

**Item No. 18****SCHEDULE C**

<b>APPLICATION NUMBER</b>	<b>MB/09/00517/FULL</b>
<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>LAND AT MAULDEN WOOD BEDFORD ROAD MAULDEN</b>
<b>PROPOSAL</b>	<b>FULL: WOODLANDS VISITORS CENTRE WITH ANCILLARY WORKSHOP UNITS AND ASSOCIATED PARKING.</b>
<b>PARISH</b>	Maulden
<b>CASE OFFICER</b>	Sarah Fortune
<b>DATE REGISTERED</b>	18 March 2009
<b>EXPIRY DATE</b>	13 May 2009
<b>APPLICANT</b>	Greensand Trust
<b>REASON FOR COMMITTEE TO DETERMINE</b>	<b>PART OF SITE OWNED BY CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL</b>
<b>RECOMMENDED DECISION</b>	<b>Full Conditional Approval</b>

**Site Location:**

The site lies to the west of the A6 trunk Road in the parish of Maulden at the eastern edge of Maulden woods which lies at the top of the distinctive landscape feature of the Greensand Ridge. Maulden woods covers 160 acres and is an attractive mix of semi natural mixed deciduous and coniferous woodlands and acid grassland.

The land contained between the layby and the A6 is owned by the former Beds County Council (now Central Bedfordshire Council). The land to the further west is owned by the Forestry Commission and is predominantly an SSSI.

**The Application:**

This application is for a working Woodland Centre and includes the creation of a new Visitor Centre in the woods - to include a cafe, shop, education and community facilities, an office and a volunteer base for the Greensand Trust. Existing Forestry Commission sheds are to be 'turned into' workshop incubator units for woodland related businesses -helping them to get started and develop markets and supply chains etc..

## **RELEVANT POLICIES:**

### **National Policies (PPG & PPS)**

- PPS7 The Countryside
- PPS9 Nature Conservation
- PPG17 Planning for Open Space, Sport and recreation.
- PPS22 Renewable Energy
- PPS1 Climate Change supplement.

### **Regional Spatial Strategy**

East of England Plan (May 2008): policies ENV3 and E6  
Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy (March 2005)

### **Bedfordshire Structure Plan 2011**

### **Mid Bedfordshire Local Plan First Review 2005 Policies**

- CS1 Protection of landscape character.
- CS3 Development within or close to AGLV.
- CS7 Countryside Management Projects and support of the aims of the Greensand Trust.
- CS19 Development in the countryside is exceptionally permitted.
- CS25 The development of retailing facilities in the countryside. Need to demonstrate that the viability of local shops not undermined.
- NC3 County Wildlife Sites.
- DPS5 Protection of amenity.
- DPS16 Encourage the retention and management of trees and other landscape features.
- DPS20 Require development to maximise energy conservation.
- EMP6A The extension of industrial and commercial uses in the countryside permitted within or beyond their curtilage etc...
- EMP7 Proposals for small scale tourist related development that can only be located in the countryside will be encouraged..
- EN2 Encourages schemes using renewable energy
- EN4 Support proposals for the development of active solar systems.

### **Supplementary Planning Guidance**

### **South Bedfordshire Local Plan Review Policies**

Not applicable

## Supplementary Planning Guidance

### Planning History

None relevant

### Representations: (Parish & Neighbours)

Maulden Parish Council  
Haynes Parish Council

Supports

No objections. Some concerns about the travel and access arrangements. There appears to be no parking for buses or school units. Concerned about extra traffic to and from the site. A6 is a fast road. Ideal solution would be for there to be a roundabout on the Old Main road junction. Parking arrangements are not clear. Are there to be parking meters? This could encourage people to find alternative free parking - and congestion could build up in the lay by or in Haynes West End. These concerns need to be addressed with highways and conditions attached to ensure that these matters are addressed. .

Neighbours

9 Bunkers Drive Cotton End: Comments regarding the potential charging for the car spaces, scant mention of the lay by outside of the clubhouse, will parking regulations be in order for the lay by, why should people pay for something that they have already paid for, are there plans to do work on the clubhouse lay by.

