

STEPPS & DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Working with North Lanarkshire Council for the Stepps Communities

- Stepps, Steppshill, Cardowan, Craigendmuir, Crowwood Grange, Coshneuk & Millerston -

North Lanarkshire Planning
Enterprise and Communities
Fleming House
2 Tryst Road
Cumbernauld
North Lanarkshire
G67 1JW

Secretary
S&DCC
25 Honeywell Drive
Stepps
G33 6GG

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Application ref 21/01275/FUL | Roadside Services Area Comprising Petrol Filling Station, Ancillary Retail Unit, Drive-Thru (Class 3) Units, HGV And Car Parking Areas, Associated Facilities, Landscaping, Infrastructure Works And New Junction Access | Site at Hornshill Farm Road Stepps North Lanarkshire

Stepps & District Community Council **objects** to the above referenced planning application and requests that North Lanarkshire Council **refuses permission** for this development.

Opening Statement

These buildings have been designed as a typical industrial service station aesthetic to meet the corporate identity of Euro Garages. The buildings are out of character with the rural and attractive landscape setting of the site and do not consider the proximity of the existing farm buildings to the site.

The visual impact on the landscape will be considerable and will not be compliant with the principles of LDP Policy DSP 4, Quality of Development.

We recommend that the buildings are redesigned in a more sympathetic way to respond to the rural landscape setting of the site.

Site Context

The site is allocated within the current LDP as EDI 2 B Transport Development, and as such the principle of development of the site as a service station is established.

However, the context of the site is important, and is a significant consideration in terms of the building, road and parking infrastructure design.

To the north, west and east the site is bounded by Greenbelt land designated NBE 3 A, for which there is a presumption against development. The character of the landscape is attractive open fields and farmland with areas of woodland.

To the south the site is bounded by the Blue Bell woodland, which is designated a SINCC, Site of Importance of Nature Conservation, and identified in the LDP as NBE 1 A4a. The site to the south of the Blue Bell Woodland is designated Greenbelt, but has recently been approved, contrary to the LDP for a housing development. As a result of this, it is important that the development of this site is considered sensitively, within this future context, to reduce the coalescence of the settlement of Steps to the north.

Considering the verdant and open greenbelt landscape setting it is important that the development of this site has a minimum visual impact on the character of the landscape.

Planning Statement

The applicant's planning statement claims that the design issues raised at the pre-consultation event have been addressed. We consider this inaccurate as the building design remains as two contemporary boxes (typical industrial units used in service stations across the UK) which are not sensitively designed to the setting of the site.

Visual Impact

As previously stated, the buildings have been designed in a typical industrial service station aesthetic to meet the corporate identity of Euro Garages. The buildings are out of character with the rural and attractive landscape setting of the site and the proximity of the existing farm buildings. It does not represent a built form that will mitigate the visual impact of the development.

The applicant claims that the buildings are 'bedded into' the landscape. We consider that this is not the case. Unit 2, the larger building is two-storeys high and Unit 1, the smaller building is one and a half storeys high. Ways to achieve integration into the landscape would involve buildings which are semi-recessed into the landscape with sedum roofs, that is, a grass roof which would act as a continuation of the landscape. This would minimise the visual impact of the buildings in the landscape setting.

An exemplary proposal for a service station located in a similar context is the Gloucester Services serving the M5, completed in 2014 and 2015. On this site, the service station buildings and fuel stations were located in a similar landscape setting, and were integrated into the landscape at a lower level with a sedum roof, and landscaping introduced to enhance the integration.

Buildings Design

It is already noted that the design statement is a standardised one and appropriate for an urban area. The design is very contemporary with large two storey glass frontages, grey metal deck

roofs and grey cladding and large 'EG EURO GARAGE' signage which is totally out of keeping with the rural landscape setting.

The use of stone for the external walls would more in keeping with the character of the adjoining farm buildings and would enhance the aforementioned design of semi-embedding the buildings into the landscape and the incorporation of sedum roofs.

Landscape Design

On this open rural site, the service station hard landscaping, tarmacadam road areas and kerb lines have been maximised right up to the edge of the boundaries. The developable area has been maximised leaving very little area around the perimeter to incorporate landscaping and meaningful space for tree planting, to provide attractive screening and reduce the visual impact. Again, the parking is taken right up to the boundaries leaving, in some areas, no space for tree planting. The landscaping proposals are poor, and will not provide an attractive setting.

When examining at the landscape screening in detail - the western boundary indicates 6 clumps of trees with a maximum of 3 and typically 2 together, with large gaps between. The closest the trees come is 12 metres with the furthest at 20 metres.

The southern boundary shows 9 clumps of trees varying between a minimum of 2 trees per clump and a maximum of 5 trees per clump. The distance between these trees is significant with large gaps between. This aspect is the most visually intrusive view from Stepps; the existing attractive view to the north, from Stepps, will be ruined by the prominent vertiginous elevations of the utilitarian boxes.

The eastern boundary shows only 5 clumps in groups of 2 trees with a maximum of 3 trees again with 12 metres being the closest and 20 metres the furthest. The significant gaps between the trees will not provide meaningful and effective screening.

In contrast to this proposal, consideration should be given to the landscaping designed by the landscape architects for the M80, which has been highly successful, and effective. The M80 motorway, and the A806 adjoins the north and east boundaries, but the M80 is located at a lower level than the surrounding landscape and has no visual impact on the landscape. The M80 becomes visible as the road rises to the west, but in this area, significant tree planting has been introduced, to reduce the visual impact.

The landscape screening along the motorway boundary is continuous, and within 15 years of growth the motorway could not be seen. It is now 25 years since the motorway has been constructed, and the effectiveness of this screening is improving as the trees mature, and in addition to reducing the visual impact of the road and traffic, the trees and shrubs screen the motorway lighting, and mitigate traffic noise.

The screening suggested in the current proposal will not be successful and appears to be a cheap solution to reduce costs for EU Garages. There is no reason why a revised landscaping design, with continuous tree planting around all the boundaries, cannot be introduced.

Economic Impact

There appears to be no assessment of the economic impact of this proposal. Similar roadside services are available only a short distance away in the Robroyston Retail Park and at other nearby locations. This availability suggests there is little additional economic benefit from the development rather there will be displacement of income from nearby competitors e.g. the public will spend money here instead of other places, not as well as (additionality) so existing businesses may well lose out. This is a key point in economic development arguments.

Environmental and Transportation Impact

The proposal brings no environmental benefits to the amenity of Stepps. It will cause unnecessary intrusion and damage to the existing attractive rural landscape along with an increase in traffic. Consequently, it will conflict with the Scottish Government's commitment to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the transportation sector.

Conclusion

To comply with Policy DSP4, Quality of Development and to minimise the adverse visual impact on the rural verdant site and reflect the character of its adjacent surroundings:

1. The buildings should be redesigned. They should be semi-recessed and integrated into the landscape at a lower level and incorporate a sedum roof.
2. Stone should be used for the external walls. This would be in keeping with the character of the adjoining farm buildings.
3. The landscaping should be redesigned to enhance the integration and screening of the development. Hard landscaping should be reduced and significant continuous tree planting at all boundaries introduced.

In addition,

4. The proposal indicates a partial development of the site, and a vehicular access to the south for future development. The application should indicate what is proposed for the remainder of the site.
5. The drawings do not show the development in context, which indicates that this has not been considered.
6. This development serves transient vehicular traffic, and there should be no pedestrian or vehicular link with Stepps via the Hornhill Farm Road.

Alice Morton (Chair)
S&DCC