

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

04 June 2014

AUTHOR/S: Planning and New Communities Director

Application Number: S/2008/13/OL

Parish(es): Dry Drayton

Proposal: Erection of buildings to form garden centre together with access and car parking and provision of World War 1 living museum

Site address: Hackers Fruit farm, Huntingdon Road, Dry Drayton CB23 8HD

Applicant(s): c/o Agent (Andrew S Campbell Associates)

Recommendation: Refuse

Key material considerations: Principle of development Whether the development is appropriate in the Green Belt and open countryside. Need for 'Very Special Circumstances' justifying Development in the Green Belt and open countryside

Committee Site Visit: 03 June 2014

Departure Application: Yes

Presenting Officer: John Koch

Application brought to Committee because: Major development proposal in Green Belt and open countryside. Significant level of interest.

Date by which decision due: 12 November 2013

Executive Summary

1. This proposal seeks permission for the erection of a garden centre and an open air museum in the Green Belt and open countryside.
2. The proposed is not considered to be acceptable in a planning policy context. The development is not consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework or the adopted Local Development Framework. The development amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

3. The development will also undermine the reasons for including land in the Green Belt and will result in a loss of openness and harm to countryside character.
4. The applicant considers the provision for a World War 1 Living Museum provides the 'Very Special Circumstances' required for development to be permitted in the Green Belt. However, this is not considered to be a case where 'Very Special Circumstances' have been demonstrated that clearly outweigh the identified harm.

Planning History

5. **S/1245/13/LD** – Lawful Development Certificate for existing use of land for retail of garden centre products, trees, shrubs, seeds, fertiliser, garden equipment, home produce etc. – Application Awaiting Determination. (This application relates to the existing buildings at Hackers Fruit Farm).
6. The site is subject to a number of applications for planning permission relating to the developed area of the existing Fruit Farm. None are relevant to the determination of this application.

Planning Policies

7. *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*
8. Paragraphs 24 to 27 – Ensuring the Vitality of town Centres:

P24. Local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan. They should require applications for main town centre uses to be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations and only if suitable sites are not available should out of centre sites be considered. When considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre. Applicants and local planning authorities should demonstrate flexibility on issues such as format and scale.
9. P26. When assessing applications for retail, leisure and office development outside of town centres, which are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan, local planning authorities should require an impact assessment if the development is over a proportionate, locally set floorspace threshold (if there is no locally set threshold, the default threshold is 2,500 sq m). This should include assessment of:
 - the impact of the proposal on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in a centre or centres in the catchment area of the proposal; and
 - the impact of the proposal on town centre vitality and viability, including local consumer choice and trade in the town centre and wider area, up to five years from the time the application is made. For major schemes where the full impact will not be realised in five years, the impact should also be assessed up to ten years from the time the application is made.
10. P27. Where an application fails to satisfy the sequential test or is likely to have significant adverse impact on one or more of the above factors, it should be refused.
11. Paragraphs 32 to 41 – Promoting Sustainable Transport:

P32. All developments that generate significant amounts of movement should be supported by a Transport Statement or Transport Assessment. Plans and decisions should take account of whether:

- the opportunities for sustainable transport modes have been taken up depending on the nature and location of the site, to reduce the need for major transport infrastructure;
- safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all people; and
- improvements can be undertaken within the transport network that cost effectively limit the significant impacts of the development. Development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe.

P34. Plans and decisions should ensure developments that generate significant movement are located where the need to travel will be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes can be maximised. However this needs to take account of policies set out elsewhere in this Framework, particularly in rural areas.

P35. Plans should protect and exploit opportunities for the use of sustainable transport modes for the movement of goods or people. Therefore, developments should be located and designed where practical to

- accommodate the efficient delivery of goods and supplies;
 - give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements, and have access to high quality public transport facilities;
 - create safe and secure layouts which minimise conflicts between traffic and cyclists or pedestrians, avoiding street clutter and where appropriate establishing home zones;
 - incorporate facilities for charging plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles;
- and
- consider the needs of people with disabilities by all modes of transport.