West End Haynes: No objection - there appears to be no parking provision for the workshops so assume there will be little traffic to them, the A6 has been a difficult access/exit for many years and pleased that the entrance to the area will be from the main gate. Highways need to look at the access arrangements. Of the view that the Greensand Trust is a way of regaining the care that this SSSI deserves.

App Adv

### Consultations/Publicity responses

Highways	Revisions are required to the access and parking arrangements. Comments on any revised plans to be reported verbally. (Highways are being pro-active in assisting with the revisions.)
Natural England	No objection as long as all works take place in strict accordance with those described in the application. Conditions and Notes recommended.
Wildlife Trust	No objections as long as conditions are attached to any consent. If the scheme is carried out sensitively it has great potential to enhance the Maulden Woods.
RSPB	No obs received
Butterfly Conservation	No obs received
Ecology Officer	No obs received
Tree Officer	No objections in principle as long as conditions are attached to any consent to ensure that trees are safeguarded
EHO	No objections subject to conditions and comments.
Refuse officer	Please forward Site Waste Management Plans as appropriate
Beds Bat Group	No objections as long as the mitigation is put in place as in the Mitigation report.
Marston Vale	Support. There is a strong accord between the activities of the Trust and those of the Forest of Marston Vale.
Forestry Commission	No objections in principle.

### **Determining Issues**

#### **The main considerations of the application are;**

1. Background and Policy
2. Siting, size and design in relation to visual amenities of area
3. Impact on amenities of neighbours
4. Access and parking
5. Wildlife

### **Considerations**

## 1. Background and Policy

The Working Woodlands Centre concept has been around a long time. It has been identified as an important project in the Greensand Ridge Local Development Strategy and coupled with the opportunities to bid for funding for the project it means that the time is now right to take the project forward.

The project is led by a partnership between the Greensand Trust and the Forestry Commission - with Central Bedfordshire Council. It is a forward thinking proposal to create a visitor facility at a popular Bedfordshire attraction and provide an opportunity to stimulate the rural economy associated with woodlands and wood products - creating and sustaining local jobs.

It is to be a hub for access and information, acting as an exemplar in positive woodland management and carbon reduction. Its objectives are to enhance the bio diversity and heritage value of these woodlands and ensure that they are sensitively managed. It is to provide opportunities for a diverse range of communities to engage and participate in the management of their environment and learn new skills. The existing Forestry Commission sheds are to be turned into workshop incubator units for wood and woodland related businesses helping them to get started and develop markets and supply chains. It will also create new jobs through the development of woodland enterprise infrastructure and tourism. It will provide the necessary infrastructure to develop tourism opportunities acting as a focal point for access linking with routes into Maulden and providing information to visitors. It will also provide a hub for the sustainable growth of the woodland enterprise, encouraging collaboration and skill sharing. It is also hoped to improve the appearance of Deadman's Hill lay - by reducing anti social behaviour.

Maulden Woods covers some 160 hectares and is an attractive mix of semi natural and mixed deciduous and coniferous woodlands and acid grassland. It is recognised as one of the largest and most important remnants of ancient woodland in Bedfordshire with the majority of the site being designated as Site of Special Scientific Interest SSSI. The site supports an exceptionally rich range of invertebrates including those which are both rare locally and nationally. There are also several rare and uncommon plant species as well as vast expanses of Bluebells.

The woodland also supports a range of mammals including bats, badgers and has a large number of muntjac deer. There is a good breeding bird population supporting a range of woodland bird species. Hazel dormice and adders have been successfully reintroduced. The site is accessed via the A6 Deadman's Hill lay-by.

With regard to national policy advice there are a number of Central Government Policy documents which are relevant to this proposal. In particular PPS1 (Climate Change Supplement) states that its principles must be used as a material planning consideration if the Local Planning Authority has not produced

an up to date DPD. (The DPD has not been formally adopted.). This proposal does clearly take full account of this Policy document.

