

Development Committee 2nd September 2010

Vitacress application BD/69802 – comments by Keith Watts

Clearly, if this was an application for building a new food processing plant on a green field in the AONB between two Conservation Areas with an inadequate road network, I would be opposing it and you would be about to refuse it. But it isn't, the plant exists and this is an application to modify it.

I have read all of the letters from objectors to the application, including those from the two Parish Councils, and I cannot find anything in them that is explicitly directed to this application, as it currently stands. I sympathise with many of the comments made about the current operations on the site and, in particular, the traffic that it generates. I have most sympathy with the occupants of the Viaduct Cottages. Because of the voluntary agreement to route Vitacress traffic away from the village of St Mary Bourne, every vehicle arriving or leaving the site passes within inches of those two cottages, some in the small hours of the morning. Both of their letters refer to the alterations increasing production, and consequently traffic. Hurstbourne Priors Parish Council support them in asking for traffic movements at night to be banned but I don't think that is within this Committee's powers while considering this application. The PC also say that "this application paves the way for increased throughput". I am not so naïve as to believe that Vitacress will not succeed in increasing sales and throughput but that will not be as a result of these changes.

One objector submitted 29 pages of erudition but, on page three, wrote "the issue of this planning application is whether the site at Lower Link Farm is the appropriate location for the operation at its current level". It is not, so the remainder of his analysis falls.

Perhaps, underlying some of these objections is a thought that, if we make things inconvenient for Vitacress, they will go away. If that is so, I must warn people to be careful what you wish for. I have been advised that, if the present users left the site, it would retain established uses for light industrial / food processing. An unknown user could move in and operate with associated transport activities.

One aspect of the application, the new vehicle and machinery workshop, bothered me a lot. I couldn't support consent being granted for what St Mary Bourne Parish Council described as a "vehicle maintenance enterprise". Conditions 24 to 27 on pages 133 and 134 ensure that will not happen and I urge you to include those in your decision.

If I thought that, by opposing this application, I could alleviate the traffic nuisance to Viaduct Cottages, I would oppose it. If I thought that granting this application would create more traffic problems on The Harroway and Walworth Road, I would oppose it. If I thought that granting this application would cause new pollution of the Bourne Rivulet, I would oppose it. I don't. I cannot see any valid reason for opposing the Officer's recommendation.