P36. A key tool to facilitate this will be a Travel Plan. All developments which generate significant amounts of movement should be required to provide a Travel Plan.

P41. Local planning authorities should identify and protect, where there is robust evidence, sites and routes which could be critical in developing infrastructure to widen transport choice.

12. The Green Belt

P79. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

P80. Green Belt serves five purposes:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

P81. Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for

opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.

P87. As with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

P88. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

P89. A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

- buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
- the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan; or
- limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.

P90. Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in Green Belt provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt. These are:

- mineral extraction;
- engineering operations;
- local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
- the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction; and
- development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order.

13. *Local Development Framework, Core Strategy*

Strategic Vision for South Cambridgeshire
ST/1 Green Belt
ST/9 Retail Hierarchy

14. *Local Development Framework, Development Control Policies*

Development Principles – Objectives
DP/1 Sustainable Development
DP/2 Design of New Development
DP/3 Development Criteria
DP/4 Infrastructure and New Development
DP/7 Development Frameworks

Green Belt – Objectives
GB/1 – Development in the Green Belt
GB/2 – Mitigating the Impact of Development in the Green Belt
Services and Facilities – Objectives
SF/2 – Applications for New Retail Facilities
SF/5 – Retailing in the Countryside
SF/6 Public Art and New Development
Natural Environment – Objectives
NE/1 Energy Efficiency
NE/3 Renewable Energy Technologies in New Development
NE/4 Landscape Character Areas
NE/6 Biodiversity
NE/8, NE/9, NE/10, NE/11 and NE/12 Water and Flooding
NE/14 Lighting Proposals
NE/17 Agricultural Land
Travel - Objectives
TR/1 Planning for More Sustainable Transport
TR/2 Car and Cycle Parking Standards
TR/3 Mitigating Travel Impact
TR/4 Non-Motorised Modes

15. *Emerging Proposed Submission Local Plan*

S/1 Vision
S/2 Objectives of the Local Plan
S/3 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
S/4 Cambridge Green Belt
S/5 Provision of New Jobs and Homes
S/6 Development Strategy to 2031
S/7 Development Frameworks
CC/1 Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change
CC/3 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy in New Development
CC/4 Sustainable Design and Construction
CC/6 Construction Methods
CC/7 Water Quality
CC/8 Sustainable Drainage Systems
CC/9 Managing Flood Risk
HQ/1 Design Principles
HQ/2 Public Art and new Development
NH/2 Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character
NH/3 Protecting Agricultural Land
NH/4 Biodiversity
NH/7 Mitigating the Impact of Development In and Adjoining the Green Belt
NH/9 Redevelopment of Previously Developed Sites and Infilling in the Green Belt
E/21 Retail Hierarchy
E/22 Applications for New Retail Development
SC/2 Health Impact Assessment
SC/10 Lighting Proposals
TI/2 Planning for Sustainable Transport
TI/3 Parking Provision
TI/8 Infrastructure and New Developments

16. *Supplementary Planning Document(s)*

District Design Guide 2010

Consultations

17. **Swavesey Parish Council** raises no objections and offers no comment.
18. **Dry Drayton Parish Council** advises that it has discussed this proposal, including traffic through the village, and wishes to make no recommendation.
19. **Boxworth Parish Council** – Objects as considers there is no need for a garden centre on the site with the presence of Oakington Garden Centre a half mile away. Also does not see any historical link to WW1 at the site and the creation of a museum will increase traffic, if it is popular, on an already busy road network. Wishes the Committee to consider its response.
20. **Oakington and Westwick Parish Council** recommends refusal. The Parish Council advises that it is concerned about the following:
 1. Close proximity to established garden centre on Oakington (approximately ½ mile away and there is limited reference to this in the application.
 2. Very poor existing access road via Dry Drayton Road flyover. A new access should be constructed before any work takes place on the site.
 3. Drainage. There will be a large amount of run-off water as a result of development. This will head to Girton and eventually Oakington via Beck Brook.
 4. Sustainability. No firm long term plans for the future of this project/business. Not clear if the WW1 centre will be permanent.
21. **Local Highway Authority (LHA)** – The LHA (Transportation) considered that further clarification was required in a number of areas including:
 - Weekday trip calculation for the Living museum
 - Details of overflow parking spaces
 - Full PICADY outputs for each of the junction assessments
 - Consideration of likely trip generation by pedestrians, cyclists and [public transport and whether infrastructure provision in the local area is sufficient
 - Provision of more ‘concrete’ pedestrian and cycle improvements and details of these
 - Consideration of how visitors and staff will access the site using public transport prior to and after implementation of the A14 improvements
 - An updated framework travel plan prior to occupation of the site
 - Staff welcome pack, etc.