Policy PPS7 encourages sustainable developments which are accessible, support countryside based enterprises and activities which contribute to rural economies and take account of the need to protect rural resources using renewable energy resources. This Policy document also states that tourism and leisure activities are vital to many rural economies and the provision of facilities for tourist visitors is vital for the development of the tourism industry in rural areas. Facilities need to enhance visitors enjoyment.

PPS9 relates to Biodiversity and Geological Conservation and requires that these matters are taken into account in the consideration of planning proposal.

PPG17 requires the planning system to encourage sport and recreation whilst PPS22 requires that renewable energy is incorporated into proposals where possible.

In Policy terms the proposal is specifically mentioned in the Greensand Ridge Local Development Strategy (2008) under the 'Swiss Army Life multi use centres theme'. It also accords with the four outcomes of the Natural England - Strategic Direction 2006-9. The proposal is also located within one of the 11 strategic corridors identified as being key to the development of the GI network and the need to enhance the facilities at Maulden Woods is acknowledged. The draft Mid Bedfordshire GI plan also acknowledges the importance of this project. With regard to Bedfordshire's Sustainable Communities Strategy (2003-13) - the project also contributes to the priorities relating to growing the Beds economy and raising the profile of the county, protecting and enhancing the environment delivering good health and well being etc.. The proposal will also help to address weaknesses identified by the Bedfordshire Tourism Growth Strategy including a low familiarity rating and a stagnation in visitor spending through the creation of a high profile facility.

There are some policies in the Mid Beds Local Plan First Review 2005 which are also relevant to this proposal. Policy SR8 relates to Sports and Leisure facilities in the Countryside. This policy provides for such development in the countryside outside of Settlement Envelopes provided that various criteria are satisfied. In particular, there must be a need for the facility to be located in the countryside - including the need for any new buildings - the design and appearance of the development must be such that it is capable of being satisfactorily assimilated into the countryside, there should be a safe access, the needs of the disabled must be met, there must be no adverse impact on the amenities of neighbours etc..

Policy CS7 states that this council will support the aims and objectives of the Greensand Trust. Policy NC3 states that development proposals likely to have an adverse impact on the nature conservation interest of a County Wildlife Site will only be permitted where the need for the development clearly and

demonstrably outweighs the nature conservation value of the site.

Policy CS3 refers to the need to safeguard Area of Great Landscape Value and Policy DPS5 refers to the need for new community facilities to ensure that there is no unacceptable adverse impact on the amenities of neighbours and that landscaping measures, safe access for cars, cyclists and pedestrian is included in any proposal.

The Forestry Commission is the Government Department who have responsibility for trees and woodland and they have advised that they have no objections to the proposal since it complies with DEFRA National Strategy 'A Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests and it also relates to the Regional Woodland Strategy for the East of England 2003 which specifically refers to Tourism and Woodland produce and Timber production and marketing. The Commission has advised that any removal of trees should be the subject of a planning condition.

## **2. Siting , size and design relation to visual amenities of area.**

There are two main areas to the planning application - as well as the existing lay by. The lay by is currently in a poor condition and needs safety improvements along with a more welcoming and safer environment to encourage the use of Maulden woods to all visitor groups.

The two main site areas in the application are known as Site A and Site B.

Site A is the lay-by where the proposal centres around a new visitors facility. This includes a small working woodland retail facility promoting local produce and wood work related products, a small cafe, WC facilities and an education room -as well as accommodation for the Greensand Trust. This is the more public focused facility providing visitor's facilities to lay-by users and specific destination user groups. It is to be connected to the workings of manufactured produce from the incubator workshop units to Site B. This site is also to contain external play areas and education areas - with enhanced landscaping and secure car parking facilities.

Site A currently has no buildings. It is proposed to build the Woodland Centre between the A6 and the existing lay by. It is to be a fairly large, flat roofed building having a max length of about 72 metres and a max width of about 42 metres, a general height of about 6 metres - with a higher section in the centre to 8.5 metres height - and is to be built in simple untreated timber cladding and green tint high specification glazing etc.. The building is to include facilities for office space for the Greensand Trust, meeting room, education area, kitchen, toilets, indoor and outside eating areas and a sales area. This site also contains an external play, vegetable patch, reed bed area and an external demonstration space and education areas.

