

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

7 July 2010

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S/0627/10/F - SAWSTON

Variation of Condition 2 of Planning Permission S/1598/08/F to Permit Occupation by Large Firms for a Temporary Period at Former Marley Building Materials Ltd, Dales Manor, Babraham Road, for Salmon Harvester Properties Ltd and Endurance Estates Ltd

Recommendation: Approval

**Date for Determination: 16 July 2010
(Major application)**

Notes:

This Application has been reported to the Planning Committee for determination because the recommendation of Sawston Parish Council does not accord with the officer recommendation.

Departure Application

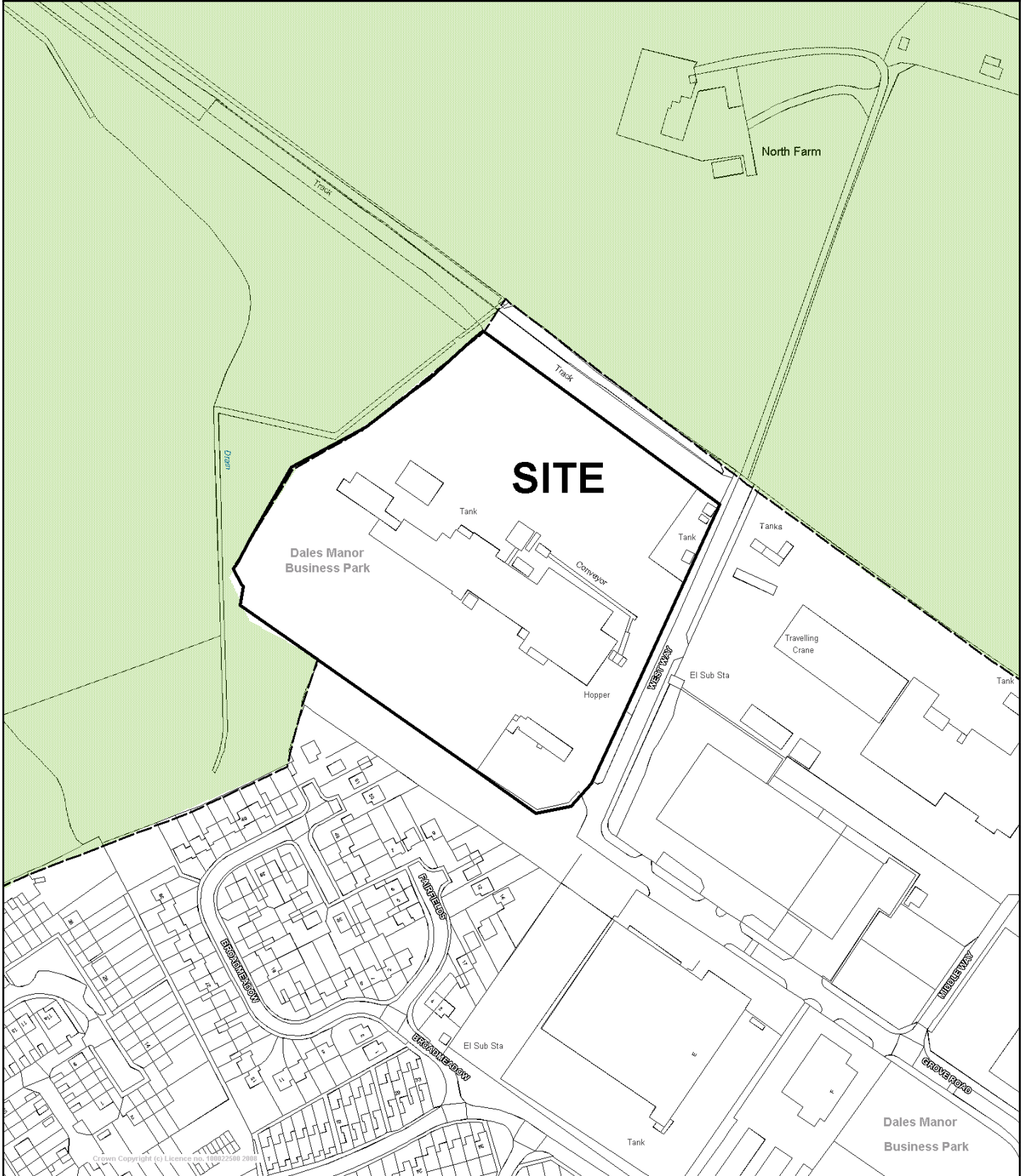
Site and Proposal

1. The application relates to 2.92 ha of industrial land located at the northern fringe of the village adjacent to the Green Belt. The site was formerly associated with Marley Building Materials Ltd, but is currently cleared of buildings and is vacant. To the north east, the site is adjoined by a disused railway track with mature landscaped tree belts, to the north west by an area of mature woodland. To the south east, the site adjoins industrial buildings on the business park, and to the south west, the site adjoins dwellings in Fairfields and Broadmeadow. A dwelling at North Farm is located in the Green Belt 120 m to the north of the site.
2. Planning permission for the erection of 27 industrial units, to be used flexibly between the uses B1(c) (light industrial), B2 (general industrial) and B8 (storage and warehousing), was granted 8 December 2008, subject to conditions (S/1598/08/F). Condition 2 requires that, for a period of ten years from the date of the first each unit, it shall only be used and occupied to a maximum industrial unit size of 1,850 square metres of floorspace, or in the sole case of Block H Unit 27 to 1932 square metres of floorspace. The full application, dated 15 April 2010, proposes a revision to this condition to add at the end: *'unless the buildings are firstly occupied within three years from the commencement of development'*.