A supplementary Transport Assessment has since been received to take into account revisions to the A14 Improvement Scheme. No objections are raised subject to suitable safeguarding conditions.

22. **Highways Agency (HA)** – The HA initially directed that planning permission was not granted for a specified period to allow for updating of the proposal to take into account revisions to the A14 proposals.

The HA has directed that should planning permission be granted, conditions be imposed regarding access. Following revisions and additional material and details, the HA is satisfied that the proposed access arrangements can be realistically integrated into the A14 improvement scheme subject to conditions which include

there being no access from the A14 and access to the adjacent crematorium only to be permitted once their existing accesses to the A14 have been closed.

23. **Environment Agency** – The Environment Agency (EA) has no objection in principle to the proposed development and recommends conditions.

The Agency has also considered concerns raised in respect of flood risk and drainage and considered the flood risk assessment submitted. It has concluded that issues of flood risk and drainage can be addressed and that a viable drainage strategy has been demonstrated which can be suitably adjusted. EA is satisfied the development could be allowed in principle but requires further information to ensure the proposal can go ahead without posing an unacceptable flood risk and/or risk of pollution to the water environment. EA has therefore recommended that conditions and informatives must be imposed in respect of surface water drainage strategy; foul water drainage scheme; pollution control and ground water protection.

24. **Anglian Water** – Raises no objection and advises that the proposals do not affect any assets; there is available waste water and foul sewerage capacity. Also that surface water and flood risk are matters for the Environment Agency.

25. **County Archaeologist** – The County Archaeologist required some initial archaeological investigation as the site is within an area of high archaeological interest. This work and I initial on site investigation was carried out. It was determined that there was no archaeological interest in the site. Archaeological investigation has been carried out in accordance with a brief agreed with the County Archaeologist.

26. **Natural England** – Natural England (NE) originally raised the possibility of Great Crested Newts (GCN) being affected by the development due to the possibility of features such as ponds on or in the vicinity of the development. NE also considered that there were no statutory nature conservation sites affected and that there were opportunities for landscape and biodiversity enhancements.

27. The applicant was advised of the need to investigate the potential for impacts on GCN and ecological appraisal work was carried out to establish whether they were present/affected. It was concluded that GCN were not affected by the development. It was however considered in the ecological appraisal that the works would affect road side verge habitat and that a precautionary survey was therefore desirable. In addition, a Golden Plovers and Badgers might be affected and therefore surveys in respect of these species were also desirable. In short therefore, if permission were to be granted, then further survey work would be required for 3 species and planning conditions relating to these would be required.

28. **County Planning Minerals and Waste** – Comments that no mention was made of the Minerals and Waste Plan in the Planning Statement. However that the Minerals Core Strategy (2011) and Minerals Site Specific Proposal Plan (2012) make provision for borrowpits intended to provide material for the planned A14 improvements. This site is not however within the borrowpit area to the north of the A14 and therefore is unlikely to prejudice the minerals allocation. No objection is therefore raised.

29. **County Footpaths** – Objected to the proposed development on the grounds of obstruction of a bridleway and because due to additional traffic, a new length of bridleway was considered to be required. The applicant confirmed that there was in fact no obstruction and that a further bridleway should be discussed further with the applicant.

