

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 4th January 2006

AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/1963/05/F - Fulbourn

Erection of Grain Store, Queens Farm, Wilbraham Road for G C Lacey & Son

Recommendation: Refusal

Date for Determination: 12th January 2005

Site and Proposal

1. Queen's Farm is sited immediately to the north-east of Fulbourn, where Station Road turns into Wilbraham Road, and consists of two houses and two ranges of farm buildings. The farm totals 405ha (1,000 acres) of which 303ha (750 acres) is owned, the remainder is farmed on a full agricultural tenancy under the Agricultural Holding Act 1986.
2. Set back some 225.0m from Station Road/Wilbraham Road, is a range of various barns measuring, in total, 130.0m x 40.0m approximately. At present they are part commercial, part agricultural - see **History** below.
3. Another 220.0m to the north is another range of buildings measuring, in total, 120.0m x 30.0m approximately. This is a former Government Intervention Store rented out for grain/crop storage.
4. The full application, received 13th October 2005, proposes the erection of a fifteen, 6.0m bay grain storage building measuring 90.0m x 20.0m. It will be sited to the west of the farm road immediately to the south of the former Intervention Store. The building will have an eaves height of 6.2m and a ridge height of 9.0m. The roof and top half of the walls will be clad with profiled steel sheeting, the bottom 3.0m to be grain walling.

History

5. Two houses approved in mid '70's and 1997. Original barns, grain stores, workshops built in the 1950's. Turkey buildings added 1976 and 1996. The Intervention Store built 1970's with two small additions in early 1980's.
6. Following difficulties in the Turkey market, consent was granted in 2001 and 2003 to use some buildings for B1, B2 and B8 Use (light industrial, general industrial and warehousing.)
7. More recently, 2004, consent was granted to use the 1950's building for B8/storage use. Whilst this latter use has not yet commenced, the former turkey buildings are used by an engineering company.

Policy

- i) **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003:**
P1/2 - Environmental Restrictions on Development restricts development in the countryside unless it can be demonstrated to be essential
P9/2a - Green Belt
- ii) **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004:**
GB1 and GB2 - Green Belt General Principles
EN5 - The Landscaping of New Development

Consultations

8. **Fulbourn Parish Council** 'Approves' the application.
The Environment Agency has no objections subject to satisfactory soakaway drainage. Such must be proven to be viable prior to the commencement of development.

Representations - Applicant

- a) The 1950's grain stores are able to handle up to 25 tonnes per hour.
- b) Today, cropping equipment ie combine harvesters, can produce 40 tonnes per hour
- c) In the 1950's, a tractor and trailer could carry 3 tonnes, today it is 18 tonnes.
- d) The present buildings are too low in which to be able to tip a modern trailer or to accommodate and load a 13.0m articulated trailer and unit.
- e) Spare parts are very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain.
- f) The new building would be able to handle in excess of 100 tonnes per hour.

Representations - Neighbours

9. None received.

Representations - Agricultural Consultants

10. With the sheer size of the grain store proposed, together with the fact that the applicant had advised the Case Officer that the Intervention Store was let to another company for grain storage, it was felt necessary to seek professional advice on the actual need for this new building.
11. Their report states:
- a) Cropping is currently all combinable crops, the majority being wheat and barley, with some peas and beans. Oilseed rape may be grown in the future. In addition there is some set aside land.
 - b) The existing grain store buildings are too small for modern machinery.
 - c) The Intervention Store is rented on a verbal agreement, by Vogan and Co. Ltd., who are based at Fulbourn Silo nearby. The building has a capacity of 7-8,000 tonnes.
 - d) The new building will also be used for the storage of machinery and as an agricultural workshop. Space for fertiliser storage is also required.
 - e) The building will be fitted with conveyors that move 100 tonnes of grain per hour plus a 200 h.p. fan for drying purposes.

