

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 1st February 2006
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/2236/05/F – Ickleton

Erection of Cereal Breeding Building, Greenhouses and Polytunnels on Land at Rectory Farm, Grange Road for Messrs P R Wombwell, L G Duke and R G R Smith and RAGT Seeds Ltd

Recommendation: Delegated approval
Date for determination: 21st February 2006 (Major Application)

Members will visit the site on Monday 30th January 2006.

Site and Proposal

1. The site, which is irregular in shape and measures 350m x 130m approximately, is part of a field and is located within a valley in undulating countryside. Surrounding land rises to the north, west and south. The Imperial War Museum Film Archive is to the east. Rectory Farm lies to the north. A ditch, culverted in places, runs northeast to southwest along the southern boundary of the site. There are trees and planting on the southern side of the ditch. Grange Road runs northeast to southwest to the south of the site. There is a roadside hedge along the northern side of Grange Road to the east of the site, but no hedge along the section fronting the site or to the west. Grange Road is not wide enough to allow two vehicles to pass. The nearest public right of way runs northeast to southwest approximately 1km to the north of the site.
2. This full application, received on the 22nd November 2005 and amended by plans, information and Flood Risk Assessment date stamped the 13th January 2006, proposes a cereal breeding complex comprising a 90m x 36m x 6.5m to eaves/8.1m to ridge olive green profiled steel sheet building; 10no. 13.8m x 9.8m x 3.3m to eaves/5.6m to ridge and 1no. 53m x 9.8m x 3.3m to eaves/5.6m to ridge aluminium frame over buff brick plinth greenhouses; and a 50m x 34m x 3m high polytunnels building. All but one of the greenhouses are to be artificially lit to provide extended day length and light intensity during the late Autumn and Winter periods. Black-out blinds are proposed for those greenhouses that would be lit. The polytunnels would not be artificially lit. The plans indicate that woodland belts and blocks would be planted along the northern and western boundaries with individual blocks and trees planted along the eastern and southern boundaries. A new pond is also proposed within the site. A total of 43 people would be employed at the site.
3. The amended plans show the roof pitch of the main building reduced and, as a result, the ridge height reduced from 9.9m to 8.1m and the rooflights in the building relocated from the south facing roofslope to the north facing roofslope (i.e. to the opposite side of the roofslope to Grange Road).
4. The application is supported by a letter, highway statement (including a survey of existing traffic flows on Grange Road and Elmdon Road and predicted traffic flows), landscape statement, biodiversity assessment, details of measures to control light pollution from the greenhouses, a Green Travel Plan (including the appointment of a travel plan co-ordinator and principally through the encouragement of car sharing and

cycling) and Employee Travel Distance Information (which shows that the average travel distance from home to work would increase from 10.4 miles to 14.6 miles as a result of the move from Trumpington to Ickleton).

5. The letter from the agent submitted as part of the application states that: the cereal breeding activity within RAGT's Seeds has been providing innovative new cereal varieties to the UK farmer since the beginning of the c.20; the cereal breeding activity was bought by RAGT in 2004 without the current Trumpington site which, due to urban encroachment, is no longer suitable, or available for plant breeding; RAGT has been actively searching for a new site since the beginning of autumn 2004, during which time 28 potential sites were shortlisted; the Rectory Farm site is the only site which adequately fulfils RAGT's requirements for soil type, access to irrigation, rotational entry and land area availability, whilst being sufficiently close to the current site to allow retention of current staff; the seed supply part of the activity has already relocated from Trumpington to Stretham; cereal breeding is essentially a field based agricultural activity; new varieties of wheat and barley will be developed at the Rectory Farm site as well as field trials of oil seed rape; selected material will be threshed and processed and then profiled using analytical and molecular markers; staff are involved with field, barn and glass house work and this close proximity between selection fields, barn, threshing rooms and glasshouses is essential; the land required for breeding must be uniform, of good quality, suitable for small-scale agricultural equipment and have access to irrigation; farmer partners need to be flexible and committed to RAGT's work; and, in essence, the land requirement and landowner commitment are key drivers in identifying Rectory Farm as the new site for RAGT's plant breeding activities.
6. A letter received from RAGT prior to the submission of the application states that: the first consideration in locating a new site is the need for 150 to 200 hectares of land of sufficiently good, workable quality, with potential for irrigation and with the correct crop rotation; the plant breeding building must be located centrally to the land being used for the plant breeding work because the core field breeding activity, using 40 to 50 hectares annually, is very labour intensive, requiring technicians to carry out detailed field notation, selection and harvest (largely by hand) amongst over 10,000 segregated breeding lines; the same technical staff are involved in the processing of harvested material (threshing and glasshouse work) and the running of out of season (November to April) tests on over 50,000 selected lines for quality and disease resistance; the staff also provide an out of season testing service for field programmes based in France, Germany and the Czech Republic; and the inability to base the breeding related activities on one site, including a minimal number of support staff (HR, admin and financial control represent around 7% of the headcount) would require increased daily traffic and staff movement between sites and would also lead to important losses in work efficiency.

