

## COMMITTEE REPORT

**Committee:** Planning Committee      **Ward:** Strensall  
**Date:** 26 July 2007      **Parish:** Stockton-on-the-Forest  
Parish Council

**Reference:** 07/00908/FULM  
**Application at:** Os Field 7928 Towthorpe Moor Lane Strensall York  
**For:** Use of land for a Maize Maze with car parking and mobile toilet  
**By:** A L Beattie  
**Application Type:** Major Full Application (13 weeks)  
**Target Date:** 7 August 2007

### 1.0 PROPOSAL

1.1 This application is to create a maize maze in an agricultural field off Towthorpe Lane, Strensall. The area in question is 4.6 hectares in size with a width of approx. 143 metres and a depth of approx. 308 metres. It is currently laid with a maize crop. There is an existing vehicular field entrance off Towthorpe Lane in the South East corner of the field and part of the proposals would see this widened to 7 metres. The site is rectangular in shape and is surrounded by other fields to the side and rear and Towthorpe Lane to the south.

1.2 A parking area is shown on the southern flank of the site closest to the road. This is shown to be 0.75 hectares in size and is rectangular in shape. A small wooden pay booth approx. 2m x 2m is shown close to the proposed entrance and 2 portable portaloos will be placed on the site whilst the site is in use. This car parking area will be laid to grass with hardcore around the entrance area. There are no permanent structures proposed although 2 low-lying temporary timber bridges would be placed within the maze. There are small ponds on the corners of both adjacent fields.

1.3 The junction of Towthorpe Lane with the A64 is approx. 150 metres away to the east.

### 2.0 POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 Development Plan Allocation:

2.2 Policies:

CYGB1  
Development within the Green Belt

CYGB13  
Sports facilities outside settlements

CYGP4A  
Sustainability

CYV1

Criteria for visitor related devt

### **3.0 CONSULTATIONS**

#### **3.1 INTERNAL.**

##### **3.2 Highway Network Management.**

The application site is currently an agricultural field with no formally constructed verge crossing. It appears likely, however, that an acceptable access in terms of construction and sight lines could be created to serve the proposed development.

It is estimated that the venue will be visited by upto 200 cars per day and a car park for 100 is proposed but there are no details of the site car park

The site is rural, at least a mile from any centres of population and approx 5 miles from the city centre. There is a nominally half hourly bus service approximately 250m from the site but no footway network between the site and the nearest bus stop. It is considered probable therefore that the majority of visitors will be car borne and whilst the use of the land may be considered "sustainable", the need to visit it by car is not!

The site is approximately 150m from the A64 (T) and it is considered probably that the majority of visitors to the site would arrive/depart via the junction of Towthorpe Moor Lane with the A64. The junction forms a simple crossroad junction with Warthill Common Lane, being a continuation of the C92. The A64 at this point is a trunk road, the highway authority of which is the Highways Agency, but it is appreciated that the junction is currently very busy at times with vehicles needing to queue to enter or leave the trunk road.

In the response from the Highways Agency it is noted that there is a request for additional information amounting to a Transport Assessment.

It is therefore requested that a Transport Assessment be submitted to accompany this application, paying particular regard to the impact on the neighbouring A64 junction. The applicant should be advised, however, that the submission of such an assessment does not necessarily infer highway support of the proposals. The applicant should be further advised that if the scheme were to be acceptable to the highway authority then it is thought probable that a number of conditions, relating to site access and parking particularly, would be requested to be attached to any permission granted.

##### **3.3 Environmental Protection Unit.**

No objections.

#### **3.4 EXTERNAL**

##### **3.5 Stockton on the Forest Parish Council.**

The Parish Council are concerned about the access and egress onto the A64

### 3.6 Highways Agency

Cannot support the application due to the limited information submitted by the applicant. Therefore unable to offer its full comments at this time. The application refers to the provision of 100 car parking spaces and we would request that the applicant provide further information in terms of the impact on the Strategic Road Network (SRN) in accordance with 'Guidance on Transport Assessment' (GTA) and Circular 02/2007 'Planning and the Strategic Network' both issued by the DfT in March 2007.