Planning History

3. **S/1598/08/F**

Planning permission was granted on 8 December 2008 for the removal of existing buildings on the site and the erection of 27 industrial units to be used flexibly between



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the uses B1(c) (light industrial), B2 (general industrial) and B8 (storage and warehousing). The permission also includes the erection of a 14 m high wind turbine, which has a helical blade design set on a vertical axis, as part of the renewable energy provision for the site. A 3m-high acoustic fence is proposed along the open side of the group formed by Blocks E, F and G in order to safeguard the amenity of residents of Broadmeadow from the noise of manoeuvring vehicles.

4. The unit sizes vary from 619 m² (Block A) to 1932 m² (Block H), measured internally, overall, the proposal shows 13153 m² total floorspace, measured externally, to replace the previous provision of nearly 4000 m² in respect of the Marley operation. A total of 266 car parking spaces are proposed, including 32 spaces for disabled parking. 158 cycle parking stands are also to be provided.
5. The heights of buildings vary from 10.6 m in Block H, adjacent to dwellings in Fairfields, down to 8.2 m in Blocks F and G. The design of the buildings is of a metal clad enclosure, topped with a curved metal clad roof. The buildings will be provided with contrasting colours of flat profile metal cladding. The frontage of the buildings is shown to include canopies over the entrance doors, supported from a series of inclined arising from ground level to eaves. An existing 8m-high conifer screen hedge on the south western boundary is to be retained.
6. There are a number of consents relating to the former buildings and uses on the site, the most significant of which are:

SC/63/472 - Building contractors yard, approved 28.10.1963

SC/65/193 - Erection of building to house tile manufacturing plant, approved 10.5.1965

S/1784/87/F - An appeal for redevelopment of the site including expansion into the Green Belt was dismissed 22.7.1988 because of the harm that would have been caused to the Green Belt.

The most recent consent was **S/0775/04/F** for the erection of a cement silo, approved 2.9.2004.

Planning Policy

7. **East of England Plan (2008)**
SS1 (Achieving Sustainable Development)
SS2 (Overall Spatial Strategy)
E1 (Job Growth)
CSR2 (Employment-Generating Development)
8. **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003**
P2/5 (Distribution, Warehousing and Manufacturing)
9. **South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy 2007**
ST/4 (Rural Centres)
ST/8 (Employment Provision)
10. **South Cambridgeshire Development Control Policies Development Plan Document 2007**

ET/1 (Limitations on the Occupancy of New Premises in South Cambridgeshire)

ET/4 (New Employment Development in Villages)

ET/5 (Development for the Expansion of Firms)

TR/1 (Planning for More Sustainable Travel)

TR/2 (Car and Cycle Parking Standards)

TR/3 (Mitigating Travel Impact)

11. **Circular 11/95 - The Use of Conditions in Planning Permissions:** Advises that conditions should be necessary, relevant to planning, relevant to the development of permitted, enforceable, precise and reasonable in all other respects.

Consultation

12. **Sawston Parish Council** – Recommendation of refusal, commenting: ‘Do not support. Concerns over weight of traffic passing through. The Parish Council would like to reinforce previous objections’.
13. In response to planning application S/1598/08/F, Sawston Parish Council commented (October 2008) - ‘Recommend refusal: against 24-hour operational hours and increased traffic on Babraham Road. Parish Council do not support until more information provided; noise levels, maintenance and visual impact in highly residential area considered.’
14. **Local Highway Authority** - Comments awaited.

Representations

15. None received.

Agent’s comments

16. Since the grant of planning permission, Savills and Carter Jonas have been actively marketing the approved units for sale and let. The development is being marketed as ‘Cambridge South’ as a modern, high specification, warehouse and business unit development. Although there has been interest in the smaller units at this site, the most serious interest has been in the potential for unit sizes larger than approved under the planning permission. The agent believes that, whilst the difficulties that have been experienced in marketing the scheme have resulted from the economic downturn, an additional reason is that of the extent of supply of smaller units in the Cambridge Sub-Region. As a result, a shortage of larger units in the Cambridge area is now be experienced, particularly given the cumulative effect of employment policies over a number of years.
17. The scheme has been promoted on the basis of a number of pre-letting/pre-sales being necessary to trigger some speculative construction. This has been necessary during difficult economic conditions in order to provide the developers with certainty that some units would be occupied and let to justify the financial commitment to commenced building of a scheme. In November 2009, a revised strategy has been followed which seeks to market the site to the spoke requirements of local occupiers, notwithstanding the specific scheme. In the twelve months to December 2009 a total of 66 requirements had been received. Most requirements had been for the largest buildings, and fewest enquiries for the smallest units. In most cases, these prospective occupiers have been unwilling to commit to pre-sale/pre-letting agreements and not in the numbers that are necessary for the applicant to

commence implementation of the consented scheme. Demand levels are some 50% down as compared with the same time last year, which were already 20% down on pre-credit crunch levels.