30. **SCDC Drainage Manager** – Considers there to be no objection, subject to similar comments as those made by EA.
31. **Trees Officer** – Trees at the site are not afforded any statutory protection. As stated in the Arboricultural report, the trees have been planted for screening or division within Hackers Fruit Farm and contribute minimally to wider amenity. No objections are raised. No objection providing as part of any new development any new landscaping includes trees that will grow into specimens reaching 10m+ in height where appropriate for diversity in height and over time, age structure.
32. **Ecology Officer** – The Ecology Officer raised no objections, subject to conditions mentioned above in the NE response.

Representations

33. **Councillor Roger Hall** has written in support of the application on the grounds that the proposals will bring additional investment, in particular to Hackers Fruit farm. It will also provide access to Oakington Road and encourages business growth.
34. **Councillor Waters** supports the application. The applicant is very keen to bring Hackers Fruit farm back into use, providing jobs and creating greater opportunity for a centre which has been in place for many years. It will serve a great many residents and provide a recreational centre. Fully support the WW1 Museum as it will inform future generations of the historical period with this interactive living history centre. It will provide more jobs, especially for local residents. Although it is not encouraged to be building in the Green Belt, believes this could help preserve the natural environment in this area with a garden centre still using the open space and believes give a new lease of life to this area.
35. 2 letters of objection have been received raising the following points:
 - The WWI Museum is considered to lack proper planning for a scheme of this magnitude. Grave concern is expressed about the preparedness for a scheme of this magnitude and in respect of research in relation to similar projects. There is also considered to be a lack of comments about the Centenary Commemorations and safety.
 - Will contribute to downstream flooding in Girton. Additional mitigation was considered to be required to address this aspect. This issue was raised with the EA and the Councils Drainage Manager and it was considered that the development could proceed without giving rise to downstream flooding, subject to satisfactory detailed design and mitigation which could be dealt with by conditions.
36. 10 letters of support have been received raising the following points:
 - The museum 'is a fantastic idea' to ensure that all who have sacrificed will be remembered and that there is educational benefit for future generations. It is important that the garden centre proceeds as the important part of the project, the museum, can proceed as well.
 - Cambridge was a major activity centre for both World Wars, There is much local interest and local family history/linkages to both WW1 and WW2. The museum should therefore be welcomed and supported.

- An increase in the general public's awareness of WW1 and its profound effects should be welcomed and encouraged. Physical experience such as proposed is desirable in order to fully understand. There is a need for a public place which can be visited by adults or school trips for educational purposes. This is a great opportunity for learning. The location of the site is very good in terms of accessibility. There is a major gap in the country's educational infrastructure that the living Museum can fill and a location for such a facility in this country would also increase access and reduce the need to travel abroad.
- Support from a tour operator (Anglia Tours) for some 400 schools. Considers the Living Museum highly desirable in place of trips to the continent which are largely unguided by specialist guides and thus of much less educational value. Also considers the proposal a very desirable 'gateway' to be followed by trips to the continent and ensuring the history is told properly and fully.

Planning Comments

37. This application relates to approximately 14.2 hectares (35 acres) of land located on the south side of the A14. The land concerned is largely now in use as arable farmland and includes buildings associated with the nursery use. The site is generally flat and includes field hedgerows; these also include some hedgerow trees. The northern part of the site is immediately adjacent to the A14. To the south east is the Cambridge Crematorium and to the north west is junction 30 of the A14. Existing site accesses are available from the A14 and Oakington Road. The land to the south of the site is for the most part arable farmland within the open countryside. Generally, apart from the existing nursery buildings located adjacent to the A14, the application site is undeveloped and has the appearance of being a part of the open countryside.
38. The current application is for outline planning permission and seeks to develop this site as mainly as a garden centre. With this development a World War 1 Living history Museum is proposed. All detailed matters are reserved for later approval and the application is therefore for the principle of development. The application is however accompanied by illustrative material indicating the general layout and siting of development, access, car parking and landscaping. There has been considerable discussion and liaison with the Highways Agency in respect of the emerging A14 improvements and the scheme has been revised accordingly.
39. The submitted application form indicates that the floor areas of the proposed development are as follows:

