

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation
Control Committee

6th October 2004

AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

**S/1472/04/F - Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth
Erection of Workshop Building, Change of Use of Existing Agricultural Building to
Ancillary Offices with Associated Parking of Vehicles and Trailers, Brook Orchard
Farm, Brook Road, for N Howard.**

Recommendation: Delegated Approval

Members will visit this site on Monday 4th October 2004

Departure Application

Site and Proposal

1. This application, submitted on 13th July 2004, as amended by drawings received on 17th September 2004, proposes the erection of a workshop building, change of use of existing agricultural building to ancillary offices with associated parking of vehicles and trailers at Brook Orchard Farm, Bassingbourn for N Howard. The applicant is the owner of On Set Location Services, which currently operates from a site at Clear Farm in South End, Bassingbourn. The Clear Farm site has recently been the subject of a serious fire. The consultation replies and representations reported in this report were received before that incident.
2. The 0.95ha site is located to the south of the road between the villages of Bassingbourn and Litlington and is served by a narrow roadway some 150 metres long. The site is a former piggery and currently comprises a large number of low agricultural buildings, of various forms of construction. There is one larger barn in the north-east corner of the site.
3. The application, as amended, proposes the demolition of the existing buildings within the site, with the exception of the larger building in the north east corner and the erection of a new workshop building along the north east boundary of the site., to the side of the retained building. The proposed building measures 42.8 metres x 18.8 meters (804 m²). It has an eaves height of 6 metres and a ridge height of 8 metres. Materials are to be agreed. The existing building is to be converted to a small workshop and offices (370m²).
4. The remainder of the site is to be laid out for the parking and turning of vehicles. There are a total of 40 spaces for HGV/Trailer Home parking and 15 spaces for cars. The application states that 8 persons will be employed on the site. Details of the applicants operation can be found under Applicant's Representations below.
5. An 8 metre wide strip of land is provided for planting at the rear of the site. The applicant owns adjoining land to the north east, north west and south west of the application site that could be made available for planting.

6. To the north of the site, fronting the road is a pair of cottages, 20 metres to the south west of and sharing the entrance to the site. There is a public bridleway which runs north-south 150 metres to the south west of the site.

Planning History

7. In 2002 consent was granted for the conversion of some of the former agricultural buildings on the site (1330m²) to commercial uses (Classes B1 and B2). That consent (**Ref S/1174/01/F**) has not been implemented. The largest existing building within the site did not form part of that scheme which included the removal of a number of buildings within the site.

Planning Policy

8. **Policy P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 (“The County Structure Plan”) restricts development in the countryside unless it can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular location.
9. **Policy 2/6** of the Structure Plan sets out criteria under which small scale employment in rural areas will be reported.
10. **Policy EM10** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 (“The Local Plan”) sets out the criteria against which applications for the change of use and conversion of rural buildings in the countryside will be considered.
11. **Policy EM7** of the Local Plan supports the expansion of existing firms within village frameworks or on suitable brownfield sites next to or very close to village frameworks subject to the provisions of Policies EM3 and EM6.
12. The Government’s Planning **Policy 7**, “Sustainable Development in Rural Areas” (2004), is supportive of replacement of suitably located existing buildings of permanent design and construction for economic development purposes. The criteria that will apply to the replacement of countryside buildings should be set out in Local Development documents.

Consultation

13. **Bassingbourn Parish Council** recommends approval.
14. **The Local Highway Authority** states that the junction arrangement should reflect that which has already been granted under the previous consent. A copy of the amended drawing has been sent to the Highway Authority for further comments which will be reported verbally.
15. **The Environment Agency** has objected to the application on the basis of inadequate information and requested the submission of a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA). This has now been submitted and forwarded to the Agency for further comments which will be reported verbally.
16. **The Chief Environmental Health Officer** requests conditions restricting the hours of operation of power driven machinery during the construction process and the submission of a scheme of investigation to establish the nature and extent of any contamination of the site and remedial works to deal with it.

17. **The Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** requests that adequate provision is made for fire hydrants.
18. The comments of **Litlington Parish Council** will be reported verbally.