Planning History

7. The District Council confirmed that prior approval was not required for the erection of an agricultural crop/grain store on the site in March 2005 under permitted development legislation (reference **S/0401/05/PNA**).

Planning Policy

Countryside Policies

8. Structure Plan 2003 **Policy P1/2** states that development in the countryside will be resisted unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.

9. Local Plan 2004 **Policy EN1** states that relevant parts of the Landscape Character Areas of England are defined on the Proposals Map. It states that, in all its planning decisions, the District Council will seek to ensure that the local character and distinctiveness of these areas is respected, retained and wherever possible enhanced. It states that, while recognising that landscape is a dynamic concept, planning permission will not be granted for development which would have an adverse effect on the character and local distinctiveness of these areas (the East Anglian Chalk Landscape Character Area in this instance).
10. Local Plan 2004 **Policy EN3** states that, in those cases where new development is permitted in the countryside, the Council will require that (a) the scale, design and layout of the scheme (b) the materials used within it, and (c) the landscaping works are all appropriate to the particular 'Landscape Character Area', and reinforce local distinctiveness wherever possible.
11. Local Plan 2004 **Policy EN5** states that landscaping schemes will be required to accompany applications for development where it is appropriate to the character of the development, its landscape setting and the biodiversity of the locality.

Flood Risk

12. The southern part of the site is within the Environment Agency's medium to high or low to medium risk flood zones.
13. Structure Plan 2003 **Policy P1/2** states that no new development will be permitted within or which is likely to adversely affect functional floods plains or other areas where adequate flood protection cannot be given and/or there is significant risk of increasing flood risk elsewhere. Structure Plan 2003 **Policy P6/3** states that, if development is permitted in areas where flood protection is required, flood defence measures and design features must give sufficient protection to ensure that an unacceptable risk is not incurred, both locally and elsewhere.
14. Local Plan 2004 **Policy CS5** states that planning permission will not be granted for development where the site is liable to flooding, or where development is likely to: increase the risk of flooding elsewhere by materially impeding the flow or storage of flood water; increase flood risk in areas downstream due to additional surface water runoff; or increase the number of people or properties at risk, unless it is demonstrated that the above effects can be overcome by appropriate alleviation and mitigation measures and secured by planning conditions or planning obligation providing the necessary improvements would not damage interests of nature conservation.

Nature Conservation

15. Local Plan 2004 **Policy EN12** states that the Council will, wherever possible, seek to retain features and habitat types of nature conservation value where these occur on sites not specifically identified in the plan.
It states that planning permission will only be permitted where the reasons for development clearly outweigh the need to retain the feature or habitat type and in such cases developers will be expected to provide appropriate mitigation measures. Appropriate management of features and habitat types will be sought by the imposition of conditions, by the use of planning obligations, and by concluding management agreements with landowners and developers.