To the north of this building is to be a Biomass boiler/store and bin store -

alongside which is to be a new private parking area for the Greensand Trust staff.

Site B is located to the north and is currently accessed by an existing access point directly from the A6 and this area will be for the site of the incubator working woodland workshop units for use by the Greensand Trust and also available for business start up users.

Site B proposes to remove 4 derelict buildings and replace these with a single unit to house 5 workshop facilities for woodland related uses. The building is to be single storey, 4 metres in height to the eaves, 29 metres in length and 8 metres in width and is to provide additional accessible timber storage and working height for timber product use and is to be constructed from a steel frame with metal green painted cladding panels, metal roller shutters and metal pedestrian access doors. The building is intended to be robust and security conscious designed to use natural light only through fixed roof lights. The colour will assist with blending the facility into the woodland area.

### **3. Impact on amenities of neighbours**

The visitors facility is to be sited such that it is over 160 metres from the nearest residential dwellings to the north - Apple Tree Cottage and Pear Tree Cottage. The building at site B for the workshop units is to be built on the site of the existing derelict buildings which have been used for offices for the Forestry Commission. There are five dwellings that are reasonably near to this site - the nearest neighbour is the riding centre at Woodside - as well the dwellings known as Dramadditon and Arkle Lodge

With regard to the potential impact on the outlook of these neighbours from the building itself and the comings and goings to it is felt that loss of amenity will not be very great as it is to be designed to be in keeping with the surroundings and the buildings are to be used by people working at the site and this is only likely to be a few people. The Environmental Health Officer is of the view that noise is not anticipated to be very great but is recommending that conditions be attached to the permission to control the hours of use of the workshops as well as control of noise levels from the machinery itself.

### **4. Access and Parking**

Access to site A is to be from the lay by and there is to be solar panel controlled gates and solar panel controlled parking meters through to the secure parking area. There are to be 80 parking spaces provided in this car parking area which lies to the north of the new woodland building with the potential for a further 40 spaces which include a series of disabled and family marked out spaces close to the centre. There is also to be a cycle storage facility located close to the main visitors centre building. There are to be hard landscaped pathways from the car

parking area to the new building A.

To the north of Building A is to be a private parking area and boiler delivery access point and this is away from the general public areas for reasons of security and safety etc..

Site B is currently accessed by an existing access point directly from the A6. The proposals are for access to site B to be from the main Maulden Wood entrance. This is a safer and more sustainable solution for access to the site.

There is an existing routeway through the wood which connects Site B down to the entrance to the wood and near to the proposed visitors centre. The introduction of this as the primary connection between Site A and Site B would mean an improvement to the current set up of a direct access point to the A6 highway at the single file traffic - head of the hill. The proposed connection to the lay-by would mean access to forestry related vehicles to the lay by with a safer entry point to the A6 where it has dual carriageway specification.

The County Highways Officer has raised comments regarding the access arrangements to the site so a meeting has been held with the applicants and revised plans are to be submitted for consideration by the highways officer. Comments on these revised plans will be reported verbally to the Planning Committee.

## **5. Wildlife, drainage, landscaping and other Considerations**

The development lies in Flood Zone 1. A flood risk assessment has been submitted with the application and this concludes that the risk of flooding from all sources is very low provided that an integrated drainage system is provided. No comments have been received from the drainage authorities.

The application has also been accompanied by an ecological survey and mitigation report. This report looks in depth at the various Flora and Wildlife at the site and makes recommendations of mitigation measures to ensure that Protected Species are safeguarded - in particular Bats and Dormice. The Bat Group of Bedfordshire does not raise any objections to the proposals and Natural England have advised that they do not believe that the special interest features of the SSSI will face a permanent adverse impact and are not objecting as long as all the works take place in strict accordance with the details provided in the application. Areas of woodland to the north and south of the visitor centre are to be managed sympathetically and also, as long as the work sheds are constructed sensitively, then the areas of woodland around the site are likely to be safeguarded as long as certain measures are incorporated. Natural England is also of the view that as long as the mitigation measures outlined in the accompanying report are carried out then the impact to biodiversity will be minimised.

