

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 4th January 2006
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/2119/05/F - Oakington
Change of Use From Agricultural Buildings and Land to General Industrial (Class B2)
at Slate Hall, Huntingdon Road
for Welney Farms Ltd.

Recommendation: Refusal
Date for Determination: 31st December 2005

Members will visit this site on Tuesday 3rd January 2006.

Site and Proposal

1. Slate Hall is a farm located on the northeastern side of Huntingdon Road (the A14) and accessed off Dry Drayton Road, which runs along the southeastern side of the farm. It is in an isolated position and is clearly visible within the flat, open landscape. It comprises of 219 hectares (540 acres) of farmland including a complex of buildings, yards and two farmhouses. There is also a mobile office on site, which has temporary planning permission until 31st December 2005. The application site includes areas of land beyond the original farm complex which have been cleared for use as hardstandings on which to park vehicles in relation to the various business operations. This has resulted in a grassed bund southeast of the site.
2. The farm business first diversified ten years ago when a road haulage business was established. Since that time the haulage business has ceased and the business has further diversified into commercial vehicle repair and maintenance, and breakdown recovery.
3. One building on site is let to Dawn Engineering, an engineering company. A further barn has been retained as a grain store and remains in agricultural use.
4. This full planning application proposes to change the use of buildings and land within and adjacent to the farm complex for general industrial use (class B2). Parts of the application site already benefit from planning permission for B2 use, however these are included in order to consolidate the permissions for the site. It has been submitted in conjunction with a planning application to the County Council for the processing of end of life vehicles by the removal of recyclable elements, or End of Life Vehicles (ELV) processing, as this is a waste operation. The application is accompanied by landscaping proposals, which include tree belts to the southeast, northeast and northwest boundaries.

Planning History

5. **S/1573/00/F** gave retrospective planning permission for a part change of use of an agricultural building and two areas of land to commercial haulage (B8 use class), with temporary permission for a mobile office.

6. **S/2160/01/0F** gave planning permission for a change of use of an agricultural building and two areas of land for B2 general industrial use.

Planning Policy

7. **Policy P1/2 'Environmental Restrictions on Development'** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 (Structure Plan) states development in the countryside will be restricted unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location; where there is an unacceptable risk to the quality of ground or surface water and; where there could be damage, destruction or loss to areas that should be retained for their biodiversity, historic, archaeological, architectural and recreational value.
8. **Policy P2/6 'Rural Economy'** of the Structure Plan permits small-scale employment development in rural areas where it contributes towards one or more of the objectives set out, including when it would enable farm or rural diversification when appropriate to the rural area; or enable the re-use of existing buildings.
9. **Policy EM10 'Conversions of Rural Buildings and Future Extensions'** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (Local Plan), allows the change of use of rural buildings outside of village frameworks where the use will not materially change the existing character or impact of the building, safe and satisfactory vehicular access with car parking and turning within the site can be provided and the scale and frequency of traffic generated can be accommodated within the road system without undue adverse effects. In paragraph 5.49 of the supporting text it states that 'incidental uses such as car parking and storage should be accommodated within the group of buildings or on well-related land where landscaping can reduce the visual impact of the new use'.
10. **Policy TP1 'Planning for More Sustainable Travel'** of the Local Plan seeks to promote sustainable travel and as such planning permission will only be granted where small-scale increases in travel demands will result, unless satisfactory measures to increase accessibility are included.
11. **Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7): 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas'** supports the re-use of appropriately located and suitably constructed existing buildings in the countryside for economic development subject to amongst others, the potential impact on the countryside, landscape and wildlife and specific local economic and social needs and opportunities.

Consultations

12. **Oakington Parish Council** recommends approval.
13. **Old West Internal Drainage Board** has no comment from a drainage point of view.
14. The **Local Highways Authority** has no objection in principle to the proposal, however the existing access requires improvements to the width, kerb radii and vehicle-to-vehicle visibility splays. A suitable layout plan should be obtained indicating these.
15. **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** is of the opinion that additional water supplies for firefighting are required. An existing tank is located on site, which is suitable and sufficient providing it is suitably signed 'Emergency Water for Fire

Brigade Use'. An annual service check should be carried out to ensure the tank is in satisfactory working condition and signage remains legible. Access to the tank should remain unobstructed at all times. Access and facilities for the Fire Service should also be provided in accordance with the Building Regulations Approved Document B5, Section 17.

16. The **Environment Agency** has commented informally that the access is within an area of high flood risk and a Flood Risk Assessment is required. Without one it would object to the proposals. It would also need to see details of pollution control measures, foul and surface water drainage; however these could be conditioned. Formal comments are awaited and will be reported verbally to the Committee.

Representations

17. No representations have been received.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

18. Clearly, the principle of an industrial use from this site has been established with the granting of earlier permissions for change of use of buildings and certain areas of the site. The key issue in considering these proposals is the impact on the countryside.

Countryside

19. The significant encroachment of the site beyond the original farm complex has materially altered its character and increased its impact upon the countryside. This is due to the intensive level of activities on site and far exceeds what is reasonable in terms of farm diversification. Officer's noted while on site, the knock-on impact of the expansion, as farm equipment is now being stored in the field to the northwest, rather than within the farm complex.
20. The cessation of the haulage business has seen improvements in the overall level of visible activity from the site, in that there are now relatively few high-sided vehicles parked on site.
21. The proposals do include significant landscaping to the northwest and southeast of the site, however these are not sufficient to justify the expansion that has been undertaken and will not overcome the visual harm caused by the level of use now sought.
22. Certain engineering operations, involving a bund and hardstandings, have been erected since 1998 in breach of planning control. These works do not appear to have been necessary to implement the permissions referred to in Paragraphs 5 and 6 above. These works have not been included within the current application, which relates solely to the change of use of land and buildings.

Recommendation

- A. This application seeks permission for significant expansion of the site with resultant harm to the countryside and is recommended for refusal for the reason set out below.
1. The change of use of land outside the main farm complex has resulted in a significant encroachment of the site's commercial activities into the countryside with unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, being conspicuous within the open landscape. As such, the use of the land for general industrial (class B2) purposes is contrary to policies P1/2 'Environmental Restrictions on Development' and P2/6 'Rural Economy' of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan, adopted 2003 and EM10 'Conversions of Rural Buildings and Future Extensions' of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, adopted 2004.
- B. In addition that authorisation be given to instigate formal enforcement action to secure the cessation of unauthorised uses of land and the removal of unauthorised structures and hardstandings within a period of 6 months of the Notices coming into effect. If the Notices are not complied with within the specified period, that prosecution proceedings be authorised subject to a reconsideration of material circumstances at that time.

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 Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas
- Planning files refs. S/2119/05/F, S/2160/01/F and S/1573/00/F

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