Type of Use	Existing Gross Internal Floor Space	Proposed Gross Internal Floor Space	Net Additional Gross Internal Floor Space
Shops	320	8820	8500
Net Tradable Area	320	7900	7620
General Industry	240		
Storage & Distribution	320		
Total	880	8820	9380

40. The existing buildings on the northern part of the site which have been used as a part of the nursery are to be retained, although the use proposed for these has not been fully detailed. Some of the existing buildings would be used for production of hanging baskets, plant rearing and propagation and potting and packaging. The sketch layout

also indicates an area to the south of the existing buildings which would be associated with these buildings and is at present open and undeveloped. This also includes a balancing/fish pond. A new hedge would be planted which would separate this area from the new garden centre and Living Museum.

41. The garden centre is effectively a new and self-contained development which does not incorporate the existing buildings. This is to be located on the larger westernmost part of the site. The Living Museum would be located in the south east of the site and be served by the same site access from Oakington Road, although it would be served by its own internal access spur within the site off of a roundabout. The Living Museum includes an area for construction of a 'typical' WW1 trench system, a parade ground, display area, car and coach parking and associated military type buildings. There is also considerable information relating to the Living Museum in terms of operation, catchment and buildings, etc.
42. The overall appearance of the sketch layout indicates a site which is effectively to be split into 3 distinct areas. The fruit farm area, the proposed garden centre and the Living Museum. The sketch scheme also indicates a link into the adjoin crematorium.
43. The application is accompanied by the following documents:
 1. Transport Assessments, Including Phased Road Improvements
 2. Stage 1 Road Safety Audit
 3. Travel Plan
 4. Flood Risk Assessment
 5. Retail Impact Assessment
 6. National Centre for the Great War, Project Report – Lest We Forget
 7. Ecology
 8. Arboriculture
 9. Hackers Fruit Farm, Background
 10. Design and Access Statement
44. Submitted Heads of terms indicate provision for an as yet to be proposed and agreed amount for public art. The applicant has also advised that 'rough costing' of highway, drainage and earthworks for the development has been completed and that these would be:
 - All highway works including the roundabout on Oakington Road and access road serving the WW1 Museum, Cambridge Crematorium and adjacent residential dwellings as well as ponds and highway drainage: £2,050,000
 - All highway works including parking area, drainage and sewers to serve the Garden centre: £1,600,000
46. These costs do not include any works associated with the WW1 Museum other than estimated levelling earthworks for the site.
47. The proposal has been the subject of 2 previous pre-application enquiries. These sought the likely response in respect of a proposed garden centre in November 2012 and a proposed WW1 Living Museum on May 2013. The advice given by officers in both cases was that the developments proposed were not considered likely to be acceptable.
48. In the case of the garden centre the pre-application response was that the development proposed would be a Class A1 Retail use and not an extension to the fruit farm use, which was pick your own and thus not Class A1 but a sui generis use.

The proposed development was considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and that there were no apparent very special circumstances that would justify such a development. The proposal was not therefore considered to be acceptable and was considered to be contrary to the NPPF and Council policy. The site was also in the open countryside and for that reason was also considered not to be in accord with Council policy. Furthermore, the development was considered not to be in accord with Council policy in respect of retailing. The proposal was also considered likely to not be sustainable in terms of transportation/location and also to have unacceptable visual impact on the Green Belt and open countryside.

49. In the case of the Living Museum the pre-application response was that the development proposed was also inappropriate development in the Green Belt and that there was no evidence of very special circumstances. The development was therefore not consistent with the NPPF nor with Council policy relating to the Green Belt. Similar to the garden centre proposal, the Living Museum was also considered to be unacceptable in terms of Council policy relating to the open countryside, landscape impact and sustainability. Additionally, it was considered that the NPPF defines a museum as a town centre use and that the sequential test applies. It was considered that if the Living Museum was of National importance this could constitute very special circumstances for development if this could be satisfactorily demonstrated.
50. Following recent discussions with the applicant, the applicant has written to outline their case as to why they consider that planning permission should be granted. The applicant has requested that this submission be considered by the Committee and therefore it has been included below as requested.

