

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

S/2313/05/F - Toft
**Extension and Conversion of Existing Stables and Store Buildings to
Holiday/Bed and Breakfast Accommodation or Manager's Unit
as Amended by Letter and Plans Dated 15th February 2006
Bennell Farm, West Street, Comberton (Parish of Toft) for R W S Arnold**

**Recommendation: Minded to Approve, Application to be Referred to the
Secretary of State for Consideration as a Departure.**

Date for determination: 27th January 2006

Departure from the Development Plan

Site and Proposal

1. The application site is located in the rural area and Green Belt adjacent to the western fringe of Comberton. There are ranges of former farm buildings that have been converted to Class B1 employment uses, known as Bennell Court. Also, the applicants dwelling and buildings comprised in the operation of the farm are close by. The application relates to a range of stables and a separate agricultural workshop that lie to the south of Bennell Court. The land between the stables and West Street is open grazing land with low hedges on the boundaries. Vehicular access is from the shared driveway from West Drive that serves Bennell Court.
2. The application, dated 8th November 2005, seeks an extension to the stable block to provide a new wing with additional holiday accommodation/ manger's accommodation. Consent to convert the stable block and agricultural workshop to holiday accommodation, and to link the buildings together, was granted in 2005. This consent has not yet been implemented.
3. Amended plans date-stamped 15th February 2006 have been submitted following discussions with your officers to show the length of extension reduced from 15.1m to 9.6m. The extension is single storey in height, and designed to match the consented conversion.

Planning History

4. Consent to convert and link the two existing buildings to provide holiday accommodation was granted in October 2005 (**S/0674/05/F**). This consent has not yet been implemented. On adjacent land, applications to erect a new single-storey office within Bennell Court were dismissed at appeal in November 2005. The Inspector found that the proposals represented inappropriate development in the Green Belt without any very special circumstances to sufficient to set aside the normal strong presumption against such development (**S/0592/04/F** and **S/2062/04/F**).

Planning Policy

5. The site lies in the countryside outside the village framework and within the Green Belt.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003:

6. **Policy P2/6** (Rural Economy) – sensitive small-scale development in rural areas will be facilitated where it contributes, *inter alia*, to supporting new and existing businesses; to farm or rural diversification where appropriate to the rural area; to the re-use of existing buildings; towards helping to maintain or renew the vitality of rural areas.
7. **P9/2a** (Green Belt) – within the Green Belt, new development, including change of use, will be limited to that required for agriculture and forestry, outdoor sport, cemeteries, or other uses appropriate to a rural area

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004:

8. **Policy GB2** (Green Belt General Principles) – Planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development in the Green Belt unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. Development is defined as ‘inappropriate’ unless it comprises (inter alia):
 1. Replacements of existing dwellings in accordance with Policy HG15 and provided there is no adverse impact on the openness of the Green Belt;
 2. The re-use of buildings provided that (a) the development does not result in a materially greater impact on the openness and purpose of the Green Belt; (b) strict control is exercised over any proposed extensions and associated uses of surrounding land; (c) the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction; and (d) the form, bulk and general design of the buildings are in keeping with their surroundings.

Any such development must be located and designed so that it does not have an adverse effect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt.

9. **Policy RT1:** (Recreation and Tourism Development)
In considering applications for the development of recreation and tourist facilities, the District Council will have regard to the need for such facilities and the benefits which might accrue. The District Council will resist any proposals which would:
 1. Result in the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (grades 1, 2 and 3a);
 2. Not be in close proximity to and not be well related with an established settlement and its built-up area;
 3. Result in buildings and other structures not directly related to the proposed use;
 4. By reason of its scale, form, design and materials of the proposal, together with any associated development such as clubhouses, pavilions, and other buildings and structures would create an intrusive feature in the landscape or surrounding area;
 5. Result in the loss of ecological, wildlife and archaeological interests;
 6. Generate significant motorised traffic movements;

7. Have inadequate provision for parking and manoeuvring of cars and service vehicles to the District Council's standards;
 8. Not provide appropriate provision for screening and to minimise the visual intrusion into neighbouring development and the countryside;
 9. Not undertake adequate measures for the screened storage and safe disposal of refuse.
10. **Policy RT10** (Development for Holiday Accommodation): Development for holiday accommodation will be considered to be acceptable where:
1. The building is in sound condition and is capable of being re-used without significant rebuilding, extension or alteration;
 2. The building itself and the proposal are of an appropriate scale, environmentally acceptable and in keeping with the character of the area and any surrounding buildings;
 3. Together with the cumulative effect of neighbouring proposals, development would have an acceptable impact on the character and amenity of the locality.
11. Planning permission will be dependant on a Section 106 Agreement to limit the use to short-term holiday lets. Permitted development rights may be removed in the interests of amenity.
12. **EM7** (Expansion of Existing Firms at Villages) – expansion of existing firms within village frameworks or on suitable brownfield sites next to or very close to the village framework will be permitted subject to the provisions of Policy EM3 and EM6.
- South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Submission Draft (2006):*
13. **GB/1** (Development in the Green Belt). There is a presumption against inappropriate development in the Cambridge Green Belt.
14. **GB/2** (Mitigating the Impact of Development in the Green Belt) Development considered to be appropriate in the Green Belt must be located, designed and landscaped so that it does not have an adverse effect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt.
15. **ET/8** Conversion of Rural Buildings for Employment
1. The change of use or adaptation of buildings (without extension) in the countryside for employment use will be permitted provided the following apply:
 - a) The buildings are structurally sound;
 - b) The buildings are not makeshift in nature and are of permanent, substantial construction;
 - c) The buildings are capable of re-use without materially changing their existing character or impact upon the surrounding countryside;
 - d) The form, bulk and general design of the buildings are in keeping with their surroundings.