The tree officer has looked at the accompanying tree report and has advised

that he has no objections in principle to the works particularly in view of the fact that an extensive tree survey has been carried out by the applicants and this includes comments on the management of the trees. He is requesting that conditions be attached to any consent to ensure that the trees are safeguarded during the works to take place.

The proposals provide for resin bonded and bark pathways, solar lighting, sedum roofs, wood burning stoves, and organic paints etc..

It is intended to minimise on site construction waste by reuse of soils to create bunds, using renewable resources mainly centre around timber products etc.. The landscaping condition is to require details of these bunds to be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for approval. There is to be a generous waste storage and recycling facility at site A and the predominantly timber waste from site B will be used in the biomass boiler for Site A.

### **Reasons For Granting**

In view of the fact that there are no policy objections to the proposal in principle, the size, siting and design are generally in keeping with this very rural location in the woodlands, there is minimal impact on the amenities of neighbours, the ecological implications are acceptable as long as conditions are attached to any consent, there are no drainage objections and the access and parking arrangements are now acceptable the application is recommended for approval as being in compliance with both Central Government Policy advice and Mid Beds Local Plan policies.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**APPROVE** Planning Permission for the application set out above subject to the following condition(s):

- 1 DG01 The development hereby approved shall be commenced within three years of the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 which is designed to ensure that a planning permission does not continue in existence indefinitely if the development to which it relates is not carried out.

- 2 EM05 Details of materials to be used for the external finishes of the development hereby approved shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and the development shall be carried out in accordance therewith.

Reason: To safeguard the appearance of the completed development by ensuring that the development hereby permitted is finished externally with materials to complement the visual amenities of the locality.

3 TL02 Full details of both hard and soft landscaping shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. These details shall include:-

- details of any bundling to be created at the site including details of their siting, profile and surface treatment.
- materials to be used for any hard surfacing and construction methods for the path and parking areas. No dig methods must be used in root protection areas.
- details of trees, shrubs and bramble to be removed at the site and details of any replacement trees - including species and size.
- details of construction details of foundations.
- planting plans - including details of planting for screening along the eastern boundary of the site - and a schedule of size, species, positions, density and times of planting;
- cultivation details including operations required to establish new planting;
- details of existing trees and hedgerows on the site, indicating those to be retained and the method of their protection during development works.

The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In order to ensure that the landscaping is carried out within a reasonable period in the interest of the visual amenities of the area and to safeguard tree roots

4 TL04 The scheme approved in Condition 3. shall be carried out by a date which shall be not later than the end of the full planting season immediately following the completion of the development.

Thereafter the planting shall be adequately maintained for a period of five years from the date of planting. Any of the trees or shrubs or both which die or are removed, or which become severely damaged or seriously diseased (during the said period of five years) shall be replaced with trees or shrubs or both, as the case may be, of similar size and species to those originally required to be planted and the same shall be maintained until properly established.

Reason: In order to ensure that the planting is carried out within a reasonable period in the interest of the visual amenities of the area.

5 TL28 A scheme shall be submitted for written approval by the Local

Planning Authority indicating the positions, design, materials and type of boundary treatment to be erected. The boundary treatment shall be completed in accordance with the approved scheme before the building(s) is/are occupied.

Reason: To safeguard the appearance of the completed development and the visual amenities of the locality.

- 6 U The workshops hereby permitted shall not operate except between the hours of 0800 hours to 1800 hours Monday to Friday, 0900 hours to 1700 hours on Saturdays and 1000 hours to 1600 hours on Sundays and Bank or Public Holidays, without the prior agreement in writing of the Local planning Authority.

Reason: To protect the amenity of neighbouring residents.

- 7 U All plant, machinery and equipment installed or operated in connection with this permission shall be so enclosed, operated and /or attenuated that noise arising from such plant shall not exceed a level of 5dBA below the existing background level (or 10dBA below if there is not a tonal quality) when measured or calculated according to BS4142:1997, at the boundary of any neighbouring residential dwelling.

