

## MEMORANDUM

To : **MR A PRIOR, SOUTHERN PLANNING SERVICES**

From : **MANDY NEILL, SENIOR LANDSCAPE OFFICER**

Tel : **01432 260150** My Ref :

Date : **21/08/2012** Your Ref : **S121834/F**

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**SITE:** Cefn Ceist Farm, Michaelchurch Escley, Herefordshire, HR2 0JY

**DEVELOPMENT:** Proposed extensions to agricultural storage building

Cefn Ceist Farm is situated in an elevated position on the south-west facing valley side of Escley brook. This area is described as Ancient Border Farmlands in the Landscape Character Assessment, which is characterised by pastoral land use, small scale enclosure pattern formed by hedgerows, small areas of woodland and dramatically rolling topography.

Access to the farm is via a long access drive which descends to the farm from a minor road (C1209) which runs along the higher ground above the farm. Farm buildings have been constructed incrementally to the west and north of the farmhouse. This expansion has necessitated excavating into the slope in order to create level platforms for the new, larger scale farm buildings. The spoil has been formed into bunds which run along the north and western boundary of the expanded farmyard. These bunds have been planted with trees.

The new agricultural building is located in a previously pastoral field to the north of the farmyard, beyond the bund (planning reference SW100615/O). This field is on a significant slope, rising to the north-east. A public right of way, (ME12) crosses this field, to the west of the proposed site for the storage building. It is noted that this footpath is subject to a Highways Act order application by Herefordshire Council.

### Visual impact issues

There are views of Cefn Ceist Farm from the north, from footpath ME12, but views are restricted by landform – the farm only comes into view along the section of footpath which descends from the prominent small hill to the north of the farm. The farm is not visible from the minor road (C1209) above it.

There are views of Cefn Ceist from the opposite (north-east facing) side of the Escley brook valley, from the minor road (C1205), in the vicinity of Michaelchurch Escley Primary School and from footpath (ME12) to the east of the school (the section of ME12 between the C1205 and Firs Farm). From this point the new building is visible as a skyline feature. It is considerably larger than other buildings in the area. The proposed extensions will be visible and further increase the scale of this already large building. The materials of the extensions should match the existing building. These views have not been mentioned in the application.

### Effect on landscape character

From Michaelchurch Escley (C1205) it was noted that the presence of small woodland blocks and trees in the vicinity of Cefn Ceist Farm have helped to partially assimilate the modern farm buildings that have been erected to date. However, the bunds which have been constructed are artificial in appearance and detract from the character of Ancient Border Farmlands. It was noted from site photographs that the level platform for the proposed extension has already been excavated.

### Proposed development – issues

I have concerns about the proposed extension of the agricultural storage building. The visual impact of this large building will be increased. The size of it is not in keeping with the landscape character. It is disappointing that the application does not mention either landscape impact or mitigation. It is not clear whether any tree planting has been carried out in accordance with the previous planning approval.

The principal of extending an existing building is considered to have a lower landscape impact than a new building on a green field site.

### Mitigation

With regard to mitigation; I recommend that new hedgerow trees (Oak/*Quercus robur* and Ash/*Fraxinus excelsior*) should be planted at random intervals along the existing native species hedgerows which form the northern and eastern boundary of the application site. A belt of native trees should be planted to the south and west of the new agricultural storage building. The recommended tree planting would help to form a backdrop for the new building, when viewed from the west and will filter views of the building from the south. The management guidelines for Ancient Border Farmland landscape type is to encourage landowners to conserve and restore the existing and historic hedgerow lines. Opportunities should also be taken to strengthen the enclosure pattern through new hedgerow planting and for new, small scale woodland planting of ancient character and linear form.

Bunds should not be used, because as stated previously, they are artificial in appearance and tend to be detractive elements. Any excess spoil should be removed from the site.

### Conclusion

The application does not demonstrate that landscape character has been considered, neither does it provide a suitable landscape scheme to integrate the development into the surroundings. This is required as per UDP Policy LA2 and LA6. It would be preferable for this to be an integral part of the application, however in this case it is considered that if the development is to be approved then a landscape mitigation scheme could be secured through a pre-commencement condition. This would be for a clearly marked plan showing existing trees and hedgerow, together with details of new native tree and hedgerow planting to be provided and agreed by the local authority before work can be started.