Consultations

16. **Ickleton Parish Council** recommends refusal of the original proposal stating:

- a. "This was a big additional development in visual terms in that particular 'valley' especially the barn (which is exceptionally large)/greenhouses and polytunnels.
 - b. Grange Road is a single-track road – this causes concern. An extra passing bay should be added near the Lilac hedge on the road coming from Ickleton Grange.
 - c. Traffic movements at the fork junction of Grange Road/Elmdon Road. Suggestion to amend the priority from Elmdon Road to Grange Road.
 - d. Traffic movements coming from Duxford, who would wish to turn right at the crossroads into Grange Road could be a danger.
 - e. Trees that are planted should be managed correctly to enhance their growth and to shield the view.
 - f. The Green Travel Plan should be re-worked. No mention of re-use of water/solar panels.
 - g. When the Imperial War Museum film bunkers were built, it was then stated that they presented a fire threat to any nearby buildings. This does not appear to have been taken into account."
17. Any additional comments received in relation to the amended plans will be reported verbally.
 18. **Chief Environmental Health Officer** states that there are no significant impacts from an Environmental Health standpoint.
 19. **Ecology Officer** strongly supports the application for the following reasons: An adequate level of biodiversity assessment has been undertaken in order to support the application; The application can demonstrate a net gain for biodiversity such as 3,500 square metres of chalk and meadow grassland, 10,000 square metres of deciduous woodland and hedgerows, a new pond, 80 hectares of less intensively managed farmland and habitat for farmland BAP species of skylark, grey partridge and brown hare.
 20. He recommends that a S.106 Agreement should include measures to ensure the correct management of the chalk and meadow grasslands, which take up to 10 years to fully develop, and the submission of a 5 and 10 year monitoring report. He asks whether a barn owl box could be erected on the side of the main building and recommends a condition requiring the final location of the passing bays to ensure that they avoid species rich areas.
 21. **Local Highway Authority** states that, given the scope of development and traffic likely to be generated, it has no objections in principle to the scheme and confirms that the use of off-site passing bays to mitigate the affect of the increase in vehicular traffic on the narrow carriageway of Grange Road is acceptable in principle. It makes detailed comments with regard to the precise position of the passing bays and the site access specification which it states should be addressed by the submission of amended plans. It states that a Green Travel Plan should be secured. Amended plans have been requested but had not been received at the time this report was compiled.
 22. **Environment Agency** originally stated that no Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been submitted and recommended that the application be deferred until such time as the FRA has been submitted and considered. Its comments in relation to the subsequently submitted FRA were awaited at the time this report was compiled.
 23. **County Archaeology** states that, on the basis of an evaluation conducted in 2000 to the east of the application site, which found no evidence of archaeology, it recommends that an archaeological condition is not necessary.

24. **Cambs Fire & Rescue Service** raises no objections and confirms that additional water supplies for fire fighting are not required.