Clarification of this should be sought prior to any final decision on the application.

### 3.7. Third Parties.

One letter of objection received from the occupier of Newstead Farm on Towthorpe Lane.

i) Site is in the Green Belt and is currently an agricultural field. It is surrounded by open farmland and close to neighbouring rural properties. The impact of such a venture would be visually and environmentally enormous. It would be a further erosion of the Green Belt.

ii) Highway Safety - Towthorpe Lane is a narrow country road and is a short distance to the junction with the A64 at the Strensall / Stockton on the Forest crossroads. The A64 is very busy particularly during the school holidays and this crossroads is particularly dangerous and has been the scene of numerous very serious accidents and fatalities. The majority of the visitors would use this route either by car or coach as there is no direct bus link to the site and no footpath. Extra traffic would bring added pollution, congestion and danger, especially for young children. There is a bus stop on the A64 but this is on the opposite side of the A64 from the crossroads and people would have to cross the A64 and walk along the road. This would be dangerous for both drivers and pedestrians. Traffic would queue in both directions to access to and from the site and this would be dangerous both on Towthorpe Lane and the A64.

iii) Additional noise and congestion in a rural environment.

iv) Visual impact in an open, agricultural area and the visual impact would be very difficult to reduce.

## 4.0 APPRAISAL

### 4.1 KEY ISSUES.

- Green belt
- Highway safety.
- Sustainability.

Green Belt.

4.2 The site is in the Green Belt where there is a general presumption against new development unless it is in connection with uses defined in PPG2 (Green Belts). One of the purposes of the Green Belt is to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation near urban areas and the type of use here would fall under this category. However, such development is considered inappropriate unless it maintains openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Any new buildings proposed would have to be essential facilities in connection with the proposed use and which preserve the openness of the Green Belt.

4.3 In this case the proposed use is for a maize maze and so largely involves a leisure based development that takes place within an agricultural crop, being grown for agricultural purposes. Other than the pay booth, portaloos and bridges within the maze, there are no new buildings being erected and even these are temporary to the life cycle of the maize crop (approx. 8 weeks) and will be removed once the use has ceased. Therefore the use of the land and the limited scope of new buildings proposed means that they are unlikely to be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt.

4.4 However, the ancillary impacts of the development also have to be considered and in this case the use is likely to attract high visitor numbers and given its location, a high number of car borne visitors. This in turn will result in a significant number of cars parked on the site and this does have the potential to harm the openness of the Green Belt. However, the use is limited to a few weeks in the summer months and the hours of opening are limited to daytime only and could be controlled accordingly by condition. The application states that the parking area will be laid to grass and the site is screened from the road by a mature hawthorn hedge. Whilst the cars would be visible above this, this will offer a level of screening which would help soften the appearance and reduce the visual impact of the car park and consequently the openness of the Green Belt. Given the above and the relatively modest area of car parking identified on the plans, officers do not consider that in this particular case the impact on the openness of the Green Belt to be unduly harmful. However, if this parking area was to be extended from that shown here (the plans do not show a proper layout and therefore it has not been proven whether the area allocated is acceptable for the proposed 100 cars to park or not) then this issue may need to be re-assessed.

Highway Safety.