Representations

19. Three letters have been received from residents of the village objecting to the application on the following grounds:
 - The large number of heavy goods and mobile home vehicle movements are not suitable for a village location and are often driven at inappropriate speeds.
 - South End is not suitable for such large vehicles and the route from South End to the proposed new one runs past a playing field and a school in South End and two schools in Brook Road.
 - If consent is granted it should be on the basis of the existing one being closed and suitable planting being carried out at the new one.
 - The existing business has grown far beyond what was anticipated when the original permission for the South End site was granted. If the growth of the business in the future mirrors the past, then the number of vehicles parked at Brook Farm will make the place look like a giant lorry/trailer park in the middle of open country.
 - A petition signed by 20 residents in South End states that they have all suffered the impact of the use at the Clear Farm site in terms of noise, speeding vehicles and the substantial growth in traffic through the village and South End in particular. All object to the application making it clear that this is not a low-key operation suitable for location in a village.
 - On Set Location Services is only one of the businesses being operated by the applicant from Clear Farm. The letter submitted with the application admits to 70 vehicles but omits to mention vehicles operated under the applicants other companies, such as The American Trailer Company. The letter accompanying the application refers only to the relocation of On Set Location Services, leaving the facilities and the American Trailer Company at Clear Farm and does not guarantee any reduction in traffic in South End
 - On Set Location Services is already operating from Brook Orchard Farm, having transferred vehicles from the other sites at Road Farm, Wendy (on the A1198) and Barrington. There has been considerable disturbance caused by vehicle movements between these site and the central facilities at Clear Farm.
 - This concentration of vehicles at Brook Orchard Farm makes matters worse for Litlington and Bassingbourn, since all vehicle movements to and from On-Sets sites must be through the villages.
 - The only exits to the main roads from Brook Orchard Farm are via the narrow congested streets of Bassingbourn and Litlington; these are not suitable for a fleet of vehicles of this scale. The On-Set vehicles include articulated trucks, box-van trucks, very large caravans, double-decker buses, site offices,

costume vehicles, etc. In one direction the route is past the Bassingbourn schools in Brook Road.

- The letter from the applicant's agent tries to make the case for 24-hour/7 day working. This would inevitably produce night-time disturbance for the residents of Bassingbourn and Litlington.
- Not all of the On-Set business is to do with vehicles occasionally going to and returning from remote sites. The Company operates a range of vehicle types, including HGV's, and there are frequent movements on and off the Clear Farm site.
- A large industrial development of this scale is quite inappropriate in the open countryside between the villages of Bassingbourn and Litlington and will become more an eyesore should the business expand.
- The site is adjacent to the school playing fields and close to a wildlife conservation area. The danger of pollution from detergents and diesel etc is self-evident. In no respect is this a brownfield site.

Applicants Representations

20. A letter from the applicants agent submitted with the application (and written before the recent fire) states that the applicant currently runs a business through his company On Set Location Services Limited providing custom built vehicles for the film and television industry from premises at Clear Farm, South End, Bassingbourn. The business is successful and is looking for modest expansion. The present location in the centre of the village, although it has planning permission or the use, is not ideal.
21. The principle of the business re-use of the application site is established by the earlier planning permission. In order to meet the current applicant's requirements a little more remodelling of the site is required than envisaged under that permission. Thus, because of the need for a large area of hardstanding it is proposed to demolish all but one of the existing buildings which will be converted into an office, and erect a purpose built workshop. Due to the nature of the applicants business it is difficult to predict what vehicle movements there will be at any one time; the usual pattern is that most of the vehicles will be away on film sets for up to 6 months at a time, or shorter periods of 2-6 weeks for TV work. Likewise it is difficult to control the timing of vehicle movements; vehicles will often have to leave outside normal hours to accommodate ferry times or filming schedules. At present the applicant has up to 70 vehicles and trailers, most of which are away for long periods of time. The only constant vehicle movements will be private motor cars from eight members of staff, including staff and mechanics. The application proposal has been designed to mitigate against potential impact and it is envisaged that a chain link fence will be erected around the site, which will be heavily landscaped in accordance with an agreed scheme.
22. Reference is made to Structure Plan **Policy P2/6** and Local **Plan Policy EM7** (see Policy section above). The letter states that although not strictly brownfield (because of its previous pig farm use) sensible analogies can be drawn with this policy and On Set Location Services Limited has been located in the Cambridge area for over two years.
23. The relocation of the business will provide a significant planning benefit to the village of Bassingbourn as it will reduce traffic movements in the village, disturbance to

neighbours of Clear Farm Barns, and allow for the visual improvement in village character flowing from the reduction in parked vehicles. The business would still be located sufficiently close to the village to allow for employment opportunities. The redundant Brook Orchard site is an ideal location sufficiently far away from the centre of the village to ensure minimal disturbance.

24. In a subsequent letter accompanying the amended drawings it is stated that the height of the building is required to ensure that when the box vans are on ramps for repairs the mechanics are able to get under the vehicles. In respect to lighting it is confirmed that the applicant would like low level lighting round the perimeter of the yard, with floodlights operated from passive infrared detectors on the front of both buildings.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