Re: Proposed extension to Hackers Fruit Farm and Garden Centre, together with establishment of The National Centre for the Great War- reference No: S/2008/13/OL.

51. Thank you very much for the time you gave us last Friday in discussing the above application. You have asked me to summarise the applicants' position and having discussed this at length both with L & P Chess Ltd and LWFL, I set out below the three essential elements to our scheme.

1. The National centre for the Great War-(NCGW). This is a prestigious proposal of national significance and fund raising is well advanced. It relies on infrastructure being provided by the garden centre (see below) and optimises the strategic location on the A14 being located to most parts of the country as well as its relationship with the Cambridge area. The NCGW will provide as follows:

- The largest dedicated Great War museum in the world providing visitor experiences of the Great War trench system, the tunnel system and replica vehicles.
- The NCGW will be of national importance with the intention of attracting around 250,000 visitors each year of which half will be school children and half will be general public. It will employ upwards of 100 people.
- Its establishment will be fully in accordance with the permitted exceptions in the green belt as set out in national policy, (paragraph 89 NPPF (2012)).
- It will be run in partnership with the YMCA, with Cambridge University, with the Cambridgeshire Regiment (in conjunction with the Royal Anglian Regimental association) with Wolverhampton University providing a vocational diploma course in Great War study and with other local bodies and educational institutions.
- It will provide a long lasting legacy for the Great War, long after 2018.

2. A14 improvements. The application proposals are coterminous with the latest proposals for improvement to the A14 and both the highways agency and the County Council endorse the highway proposals included in the planning application. This will ensure an early start to the A14 improvements, and the removal of existing accesses on the A14 with early adjustments to the Dry Drayton junction. The A14 road proposals which completely envelope the application site is also appropriate development in the green belt (paragraph 90, NPPF 2012). Important aspects of the A14 improvements are:

- The proposals provide an effective new access to the Cambridge Crematorium at the same time as providing alternative access to the existing fruit farm and garden centre.
- The A14 improvements reflect those required for both the fruit farm and garden centre and for the NCGW and are acceptable proposals within the greenbelt. Early approval of the planning application will bring forward and establish anticipated improvements to the A14 and the establishment of both the garden centre and the NCGW as a fundamental part of those proposals.

3. Hackers Fruit Farm & Garden Centre. Expansion of Hackers Fruit Farm & Garden Centre will save it from closure. Hackers Fruit farm was established over 90 years ago and employed up to 150m people. The garden centre element was added in the 1970's and 1980's but trade has suffered immensely in recent years because of inadequate access as a result of the closure of access points on the A14. Expansion of the garden centre is acceptable in terms of planning policy for the expansion of existing businesses. Although the retail aspect is not an exception to green belt policy, its development as a leisure proposal is undoubtedly acceptable in this location. The main facets of the proposal are as follows:

- A major garden centre extension is proposed with access off the Oakington Road. It will involve substantial infrastructure provision that will enable the NCGW to be established.
- Market research assessment demonstrates a potential garden centre market within the north-west quadrant of Cambridge, lying between the existing major garden centre to the south and west of Cambridge and Huntingdon Garden & Leisure to the north.
- This market area would support a garden centre of approximately 8,500 square metres without any undue impact upon major garden centres elsewhere within the sub-region.
- The establishment of the garden centre will provide a significant element of the A14 proposals in advance of their construction, whilst the completion of the A14 proposals in due time surround the existing Hackers Fruit Farm and Garden Centre site by roads.
- The establishment of the garden centre will be a retail use and in this sense does not necessarily comply with green belt policy, but it will be associated with the provision of garden and related leisure facilities, consistent with acceptable development in the green belt. (paragraph 89 NPPF 2012).
- The establishment of a footpath/cycle way network between Dry Drayton/Bar Hill/Northstowe and the outskirts of Cambridge.
- The establishment of the garden centre will deliver sustainable development as part of the Cambridgeshire sub-region creating perhaps up to 120 jobs and helping to deliver a strong competitive economy, and assist in promoting a sustainable transport system within the all in accordance with Government Policy

as expressed in paragraphs 21,26,32,35 and 58 of the NPPF (2012). It is fully supported by the local District Councillors and the Dry Drayton Parish Council.