Reason: To protect the amenity of neighbouring residents.

- 8 U **Prior to commencement of the development hereby permitted the applicants shall submit in writing full details of the bio mass plants to be installed at the Visitor Centre on the development. The details shall include boiler capacity, fuel type, flue height calculations, the content and amount of all emissions to air likely to arise from the plant when in operation, and the measures to be instigated to adequately control such emissions. The approved details shall be fully implemented prior to the plant coming into operation unless otherwise agreed by the Local Planning Authority.**

**Reason: To prevent pollution of the environment and protect local air quality.**

- 9 U The lighting of the Working Woodland Centre must be sensitively designed. Prior to the opening of the Centre details of external lighting to be installed on the development hereby permitted , including the type and design of the lighting unit, any supporting structure and the extent of the area to be illuminated, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The recommendations in the Ecological Survey

Summary and Mitigation Report and guidance from the Bat Conservation Trust should be adhered to. Only the details thereby approved shall be implemented.

Reason: To prevent obstructive light and glare having an adverse impact on surrounding uses and safeguard bats in the Maulden Wood.

- 10 U All individual contractors must be briefed prior to undertaking any operations on site, so that they have a clear understanding of the ecological importance of the application area and hence the strict need to undertake the works in a sensitive manner. They should be provided with a clear protocol to be followed and a named ecological supervisor should any ecological issue arise during works, (e.g. protected species being found during works.)

Reason: To safeguard the ecology of the site.

- 11 U A long term management plan for enhancement of the lay-by site and the Deadmans Hill RNV should be provided to and agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority prior to the centre being opened. This will include details such as planting schemes and a regular management regime to ensure that wildlife interest is restored and increased. Only the approved management plan shall be implemented.

Reason: To safeguard the ecology of the site.

- 12 U As recommended in the Ecological Survey Summary and Mitigation Report a reptile and amphibian terrestrial habitat survey needs to be carried out at an appropriate time of year and suitable mitigation implemented - should any be found. This needs to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To safeguard the wildlife at the site.

- 13 U The recommendations in the Hazel Dormice survey must be followed.

Reason: To ensure that the dormouse population in Maulden Wood is not affected by the development hereby approved.

- 14 U The area approved for retail sales associated with the use of the site hereby permitted shall be restricted to that as shown on the accompanying approved Plan No. 1319/02/02 and no additional area shall be used for retail sales without the prior approval in writing of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To define the permission hereby granted since the site lies in a rural location where there are strict controls over retail developments

- 15 U Details of gates and meters to be erected in association with the development hereby permitted shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and only the approved details shall be implemented.

Reason: To safeguard the visual amenities of the area.

#### Notes to Applicant

- 1 The applicants are advised that the premises may require registration as a commercial food business under the Food Premises (Registration) Regulations 1991 and will need to comply with the standards contained in the relevant Food Hygiene Directives and Regulations. Further information may be obtained for the Public Food Team on 0300 300 800.
- 2 The legislation controlling species is explained in Part 1V and Annex A of ODPM Circular 06/02005 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and their impact within the planning system. The applicants should be informed that planning permission, if granted, does not absolve them from complying with the relevant law, including obtaining and complying with the terms and conditions of any licenses required as described in part 1V B of the Circular.
- 3 The applicant is advised that the following generic good practice mitigation measures are adapted and followed at the site:  
  
Cover any trenches overnight to prevent newts falling into them.  
Do not leave any piles of bricks, tiles, building rubble etc.. lying around as newts may attempt to take refuge and/or over winter in them  
Store any building materials above ground on pallets.  
Put building waste into skips or take off site immediately.  
Mow any lawns regularly and/or strim any vegetations required for building to discourage newts.  
Dismantle any existing potential hibernation sites, e.g. brick rubble, by hand during the summer months;  
Safeguard the pond and around the pond from damage during construction and provide enhancements for great crested newts by pond and terrestrial habitat management.
- 4 The applicant is advise to take note of the letter dated 14 April 2009 from

English Nature attached.

**Decision**

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