Representations

25. The following comments relate to the original plans. Any additional comments received in relation to the amended plans will be reported verbally.
26. The occupiers of Rectory Farmhouse, Grange Road express the following serious concerns: Significant impact on important rural setting contrary to Local Plan Policies EN1 and EN3; The development is not 'essential' in this particular rural location and the proposal is therefore contrary to Structure Plan Policy P1/2; Given the offices, meeting rooms and laboratories included in the main barn, the proposal cannot be considered as anything other than an industrial business and, as such, fails to accord with Local Plan Policy EM6 in that it is not within a village framework or on a brownfield site next to one and does not meet the criteria for small-scale development, defined as being firms who employ 25 people or less; This location was chosen for the Imperial War Museum's nitrate film store in part as it was a remote location, distant from housing and people. It must surely be irresponsible to allow a work place for 40 people to be located adjacent to such a potentially dangerous storage facility; As there is no attempt to locate the development close to existing farm buildings, the proposal does not accord with Local Plan Section 10.18 vi; Significant impact on long distance views; and The increase in traffic along Grange Road, a single track highway, and additional congestion felt by Ickleton residents, particularly along Abbey Street.
27. Occupier of Shepherds Cottage, Grange Road objects on the following grounds: considerable visual impact; increase in traffic will alter the nature of Grange Road forever; the junction of Grange Road and Elmdon Road is already dangerous; erosion of Grange Road's protected verges; proximity to explosive/fire hazard at Imperial War Museum nitrate film store; and need to look at alternative sites.
28. Occupiers of 33 Abbey Street support the proposed cereal breeding activity and the retention of land in agricultural use but have the following comments to make on the project: the large 'barn' would have a significant negative visual impact; proximity to Imperial War Museum nitrate film store; loss of protected verges as a result of construction of passing bays but also by cars driving over them rather than stopping or reversing and using passing bays; poor visibility at the junction of Grange Road and Elmdon Road; and, as most traffic to the site would approach Ickleton from Duxford, traffic calming is needed at or before Abbey Street bends sharply into Duxford Road.
29. Occupiers of 8 Brookhampton Street support the proposal stating that: over the years we have seen the loss of farms in the village to housing and this is a good opportunity to redress the balance; the area would be landscaped and passing bays could be provided in Grange Road although we cannot see than the development would generate much additional traffic; and farmers are being encouraged to diversify and we believe the development would enable a local team to do so.
30. The Ickleton Society supports the activity but has a number of concerns about the particular site chosen: the significant visual impact, particularly at night from light pollution; proximity to Imperial War Museum nitrate film store; most employees would travel to the site in their own cars; loss of protected verges as a result of construction of passing bays but also by cars driving over them rather than stopping or reversing and using passing bays; poor visibility at the junction of Grange Road and Elmdon Road; and as most traffic to the site would approach Ickleton from Duxford, traffic calming is needed at or before Abbey Street bends sharply into Duxford Road.

31. Occupier of Crossways, Grange Road states that: the development would lead to a substantial further increase in traffic; appropriate measures should be introduced to bring Grange Road up to a standard to support recent and the proposed increase in traffic levels if the development is approved; and a new access to serve Crossways, 50 yards to the west of the existing exit, is requested as the existing access requires drivers to look in three directions at once which has become difficult and would become more difficult if this development went ahead.
32. Occupiers of Crossways Lodge, Grange Road ask that thought be given as to whether Grange Road, and the Grange Road/Elmdon Road junction in particular, can adequately provide for traffic associated with the proposed development.
33. Occupiers of Stulps Cottage, Grange Road strongly object for the following reasons: insufficient consideration has been given to siting, design and landscaping; the negative impact on the environmental qualities of the local area; the site is open, unprotected and exposed and the proposed landscaping is therefore unlikely to succeed; increase in traffic on Grange Road; damage to verges; noise from vehicles passing their house; risk to children's safety due to speed of traffic using Grange Road; it is an inappropriate site for a largely industrial development; proximity to Imperial War Museum nitrate film store; and no analysis of the other 27 sites considered has been provided.
34. Occupier of Ickleton Grange makes the following comments: the site is very close to the Imperial War Museum nitrate film store; the development would result in a large undesirable increase in traffic volume along Grange Road and potential damage to verges; the site would require water in large quantities putting additional strain on an already scant local resource; the barn is unnecessarily high; light pollution is inevitable; the use of a more level site could avoid the proposed great deal of earthworks; and the site could have an undesirable and potentially detrimental effect on the local wildlife population.
35. Occupier of Larkhill House, Grange Road objects on the following grounds: the development is totally inappropriate in a rural location, particularly such an open site unrelated to other buildings or topographical features; local soil conditions are inhospitable for the level and type of planting required; the development is primarily industrial and, whilst the field plot trials require a rural location, the polytunnels, greenhouses and commercial processing and analysis do not; no analysis of the other 27 sites considered has been provided; the location is entirely unsustainable in transport terms; the Green Travel Plan is something of a flight of fancy; a single days traffic census cannot be a sound basis to make a judgement on the impact of additional traffic; overrunning of verges; the development would add to the already congested traffic at the junction with Duxford Road in the village during rush hour; there are blind turnings at both ends of Grange Road; and proximity to Imperial War Museum nitrate film store.
36. The Director of the Imperial War Museum has been consulted. No comments have been made.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

37. The main issues in relation to this application are:
 - a. Whether this countryside site is an appropriate location for the proposed development:

- b. Impact of the development, including light pollution, on the visual amenities of the landscape;
- c. Highway matters; and
- d. Proximity to Imperial War Museum Nitrate Film Archive.