Given the substantial support for the proposals and the many benefits as outlined in policy and green belt terms, I hope you can support the proposals by recommending approval.

52. This application has been the subject of considerable discussion with the applicant and consultees in an effort to resolve matters of detail such as highways (including A14 improvements and access), archaeology and ecology. In addition, there has been considerable liaison and consultation with the Environment Agency in respect of concerns relating to flooding. This approach was agreed with the applicant and adopted in order to reach a position where when considering the proposed development the issues would be largely ones of principle, such as development within the Green Belt and development within the open countryside.
53. The key issues relating to this application are:
- Whether the development is appropriate in principle in the Green Belt
 - Whether the development is acceptable in the open countryside location
 - Whether the development is acceptable in terms of the location of retail development
 - Whether the development has a detrimental impact on the appearance of the site
 - Whether the development is acceptable in highway terms and in terms of highways impact.
 - Whether there are very special circumstances which clearly outweigh any in principle harm to the Green Belt and any other identified harm

Principle of development in the Green Belt

54. Paragraph 89 in the NPPF (as set out in the policy section of this report) advises that Councils should regard the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt as inappropriate development unless they fall within specific categories of exceptions. Neither the Living Museum nor the proposed garden centre (which is not a leisure/recreation use, but a Class A1 retail use) fall with the categories of exceptions set out.
55. The development, the buildings proposed and the associated works such as car parking areas would detract significantly from the openness of the Green Belt. They would result in the loss of a significant area of presently undeveloped Green Belt land. The development is considered to conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt and to have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and, hence, fails to comply with the NPPF and Policy GB/1 in this respect.

Whether the development is acceptable in the open countryside location

56. Inevitably, the development of the application site would result in a significant change in the character and appearance of the site. At the present time, apart from the limited previously developed area of the Fruit farm adjoining the A14, the land is open farmland with field hedgerows. The majority of the site therefore is undeveloped and has a rural and arable open countryside appearance. Development would introduce a significant amount of buildings, roads and parking onto the site which would detract from the appearance of the site in the open countryside. It is considered that the

introduction of this level of development would be harmful to the appearance of the site and the open countryside.

Whether the development is acceptable in terms of the location of retail development

57. The application is accompanied by a retail impact assessment. This seeks to demonstrate that the proposed garden centre is acceptable in terms of retail impact. The assessment considers existing garden centres for the most part and not wider retailing and associated issues. It also makes assumptions in relation to potential catchment area based on 20 minute travel times and estimates catchment as being some 325,000 people. Following estimating and discounting trade to other garden centres, the assessment determines that catchment will be some 165,000, including urban extensions. The assessment also estimates expenditure and turnover. However, the assessment contains little detail to underpin its assumptions. The assessment also goes on to consider site access and layout. Apart from the limited material relating to catchment and turnover, there is little conclusive material as to impact of the proposed development. Nor is there any meaningful analysis of impact on other retailing.
58. The assessment contains little if any sequential analysis relating to the proposed location of the garden centre. It has not therefore demonstrated that the proposed site is an appropriate location for an enlarged retail development of this size.

Whether the development has a detrimental impact on the appearance of the site

59. The development proposed will inevitably result in a significant change to the appearance of the application site. A significant amount of built development will be introduced in the form of the garden centre and also, to a lesser degree, in the form of the buildings and surfacing and trenched areas associated with the Living Museum. In addition, new access roads and large surfaced areas for car parking will be introduced. It can reasonably be expected that both developments would also introduce lighting.
60. The present appearance of the site is as a visually pleasant part of the open countryside and an integral part of it, apart from the developed margin adjoining the A14. The introduction of development will inevitably result in a very significant change to the appearance of the site and a clear departure from its present appearance as a part of the open countryside. Development will therefore inevitably have a detrimental impact on the appearance of the site.

