



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

Asst Director Planning Services  
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Peter Samuel, Regional Planning  
Adviser  
Agriculture and Rural Affairs  
Department  
Cathays Park  
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CF10 3NQ  
Tel.029 2082 5111

7 October 2002

Dear Sir

**Reference P/02/1006/OUT**

**Proposal to develop 50 hectares of land at Island Farm, Bridgend for sports/ leisure facilities, hotel/restaurant, business park, housing and access**

I refer to your letter of 20 September concerning the above planning application and consulting this Department in accordance with the provision of Article 10(1)(w) of the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995.

The Agriculture and Rural Affairs Department ("the Department") of the Welsh Assembly Government has carried out an Agricultural Land Classification of the land, with the conclusion that all the affected agricultural land is considered to come within the best and most versatile category (6.5 hectares of grade 2 and 29.5 hectares of grade 3a). A plan identifying the grade boundaries will be forwarded to your Authority as soon as possible.

The Department has considered this proposal in the light of the Welsh Assembly Government's policy for the protection of agricultural land as set out in paragraph 2.8.1 of Planning Policy Wales, March 2002.

The Department considers that the proposal is in conflict with the above policy statement and therefore wishes to **object** to the proposal in the long term national agricultural interest, for the following reasons

- In carrying out development control decisions, considerable weight should be given to the protection of best and most versatile agricultural land, because of its special importance.
- Best and most versatile agricultural land should only be developed if there is an overriding need for the development, and either previously developed land or land in lower agricultural grades is unavailable, or available lower grade land has an environmental value recognised by a landscape, wildlife, historic or archaeological designation which outweighs the agricultural considerations.
- The development for sports/leisure, hotel/restaurant, business park, housing and access purposes will lead to the loss of approximately 36 hectares of best and most versatile agricultural land, of which approximately 9 hectares is identified under current Development Plan proposals to be developed for special employment purposes.

If your Authority refuses planning permission for this proposal and includes the Department's objection in its grounds for refusal, the Department will be prepared if requested in accordance with Rule 12/1 of the Town and Country Planning (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1992, to be represented at any subsequent appeal inquiry. In addition, to assist in the preparation of the written statement of case required under Rule 6/1 of the 1992 Rules, the Department will be prepared to provide a statement based on the reasons for objection as outlined above.

Should your Authority consider that there is a case for granting planning permission despite this objection, the Department would expect to discuss the matter further with you as a matter of urgency. If agreement cannot be reached, the Department may initiate procedures within the Welsh Assembly Government to consider the application for call-in.

The views expressed by the Department are without prejudice to the Welsh Assembly Government's duty to take into account all material planning considerations and the representations made by other parties.

Yours faithfully

**Basil Hollington (tel. 029 2089 2660 mobile 07785 222122)**  
**On behalf of the Regional Planning Adviser**



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FAO Mr David Davies

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8 November 2002

Dear Sir

**Reference P/02/1006/OUT**

**Proposal to develop 50 hectares of land at Island Farm, Bridgend for sports/ leisure facilities, hotel/restaurant, business park, housing and access**

I write to confirm certain matters raised at the meeting at your offices on 6 November, when the Department's objection stance on the above proposal was discussed with Mr David Davies of your Authority and Mr Andrew Muir, of Harmers Ltd, representing the developer.

Your letter of 10 October 2002 highlights the matters of concern.

**Agricultural Land Classification (ALC)**

The Department has carried out a detailed ALC assessment of the site and the results were given to Mr Davies and Mr Muir. The Department considers that the site contains 7.02 hectares of grade 2 and 29.33 hectares of grade 3a. No agricultural land of a lower grade was mapped.

## **The Development Plan**

I can confirm that, in accordance with Article 10(1)(w) of the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995, the Department is required to take a view upon the development of 20 hectares or more of grade 1, 2 or 3a quality agricultural land that "is not for agricultural purposes and is not in accordance with the provisions of a development plan".

The Department is therefore required to consider the provisions of the Development Plan.

Mr Davies confirmed the following -

- approximately 2.5 hectares of the business park element was in accordance with the provisions of the approved Ogwr Borough Local Plan and the emerging Unitary Development Plan Special Employment allocation at Island Farm.
- the residential, hotel/restaurant and the remainder of the business park elements are contrary to the provisions of the Development Plan.
- the WRU and the Public Open Space elements could be considered as generally acceptable recreational uses within the countryside and, consequently, may not be contrary in principle to Local Plan countryside protection policies. However, the development plan makes no provision for recreational use in this location.

In conclusion, of the 36 hectares of agricultural land involved in this proposal, approximately 2.5 hectares is considered by your Authority to be in accordance with the provisions of the development plan.

## **Reversion to high quality agricultural land**

The concept of "reversibility" is tackled in Technical Advice Note (Wales) 6, paragraph 4 as follows "Also, once agricultural land is developed, even for soft uses such as golf courses, its return to agriculture as best and most versatile agricultural land is seldom practicable".

It was agreed by the meeting that there was no realistic prospect that the land affected by the WRU proposals would revert to agricultural use in the foreseeable future. The land would also be difficult to restore to high quality agricultural land. The development includes a significant amount of built development (buildings, car parks, artificial playing surfaces, underground services). Additionally, although no detailed design work has been undertaken to date to quantify the extent of ground disturbance, it is

likely that the construction of some of the grass rugby pitches would involve cut and fill and plateau formation.

Mr Muir confirmed that his client would be unwilling to submit to conditions at outline planning permission stage that secured the long term agricultural potential of the site, as these conditions would constrain the manner of development.

It was agreed that the public open space proposals, which are included in the proposals for nature conservation enhancement reasons, would be reversible in the physical sense if the development did not include significant ground disturbance or artificial surfacing. However, the likelihood of this happening sometime in the future should be viewed in the light of TAN 6 guidance.

### **ADAS Agricultural Assessment**

The difference between the ADAS and the Department's ALC assessment of the site was discussed. However, it is confirmed that ALC grades 2 and 3a are both afforded statutory protection.

ADAS provided ALC information for the locality, based upon the reconnaissance ALC sheet 154. I would like to confirm that the reconnaissance series has been withdrawn and is no longer available for ALC identification purposes. I confirmed that sheet 154 was produced in 1966 and contains out dated ALC information. Its contents should not be relied upon.

ADAS provided information concerning the private agricultural interest.

I would like to confirm that the Department views the proposal in terms of its affect on the long term, national agricultural interest. There are other agricultural factors that your Authority is obliged to take into account where they apply to a development proposal, as per paragraphs 7 to 11 of TAN 6. However, the affect upon the private agricultural interest does not concern the Department under the General Development Procedure statutory consultation arrangements unless it also has a bearing upon the national agricultural interest. In this case, the Department is not aware of any long term factor that reduces the land's ability to perform to the identified ALC grade potential.

### **Timetable**

I would like to confirm the Department's agricultural objection to the proposals.

It is my understanding that the planning officer's report to the Planning Committee will be finalised by 18 November for the Committee to consider on 21 November. This Committee will not have powers to grant consent and your Authority will be obliged to refer the case to Welsh Assembly Government under the departure rules.

I shall contact Mr Davies in the near future to check on progress. Depending upon the outcome, the Department may wish to initiate procedures within the Welsh Assembly Government to consider the application for call-in.

I hope the above comments correctly interpret the discussion and clarify the Department's method of viewing the proposal. I would be pleased to discuss if necessary.

Yours faithfully

**Basil Hollington (tel. 029 2089 2660 mobile 07785 222122)**  
**On behalf of the Regional Planning Adviser**

**Copied to Mr Andrew Muir, Harmer Ltd.**