18. There remains a shortage of larger space buildings in excess of 20,000 ft.² in the Greater Cambridge Area, especially good quality modern space with goods yard area. Given that commercial employment land in the area is generally in short supply, it is difficult to see how existing is based within Cambridge can grow without relocating outside of the area.
19. The applicants recognise that these existing circumstances are not likely to continue for an indefinite period. As the economy recovers, which is expected to be long and slow as the district accommodates future growth requirements, this could see demand for smaller employment units returning. Consequently, the variation proposed to Condition 2 provides for a window during which the relaxation of the floorspace condition would apply.
20. The agent has drawn attention to the previous building accommodated at the site which, which totalled in excess of 3000 m² of floorspace in addition to the remainder of the site area which was used for the storage of building materials. Dales Manor Business Park is a location at which large scale occupiers have traditionally been accommodated; therefore this proposal represents a continuation of the status quo in this location. An added consideration is that the nature of demand has meant that no redevelopment of the site has taken place since Marley Eternit's cessation of operations in Sawston in 2008, and that since then that employment use and the jobs provided by it have not been replaced.
21. Policies ET/1 and CSR2 have resulted in provision for only small-scale industries at the local level in South Cambridgeshire. Supporting businesses to high technology and research can include larger occupiers, and the agent considers that the application site presents an appropriate and suitable opportunity to provide accommodation for a larger unit occupier.
22. In response to the concerns of Sawston Parish Council, the agent has indicated that the proposal will result in no additional floorspace and no additional vehicular movements. The existing planning permission allows for any mix of B1c, B2 or B8 uses, and this will not change. It is more likely that traffic generation will go down for a development of larger uses unit sizes when compared to a development of a greater number of smaller unit sizes of the same floorspace. This is because better economies of scale can be achieved in terms of the goods carried by vehicles for a development of larger units. Also a certain number of movements are needed on a per unit basis, for example a cleaning service vehicle, and for fewer units fewer such vehicle trips would be necessary.

Planning Comments

23. Policy ET/1 requires that a limitation of 1,850 square metres (19,900 square feet) be placed on the size of occupier of new buildings for the first ten years from the date of first occupation, in use classes B1(c), B2 and B8. The supporting text to the policy explains that this is necessary to discourage the occupation of new industrial buildings by large-scale manufacturing, distribution and warehousing, and office firms that could equally well locate in other areas of the country. This approach is necessary to manage the intensive development pressure in and around Cambridge. Given the need to protect the environment, employment land in the district is a scarce resource. New employment growth must be managed to ensure the very qualities

that attract firms in the first place remain, and to ensure employment land is reserved for firms that need it most (DCP DPD paragraphs 5.1 and 5.3).

24. The applicant has indicated that for a period of eighteen months, of marketing insufficient commitment to presales and pre-lets of the buildings has been forthcoming from industrial and commercial users in South Cambridgeshire. As a result, jobs and enterprise in the Sawston area has been diminished. The applicant proposes a temporary measure to address this weakness of demand, and has drawn attention to the size of the former building upon the site. It is considered that an exception to the normal restrictions is acceptable for a period of three years for the commencement of construction, on the grounds of current difficulties in the local economy and the large-scale size of the former occupier of the site.
25. It is not considered that additional traffic will arise from occupation by a larger scale-user. The comments of the Local Highway Authority will be reported to Members, if received.
26. The application is not required to be sent to the Secretary of State for consultation on call-in.

Recommendation

27. Approval of the application dated 15 April 2010, subject to the following conditions:

Conditions

1. **The development hereby permitted shall be begun on or before 8th December 2011.**
(Reason - To ensure that consideration of any future application for development in the area will not be prejudiced by permissions for development which have not been acted upon.)
2. **Occupation of units**
Notwithstanding the provisions of Article 3 and Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any order revoking or re-enacting that order with or without modification) - for a period of ten years from the date of first occupation of each of the hereby permitted buildings, they shall only be used and occupied as light industry, general industry or storage and distribution to a maximum industrial unit size of 1,850 square metres of floorspace, or in the sole case of Block H Unit 27 1932 square metres of floorspace, unless the buildings are first occupied within three years of the commencement of development.
(Reason - To comply with Policy ET/1 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007, which limits employment development in the Cambridge area to uses that need to be located close to Cambridge.)

Remaining conditions as S/1598/08/F.

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

1. East of England Plan 2008
2. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
3. South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2007
4. South Cambridgeshire Development Control Policies Development Plan Document 2007

5. Planning files refs S/0627/10/F; S/1598/08/F

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