25. This application is a Departure from the Development Plan as it proposes the erection of a new building in the countryside. The key issues to be considered are whether there is sufficient justification to warrant a departure from the Development Plan, having regard in particular to **Policy P1/2** of the County Structure Plan, the impact of the proposed use on the surrounding countryside and villages, and the benefits of relocation from the existing site in South End, Bassingbourn.
26. The recently submitted amended drawings have been sent out for consultation and responses, where available, will be reported at the meeting. I have brought the application to Committee at this stage, given the recent fire at the Clear Farm site in order that Members can take a view whether the use of the Brook Orchard Farm site might be acceptable in principle, subject to resolution of any outstanding matters.
27. Whilst planning consent was granted in 1996 for the use of the Clear Farm site the applicants business has grown substantially since that time and storage of vehicles has taken place on other sites in the area. The applicant has clearly outgrown the Clear Farm site in the village and has been looking for alternative sites for some time.
28. I have spoken to the applicant's agent who has confirmed that if approval is given for the Company to relocate to this site it will vacate the Clear Farm and other sites. A Section 106 Agreement would be required to secure this in respect of the Clear Farm site, although its future will be the subject to discussion in any event following the recent fire. I would not support this application in the absence of such an agreement
29. Planning consent exists for the conversion of existing buildings within the site to Class B1 and B2 uses, amounting to a total floor area of 1330m². The principle of the use of the site for commercial purposes is therefore established. The Local Highway Authority has raised no objection to the current application, having had regard to the potential implementation of the existing consent. In coming to this view it has had regard to the issue of traffic movement through adjacent buildings. An amended plan has been submitted showing the upgrading of the existing access and the further comments of the Highway Authority will be reported.
30. The current application would result in buildings on the site totalling 1174m², less than that approved under the conversion scheme, although the area of the site itself has been extended to the south west.
31. The existing former piggery buildings on the site are relatively low. The replacement of these buildings by a single larger building, twice the height of the buildings to be demolished, will increase the visual impact of the site on the surrounding countryside.

In addition the use of a large area of hardsurfacing within the site for the parking of vehicles equally has the potential to increase the visual impact in the countryside beyond that which could reasonably have been anticipated as a result of the consent for conversion of the existing buildings. The applicant however controls land on three sides of the site allowing for the implementation of a substantial landscaping scheme, which could, over time, help to significantly offset this impact.

32. The applicant does not however control land to the south of the site and I am concerned at the visual impact of the site when viewed from that direction and the nearby public bridleway. At the moment the scheme as amended allows for a minimum of an 8 metre wide strip of land along the south boundary of the site. I will explore the possibility of increasing this area where it abuts the parking area.
33. The applicant has indicated that lighting within the site would be low level with the exception of floodlights on the front of both buildings, which would be operated by infrared detectors. I am concerned about the impact of lighting in this rural location, particularly as the applicant states that vehicles may have to leave or return to the site outside usual hours. A detailed scheme of lighting would be required by condition if consent were granted.
34. The vehicular access to the site is within 20 metres of a pair of cottages, which share the entrance with the former piggery site. No representations have been received from the occupiers of these cottages which I understand are owned by the former owner of the application site and occupied by tenants. I am concerned about the impact of vehicular movements to and from the site on the amenity of the occupiers of these cottages, although the approved scheme of conversion of the buildings, if implemented, is likely to result in a greater number of daily movements to and from the site, albeit the type of vehicles and hours of movements may have differed.
35. The applicant has submitted a flood risk assessment which has been passed to the Environment Agency whose further comments will be reported.
36. Letters of representation refer to other companies operated by the applicant that are not mentioned in the application. Additional information is being sought on this point and will be reported verbally although I understand that one of these companies, the American Trailer Company no longer exists. If consent is granted the use of the site should be restricted to the applicant's own business and vehicles.
37. Hours of operation of vehicle repairs on the site should be restricted by condition.
38. In my view that applicant has outgrown the existing site in South End and needs to relocate. The recent fire has obviously affected the applicant's position. Whilst I have reservations about the suitability of the Brook Orchard Farm site, in particular in terms of the amount of outside parking in this countryside location the applicant has the ability to substantially screen the site with new planting, with the exception of the rear boundary as discussed above.
39. If the outstanding matters can be satisfactorily resolved I am of the view that the use of this site could be supported as a departure, subject to the applicant entering into a Section 106 Agreement agreeing to the cessation of the use at the Clear Farm site and stringent safeguarding conditions.

Recommendation

40. Subject to the satisfactory resolution of outstanding matters that Members be minded to approve the application as a departure from the Development Plan and that the applicant be invited to enter into a Section 106 Agreement requiring the cessation of use of the Clear Farm site. Subject to the prior signing of this agreement that delegated powers of approval are given to grant consent subject to safeguarding conditions.

Informatives

Reasons for Approval

1. In considering this application regard has been had to policies in the Development Plan. Although the application proposes the erection of a new building in the countryside it replaces existing buildings, comprises less floorspace and the site benefits from an extant planning permission for commercial purposes. The Local Planning Authority is of the view that application can be approved as a departure from the Development Plan.
2. The proposal conditionally approved is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the following material planning considerations which have been raised during the consultation exercise:
 - Residential amenity including noise disturbance
 - Highway safety
 - Visual impact on the locality
3. All other material planning considerations have been taken into account. None is of such significance as to outweigh the reason for the decision to approve the planning application.

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 Application File S/1472/04/F and S/1174/01/F

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