12. The business has a requirement for grain storage being the main commodity grown on the farm. Working on a farmable area of 405ha (1,000 acres) less set-aside at 8% this leaves 372ha (920 acres) cropable, although in reality some of this area is down to Countryside Stewardship and peas and beans. Using a good wheat yield of 3.5 - 4 tonnes per acre this equates to between 3220 and 3680 tonnes of grain produced on the unit. The storage requirement for the farms own produce could be covered by a 4,000 tonne grain storage building.
13. Whilst I can see the benefit of additional modern storage on Queens Farm and also the benefits of additional income achieved by renting the existing grain store to Vogan Ltd, there is a need to balance the countryside protection policies against those encouraging farmers to deliver diverse and sustainable farming enterprises. On balance I would normally expect that any existing buildings and spare capacity be utilised prior to erecting further buildings on the farm.
14. The application refers to a 'proposed grain store' and whilst I believe this will be a predominant use Mr Lacey did infer that other current building uses will need to be relocated. I have mentioned previously that agricultural machinery and fertiliser will require storage space also the farm workshop will need to be relocated. The current design does not adequately differentiate between grain storage areas, fertiliser storage areas, and or workshop areas. In my opinion the proposed building is very long and narrow and whilst it may operate effectively as a bulk grain store, in reality with only two access doors in each gable end it will be difficult to practically use the building for everything i.e. grain storage, machinery storage, fertiliser storage and a workshop. Guidance from the Health and Safety Executive would normally not allow fertiliser to be stored in close proximity to combustible materials such as grain.
15. The proposed building measures 90m x 20m, = 3,800m².
16. The grain walling is shown in the submitted plans to be 3m. The eaves height is 6m, taking an average storage height of 4m gives the building a cubic capacity of 7,200m³. I have deducted one bay (20m x 6m x 4m) which is 480m³ from the total capacity to account for working areas, tunnels etc. This equates to a storage area of approximately 6,720m³. In terms of tonne capacity this figure is divided by 1.3 (assumed wheat) which gives storage for approximately 5,169 tonnes. When compared to the 3,220-3,680 tonnes of grain produced on the unit this figure seems excessive, especially when an existing building on the farm provides for grain storage of between 7,000-8,000 tonnes.
17. I am of the opinion that this application needs further justification in terms of the size and scale of the proposed building. I would like to see further farm planning in terms of all the buildings which are going to be necessary once the existing buildings have been converted. The size of this building solely for grain storage for Queens Farm seems excessive, especially when a grain storage structure exists which is currently rented to a third party.

Planning Comments

18. The issue to be considered in respect of this proposal are need, size of building and position/effect on landscape.
 - i) **Need** As can be seen from the comments of the agricultural consultant, the farm could produce something in the region of 3220 to 3680 tonnes of grain which could be stored in a building of no greater than 4,000 tonne capacity.

- ii) **Size of Building** There is no argument in that the building is large, 90.0m x 20.0m x 9.0m high but, sited as proposed in an open landscape with any public views being 'long distance', its scale is substantially diminished. The nearest public view is from a public footpath to the east, between 350.0m and 400.0m away. Even if a case could be proven for the additional grain storage facility, bearing in mind its capacity could be around three times annual output, the building does not appear to have been designed for the other suggested uses - i.e. fertiliser storage, machinery storage and agricultural workshop.
- iii) **Position and Effect on Landscape** The farmland to the east is extremely open but there is a gentle rise in the land of several metres. Standing on the site of the proposed building facing towards Cherry Hinton/Cambridge, one can see the top of Fulbourn Hospital and some of the hangars at Marshalls - all the other 'middle distance' is screened by this slight rise in ground level.
19. To the east, the land falls slightly towards the watercourse, New Cut, which drains north towards Fulbourn and Little Wilbraham Fen. It is alongside this watercourse that the public footpath runs. There are traditional hedgerows, together with some trees, alongside the field boundary, which afford some screening; however additional screening would be required.
20. Whilst I am satisfied that with appropriate materials and additional landscaping, the building would not be inappropriate to this location, I am not satisfied that a need has been proven, especially with the existing storage facility on site let to a third party. Refusal is therefore recommended.

Recommendation

21. Refusal
22. With current storage facilities on the farm sufficient to store its annual output of grain, no case has been put forward to justify the need for this second building. As such the proposal is contrary to Policies P1/2 and P9/2a of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and Policies GB1 and GB2 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
- Planning file refs. S/0852/03/F, S/1154/04/F and S/1963/05/F

Contact Officer: Jem Belcham – Area Planning Officer
Telephone: (01954 71 3252)