38. *Whether this countryside site is an appropriate location for the proposed development*
 Whilst some of the activities that would be undertaken at the site are laboratory based or service facilities, I am satisfied that the use is essentially a field based enterprise which requires a location close to the land on which the trials take place. The proposed site is centrally located within the land on which the trials are to take place and I am therefore satisfied that the proposal has been demonstrated to be essential in this particular rural location in terms of Structure Plan Policy P1/2. The seed supply part of the activity, which I consider does not necessarily need a countryside location, has already relocated from Trumpington to Stretham.

Impact of the development on the visual amenities of the landscape, including light pollution
 39. Due to its scale, the development will have an impact in the landscape. However, by being set in a valley and provided significant new planting as proposed is carried out, I consider that the visual impact of the development as amended would be acceptable.

40. Subject to safeguarding conditions, I consider that light pollution from the site can be kept to an acceptable level.

Highway matters
 41. The Local Highway Authority has raised no objections in principle to the proposal although it has requested amended plans in relation to the precise position of the passing bays and the site access specification.
 If Members are minded to support the application, I would recommend that any resolution is subject to the receipt of an amended plan that addresses these comments.

Proximity to Imperial War Museum Nitrate Film Archive.
 42. The Fire Service was consulted on this application in terms of the proximity of the site to the nitrate film archive and has raised no objections. At the time permission was granted for the film archive in 2000 (S/1104/00/F), the Fire Service stated that "it is apparent that the risk of an incident occurring at the site is extremely remote. If a fire was to occur then it would be restricted to one cell and would self extinguish in all probability before the arrival of the Fire and Rescue Service". I therefore consider that there is no reason to refuse the application in terms of the proximity of the development to the adjacent film archive storage facility.

Nature Conservation
 43. The Ecology Officer strongly supports the application stating that an adequate level of biodiversity assessment has been undertaken and the application demonstrates a net gain for biodiversity.

Recommendation

44. Provided the Environment Agency raises no objections to the proposal in response to the submitted Flood Risk Assessment and subject to the receipt of further amended plans to address the comments of the Local Highway Authority:

Delegated approval (as amended by drawing nos. 0511/10 rev A and 0511/12 rev A, Employee Travel Distance Information and Flood Risk Assessment date stamped 13.1.06) subject to safeguarding conditions to include:

1. Standard Time Condition
2. Green Travel Plan
3. Details of Greenhouse black-out screens
4. No artificial lighting of polytunnels or glasshouse L
5. Details of any external lighting
6. Provision of passing bays
7. Landscaping
8. The need for a S.106 Agreement covering ecological matters
9. Number of employees

and delegated refusal if the Environment Agency does raise objections to the proposal in response to the submitted Flood Risk Assessment and/or further amended plans to address the comments of the Local Highway Authority are not received.

Reasons for Approval if the Application is Approved

1. The development is considered generally to accord with the Development Plan and particularly the following policies:
 - Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003: P1/2 (Environmental Restrictions on Development) and P6/3 (Flood Defence)
 - South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004: CS5 (Flood Protection), EN1 (Landscape Character Areas), EN3 (Landscaping and Design Standards for New Development in the Countryside), EN5 (Landscaping of New Development) and EN12 (Nature Conservation)
2. The development is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the following material planning considerations which have been raised during the consultation exercise: visual impact of development; additional congestion and highway safety; proximity to Imperial War Museum nitrate film storage facility; a countryside location is not essential for this industrial development; impact on protected verges; farm diversification; most employees would travel to the site in their own cars; renewable energy; management of proposed landscaping; archaeology; and flood risk.

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 file Refs: S/2236/05/F, S/0401/05/PNA and S/1104/00/F

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