4.5 The application was accompanied by little information in the way of expected visitor numbers although the applicant has estimated this to be approx. 200 cars per day of the application form. Other than a plan indicating approx. the extent of the parking area, no detailed site / parking layout has been provided. The comments of both the Council's highway officers and the Highways Agency appear at para's 3.2 and 3.6 of this report and Members will note that both make reference to a lack of information supplied by the applicant. Despite the applicant purporting otherwise, the site is wholly unsustainable with a significant reliance on the private car in order to get to the site and this will have a particular impact on the junction with the A64 which is approx. 150 metres to the east. This is a busy junction and the Highways Agency are responsible for the A64 as it has trunk road status. The Agency were unable to support the application and have requested further information, the content

of which effectively amounts to a Transport Assessment. This stance is supported by the Council's Highway officers who are concerned at the lack of information and detail submitted with the application which makes it almost impossible for the Council to make a proper and detailed assessment of this issue. This is particularly important given the nature of the uncontrolled junction (a crossroads) between the A64 and Towthorpe Lane and it is considered vital that this issue is properly considered given the safety concerns associated with this junction.

4.6 Furthermore the applicant has estimated that approx. 200 cars a day will visit the site but has estimated that the car park will have a capacity for 100 cars (although no layout has been provided to support this). Therefore, whilst it is acknowledged that there will likely to be some crossing over of visitors, some parking on Towthorpe Lane is likely. There is no public footpath from which to get to the site and excessive parking on Towthorpe Lane is not acceptable. Again further information is required with regard to likely visitor numbers and the subsequent capacity of the car park to cope with this including a more detailed site layout plan.

Sustainability.

4.7 The site is not served by public transport and the nearest bus service is approx. 250 metres from the site with no public footpath to the site. Therefore it is likely that the vast majority of the visitors to the site will be car borne and therefore whilst the attraction itself (in terms of the use of the maize crop) is a sustainable use of the land, the need to visit the site by car is not. The use therefore encourages car borne travel and this is contrary to National and local policy which seeks to reduce the dependency on the use of the car. However, the season of a maize maze is limited to the cycle of the crop which in this case would be limited to approx. 6-8 weeks. The venture promotes a form of farm and economic diversification which government guidance and local policy encourages. It is a sustainable use of land and therefore the only issue would be environmental sustainability from traffic and this is difficult to accurately predict given that the numbers of visitors is only estimated. The public use may reduce any possible spraying of the crop and this would offset the environmental issues raised by the short term increase in car journeys to and from the site. Therefore, given the above, in particular the likely short term use of the site officers consider that the proposal is acceptable in sustainability terms.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

5.1 The use of the land constitutes an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt and any likely structures associated with the proposal are unlikely to harm the openness of the Green Belt. The use is limited to the extent of the maize growing season and therefore the visual harm caused by the parking of cars will be short term although this would be dependant on more information as to the adequacy of the size of the car park shown.

5.2 However, the application generally is poorly presented with little in the way of detailed plans. There are no layout plans for the car park and so it is impossible to properly assess whether this will be adequate for the parking of 100 vehicles as

suggested. The use is likely to be a high vehicle generator and therefore highway safety is an important material consideration. The site is very close to a busy crossroads with the A64 and many visitors are likely to arrive and leave the site via this junction. The A64 is controlled by the Highways Agency and they have stated that the limited information submitted means they cannot properly consider the implications of the use on this junction and have requested further information in the form of a Transport Assessment. This is supported by the Council's own highway officers. Therefore, officers are of the view that the application be refused until this has been prepared and properly assessed.

**6.0 RECOMMENDATION:** Refuse

- 1 In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority the proposal has been submitted with insufficient information in order to properly assess in detail the impact on the Strategic Road Network and on local highway safety, in particular at the junction of Towthorpe Lane and the A64 (T) given the additional number of vehicles likely to be visiting the site in connection with the proposed use. A full Transport Assessment is therefore required in order to properly assess this in detail. This is in line with Government Guidance contained within PPG13 (Transport) and Circular 02/2007 'Planning and the Strategic Network', March 2007.
- 2 The plans submitted offer insufficient information or detail on the size or layout of the proposed car park. It has not been proven that the car park can accommodate 100 cars as indicated and consequently the extent of the car park area cannot be assessed as adequate in order to prevent off-site parking on the public highway which could constitute a highway safety danger.

**7.0 INFORMATIVES:**

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