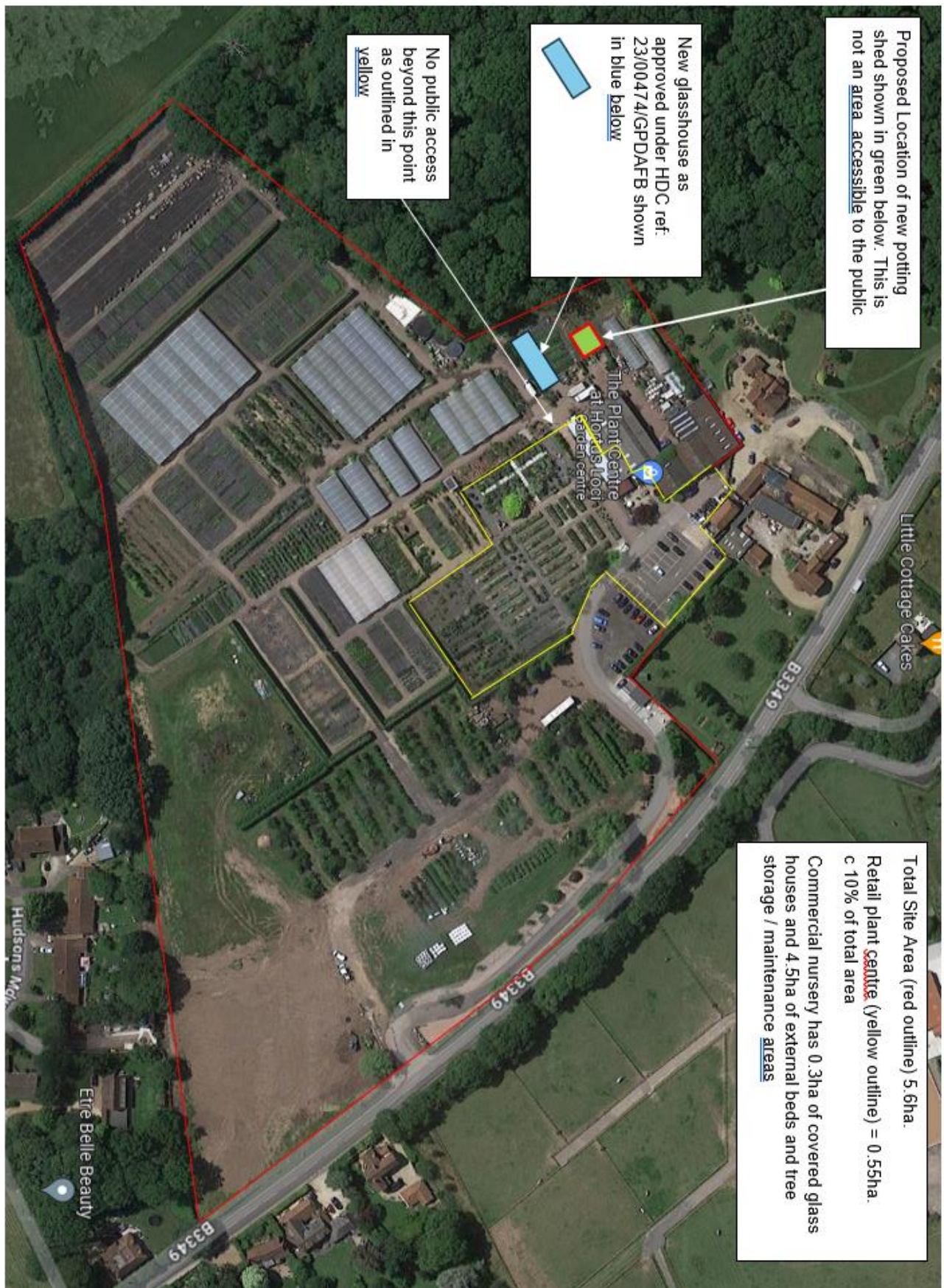
Once the plants are fully rooted, they get potted on again into a larger containers depending on the plant, again a process for which much more space is needed. This final process is the nursery's current worst problem. As potting is a necessary operation for 12 months of the year the currently used old agricultural building is not fit for purpose as previously outlined.

Whilst the current area used for this potting operation can be re-used for the storage of compost and equipment that is not vulnerable to modest weather ingress, it is no longer fit-for-purpose to accommodate potting staff all year round who now urgently need a larger, warmer and dryer space for this process.

The type of building required for this needs to offer modest insulation from wind and rain and internal spaces uninterrupted by columns / supporting framework to enable plants and equipment to be freely manoeuvred within the building. The proposed shed meets these requirements entirely.

The building is, therefore reasonably, required for the purpose of horticulture (agriculture) for this important local business.

Appendix A Site Plan showing Proposed Potting Shed Location



Appendix B - Site Photographs May 20224



These plants are some of the nursery's commercially grown stock headed for Chelsea Flower Show in May 2024. Others from the commercial beds examples as shown below and overleaf (not accessible to the public) will, when ready be sent on to Hampton Court, Wiseley Plant Centre, Coblands Plant Centre, Exbury Gardens, Darts farm Exeter, and a host of other Landscape customers.

Hopefully this illustrates the need to the LPA for a fit for purpose potting facility to support this important local horticultural business. A site visit is encouraged.