2. Any increase in floor area will be strictly controlled, and must be for the benefit of the design, or in order to better integrate the development with its surroundings. There will be a general presumption against future extensions of such buildings. 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 site.
 3. Employment generated must be in scale with the rural location. Developments resulting in significant numbers of employees or visitors must only be located near to larger settlements or accessible by public transport, cycling, or walking. The cumulative impact of the conversion of a number of buildings on adjoining sites will also be considered.
16. **ET/10 (Farm Diversification)**
1. Well-conceived farm diversification schemes, where they are directly related to supporting a working farm, will be permitted if:
 - a) They are consistent in scale with their rural location;
 - b) Existing buildings are re-used where possible, and if not replaced, in accordance with Policies ET/8 and ET/9;
 - c) Any new development is part of an existing group of buildings.
 2. Applications must include a Farm Business Plan, to demonstrate how the proposal will support a working farm.
17. **ET/11 (Tourist Facilities and Visitor Accommodation)**
1. Outside development frameworks, development to provide overnight visitor accommodation, holiday accommodation, public houses and restaurants will only be permitted by change of use / conversion, or through appropriate replacement of buildings not requiring large extension, or by appropriately modest extensions to existing facilities.
 2. Development of holiday accommodation will be limited to short-term holiday lets through conditions or legal agreement. Permitted development rights may be removed in the interests of amenity.

Consultations

18. **Toft Parish Council** - Approves (no comments)
19. **Chief Environmental Health Officer**- No objection in principle. The property will be assessed as a house in multiple occupation under separate legislation.

Representations

20. Representations have been forwarded from the occupiers of two units in Bennell Court expressing support for the additional security represented by providing manager's accommodation.
21. Correspondence from Cambridgeshire Constabulary has been provided that has confirmed the need for improved security at the site in response to continuing incidents of crime at the premises. A letter dated 12th January 2006 recommends an

on-site manager with responsibility for security 'as this is a proven way to help reduce opportunistic crimes such as burglary and theft'. A copy of this letter is reproduced as **Appendix 1**.

22. The agent has stated: 'The applicant, as he is now approaching 70, wishes to appoint a part-time manager to assist with the running and maintenance of the bed and breakfast accommodation and the adjoining commercial offices and farm. The manager would also provide additional security for the periods when the applicant and his wife are away from the site. Security of the site has now become an important consideration. During those periods when no manager was required the unit would be used as bed and breakfast accommodation.'
23. A planning adviser has submitted evidence in support of the proposal. In this he argues that the applicant has demonstrated 'very special circumstances' for the proposal to be considered as an exception to existing policies in the development plan. This document is reproduced at **Appendix 2**.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

24. The proposal represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which is by definition harmful to the openness of the area. Policy GB2 indicates that such development will only be acceptable if there 'very special circumstances'.
25. In this case the premises have been subject to incidents of crime, for which the Community Safety Unit at Cambridgeshire Constabulary have recommended the presence of an on-site manager. In addition, the reduced size of the proposed extension, and its careful design to reflect the appearance of the buildings to be converted, will result in very limited harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
26. For these reasons, I consider that very special circumstances have been demonstrated as an exception to the normal policy of strict control over extensions to existing buildings in the Green Belt.
27. If Members are minded to approve it, the application should be referred to the Secretary of State as a departure from the development plan. In addition, the existing Section 106 Agreement on the building in relation to occupation for b&b/ holiday accommodation will be required to be varied to take account of the manager's accommodation.

Recommendation

1. Approve, subject to the application being referred to the Secretary of State and, if he does not call it in, that it the S106 legal agreement varied accordingly, and that the application be approved as amended by plans date stamped 15th February 2006 and subject to the conditions set out below:
 1. Standard Condition A – Time limited permission (Rc A)
 2. Sc5a – Details of materials for external walls and roofs (Rc5 aii)

Informatives

Reasons for Approval

1. The development is considered to be acceptable as departure from the development plan because of the need for on-site security on the site to monitor the holiday accommodation, business premises and farm, and because of the limited harm to the openness of the Green Belt arising from it. In other respects the development is considered generally to accord with the Development Plan and particularly the following policies:
 - Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003:
P2/6 (Rural Economy)
P9/2a (Green Belt)
Policy GB2 (Green Belt General Principles)
 - South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004:
GB2 (Green Belt General Principles)
RT1 (Recreation and Tourism Development)
RT10 (Development for Holiday Accommodation)
EM7 (Expansion of Existing Firms at Villages)

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

- South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Submission Draft (2006)
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
- Planning file Refs. S/2313/05/F; S/0674/05/F, S/0592/04/F and S/2062/04/F

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