

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Development and Conservation Control Committee 6 October 2004  
**AUTHOR/S:** Director of Development Services

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**S/1592/04/F - Girton**  
**Erection of Offices (Class B1) Retrospective Application at Girton Farm, Oakington Road for Cambridge Federation of Women's Institutes**

**Recommendation: Delegated Approval**

### **Departure Application**

#### **Site and Proposal**

1. The application site lies 0.4km beyond the northern edge of Girton and is positioned to the rear of properties in Oakington Road. It uses the vehicle access running immediately adjacent to the chalet bungalow at No. 1a Oakington Road, which is also the vehicular access to Girton House. There are redundant agricultural buildings in separate ownership to the south and houses to the east. The site is within the Cambridge Green Belt.
2. The full application, received on 29 July 2004, seeks retrospective permission for the erection of offices (Class B1) measuring 181 sq. metres. The offices measure 28.3m in width and up to 7.6m in depth, with a ridge height of 3.0m.
3. The site is to be used as the administrative headquarters of the Cambridge Federation of Women's Institutes and will house two full-time staff.

#### **Planning History**

4. Planning permission was given in October 2003 for the Alteration, Extension and Conversion of Agricultural Building into Offices (Class B1) (Ref: S/1500/03/F). Condition 6 of the planning consent stated that "with the exception of the north-west end of the building and part of the south-western elevation, there shall be no demolition of the existing building".
5. The agent was informed by letter dated 15 June 2004 that Council officers were of the view that work on the site had amounted to the demolition of the building and the erection of new offices.

#### **Planning Policy**

6. **Government Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPG) 2** "Green Belts" identifies the erection of new buildings within the Green Belt as inappropriate development, which is by definition harmful to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances are needed to justify inappropriate development in these areas.
7. **Government Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 7** "Sustainable Development in Rural Areas" supports the replacement of "suitably located, existing buildings of permanent design and construction in the countryside for economic development

purposes”. It adds that the “replacement of buildings should be favoured where this would result in a more acceptable and sustainable development than might be achieved through conversion.”

8. **Policy 1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 (“The County Structure Plan”) restricts development in the Countryside unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
9. **Policy 1/3** of the County Structure Plan requires a high level of design for all new development that responds to the local character of the built environment.
10. **Policy 2/6** of the County Structure Plan states that sensitive small-scale employment development in rural areas will be facilitated where it contributes to specified objectives, including helping to maintain or renew the vitality of rural areas.
11. **Policy 7/4** of the County Structure Plan and **EN1 & EN3** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 (“The Local Plan”) seeks to protect the character and appearance of the local landscape.
12. **Policy GB2** of the Local Plan defines the erection of offices as inappropriate development within the Green Belt and adds that planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development in the Green Belt unless very special circumstances can be granted.
13. This policy goes on to state that: “any development considered appropriate within the Green Belt under the above criteria must be located and designed so that it does not have an adverse effect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt”.

#### **Consultation**

14. **Girton Parish Council** – No recommendation
15. **Chief Environmental Health Officer** – No objection, subject to a recommended condition of consent regarding power driven plant or equipment.
16. **Environment Agency** – Response to be verbally reported.
17. **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** – No objection. They add that the Fire Authority is of the opinion that additional water supplies for firefighting are not required.

#### **Representations**

18. Letter received from the occupant of Dapple Farm which, lies to the south east. The letter states that “we note there is no landscaping plan to the southeast boundary. This abuts our property and is clearly visible. Could a landscaping plan be included to screen the buildings and car parking area”.
19. This resident also asks for confirmation of how surface water drainage will be disposed of.

#### **Planning Comments**

20. The key issues for consideration in this application are:

- Whether the proposal represents appropriate development within the Green Belt and if not, are there very special circumstances that would justify a departure from planning policies;
  - The visual impact of the proposed building on the visual amenities of the Green Belt, Countryside and local landscape;
  - Potential impacts on the amenity of adjacent land users; and
  - Increased employment in a rural location.
21. The development plan defines the erection of new buildings within the Green Belt as inappropriate development. Although the application has been advertised as a Departure from the Development Plan, the proposal will result in an office building of the same size, siting and appearance as the approved planning application for the conversion of an existing agricultural building into offices. The proposal will have no additional impact on the visual amenities or the openness of the Green Belt, Countryside and local landscape than the previous application approved on this site. It is noted that the proposed building is setback approximately 50m from Girton Road and is of similar size and height to existing agricultural buildings to the south and west.
22. I wish to draw to Members attention that in January 2003 a Planning Inspector quashed an enforcement notice against, and granted planning permission for, the erection of a commercial building within the Green Belt at Arnold's Farm, Shelford Bottom, Great Shelford. Planning permission had previously been given on this site for the conversion of an agricultural building for commercial uses. In this case, the Inspector was of the view that the new building did not harm the openness of the Green Belt as the building had the same external appearance as shown on the approved plans for conversion.
23. The current proposal will have no additional impacts on the amenity of adjacent land owners as the previously approved building conversion on the site.
24. The proposal will marginally increase employment opportunities within this rural location.
25. Having regard to the nature of representations received and the special circumstances identified in paragraph 21 above, I do not consider that it will be necessary to refer the application to the Secretary of State as a Departure Application which would significantly prejudice the implementation of the Development Plan's Policies.

### **Recommendation**

26. Delegated Approval following response received from Environment Agency.

### **Conditions of Consent**

1. Standard Condition A – Time limited permission (Reason A);
2. The building, hereby approved, shall not be occupied until a scheme for the provision and implementation of pollution control which shall include foul and surface water drainage, has been submitted to and agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. The works/scheme shall be constructed and completed in accordance with the approved plans before the building is occupied. Reason: to ensure a satisfactory method of foul and surface

water drainage and to prevent the increased risk of pollution to the water environment.

3. The building, hereby approved, shall not be occupied until the existing access has been widened to 5.5 metres for a distance back of 15.0 metres as measured from the channel line of Oakington Road in accordance with details which shall previously have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Reason: In the interests of highway safety.
4. The building, hereby approved, shall not be occupied until the access driveway has been provided with a sealed surface for its entire length in accordance with details which shall previously have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Reason: to minimise noise disturbance to adjoining residents.
5. The car parking spaces shown on drawing no. 037/02/P002 shall be provided before the use commences and thereafter made available for staff/visitors to the premises. Reason: to ensure adequate parking is made available.
6. Details of the location and type of power driven plant or equipment, including equipment for heating, ventilation and for the control or extraction of any odour, dust or fumes from the building but excluding any office equipment and vehicles and the location of the outlet from the building of such plant and equipment, shall be submitted and approved, in writing, by the Local Planning Authority before such plant or equipment is installed; the said plant or equipment shall be installed in accordance with the approved details and with any agreed noise restrictions. Reason a) to protect the occupiers of adjoining buildings from the effect of odour, dust or fumes and to ensure that plant and equipment is not visually intrusive.

+ Conditions recommended by Environment Agency

### **Informatives**

### **Reasons for Approval**

26. Although the proposal is contrary to policies in the Development Plan restricting new development within the Green Belt, it is considered that there are material considerations in this case which warrant a departure from the provisions of this plan. The proposal would result in a new office building of the same size, siting and appearance as a previous planning permission for the conversion of an agricultural building; and hence would have no additional impact on the openness of the Green Belt or the visual amenities of the local landscape.

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

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003  
South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004  
Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 – Green Belt  
Planning Policy Statement 7 – Countryside  
Planning File Refs S/1592/04/F and S/1500/03/F  
Enforcement File Ref E/451

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