Whether the development is acceptable in highway terms and in terms of highways impact.

61. Generally speaking it has been demonstrated that the site can be developed in an acceptable manner in the context of highways, particularly in respect of the A14 improvements and the highways Agency. The outstanding transportation issues listed in this report remain to be fully resolved, but could be dealt with by conditions.

Need for very special circumstances

62. The NPPF advises that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green

Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. In this case there is both in principle harm to the Green Belt and harm to the openness and character of the countryside. This harm is considered to be significant.

63. The applicants argue that the proposed Living Museum provides the very special circumstances which are required to justify an exception to normal policy relating to development within the Green Belt. Also, that the garden centre use is more of a leisure/recreational use. It is also understood that the Living Museum does not require the garden centre development in order to provide funding to deliver it. Therefore, the justification for the garden centre as being required to deliver the Living Museum would fall into serious question in any event.
64. The applicant has not demonstrated that these circumstances are “very special” to warrant a departure from advice in the NPPF or from the Council’s own adopted policies. The applicant has not provided any real justification as to why the proposed development should be considered to be an exception.

Conclusions

65. This proposal is clearly not consistent with guidance set out in the NPPF relating to the Green Belt. The proposed development does not fall within the exceptions for development within the Green Belt set out in the NPPF nor within the Council’s own adopted planning policies or emerging Local Plan. The development proposed will result in a loss of openness of the Green Belt and in addition detriment to the appearance of the application site, both as a part of the Green Belt and also as a part of the open countryside.
66. It should be noted that whilst refusal of planning permission is strongly recommended, were the Committee to be minded to consider granting planning permission then considerable work would need to be completed in respect of planning conditions and also agreement of financial contributions.
67. In addition, the scheme would have to be advertised as a Departure for a period of at least 21 days and referred to the Secretary of State.

Recommendation

68. Refuse for the following reasons:
 1. The proposed development does not fall within any of the exception categories set out within the National Planning Policy Framework relating to development within the Green Belt and as such is unacceptable in principle. It would lead to an unacceptable loss of the openness and the essential undeveloped nature of the Green Belt. The development proposed would be inappropriate development within the Green Belt and would not therefore be consistent with guidance set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and conflict with Policy GB/1 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.
 2. Notwithstanding the harm by reason of inappropriateness, the proposed development would result would result in a significant change in the character and appearance of the site which is located within the open countryside. The present undeveloped, arable and open appearance of the site as an integral part of the open countryside would be lost as a consequence of the

development proposed. The development of the site is therefore considered to be detrimental to the appearance of the open countryside and the appearance of the site. Consequently, the proposal would be contrary to Policy DP/3 (m) of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007, which states that development will not be permitted if it would have an unacceptable adverse impact on the countryside and landscape character.

3. Insufficient very special circumstances, have been put forward to demonstrate why the harm, by reason of inappropriateness in the Green Belt and other harm identified above, is clearly outweighed by these considerations. The application therefore fails to satisfy the requirements of paragraph 88 of the NPPF 2012.

Background Papers

Where [the Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection: -

- (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- (b) on the Council's website; and
- (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

The following list contains links to the documents on the Council's website or elsewhere at which copies can be inspected.

- National Planning Policy Framework
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf
- National Planning Policy Guidance
<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/>
- South Cambridgeshire Core Strategy
<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/sites/www.scambs.gov.uk/files/documents/Adopted%20Core%20Strategy%20DPD.pdf>
- Local Development Framework, Development Control Policies, Adopted July 2007
<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/sites/www.scambs.gov.uk/files/documents/FINAL%20-%20Development%20Control%20Policies%20DPD%20for%20Adopt.pdf>
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, Proposed Submission July 2013
<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/localplan>
- South Cambridgeshire District Design Guide March 2010
<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/content/district-design-guide-spd>

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