

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Development and Conservation Control  
Committee

12<sup>th</sup> May 2004

**AUTHOR/S:** Director of Development Services

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### **S/0468/04/F – GREAT AND LITTLE CHISHILL ERECTION OF 2 TIMBER SEASONING STORAGE BUILDINGS AT MILESTONE FARM, BARLEY ROAD FOR WHIPPLETREE HARDWOODS**

#### **Recommendation: Refusal**

##### Site and Proposal

1. The site measures 1.28 hectares (3.2 acres) and forms part of a field adjacent to the existing Whippletree Hardwoods timber yard which comprises two storage buildings, an office and open storage. The existing site is bounded by a 5m wide landscaping belt with trees up to approximately 5-6m in height. The site falls to the west/away from the existing yard. There is a bridleway approximately 100m to the northwest of the site.
2. This full application, registered on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 2004, proposes the erection of 2 buildings for timber seasoning. Each building would measure 60.0m x 13.7m and would measure 5.2m to eaves and 7.6m to the ridge. The facing materials would be dark green sheeting over blockwork with a cement sheeting roof. Access to the site would be from Barley Road through the existing yard. Perimeter planting of the site is proposed. A letter from the applicant submitted as part of, and in support of, the application is attached as an appendix.

##### Planning History

3. There is no planning history on the application site.
4. The following applications relate to the existing, adjacent site:
  - S/1387/01/F Replacement Storage Building and Hardstanding – Approved
  - S/2067/99/F Change of Use of Land into Yard Space and Open Storage – Approved
  - S/0903/99/F Office Building and Hardstanding – Approved
  - S/1577/97/F Construction of Hardstanding – Approved
  - S/0639/97/F C/U of Land from Agricultural to Timber Drying and Storage – Approved
  - S/1403/96/F Drying Shed for Seasoning of Timber – Approved
  - S/0661/93/F Timber Drying Units and Enclosure – Approved
  - S/0696/92/F C/U of redundant farm buildings to industrial/storage purposes – Approved

##### Planning Policy

5. The site is within the countryside and the East Anglian Chalk Landscape Character Area as defined in the Local Plan 2004. By road, it is approximately 4.5km from the edge of Great Chishill village, 2km from the edge of Barley village, 4.5km from the edge of Melbourn village, 4km from the edge of Fowlmere village and 6.5km from the edge of Royston.

6. **Policy P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 states that development will be resisted in the countryside unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
7. **Policy EM7** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 supports the expansion of existing firms, but only “WITHIN VILLAGE FRAMEWORKS OR ON SUITABLE BROWNFIELD SITES NEXT TO OR VERY CLOSE TO VILLAGE FRAMEWORKS”.
8. **Policy EN1** states that planning permission will not be granted for development which would have an adverse effect on the character and local distinctiveness of Landscape Character Areas.

#### Consultations

9. **Great and Little Chishill Parish Council** recommends approval provided natural screening is maintained.
10. **Chief Environmental Health Officer** raises no objections.
11. **Environment Agency** recommends a condition relating to pollution control, including surface water drainage, is attached to any approval.
12. **North Herts D.C.** has been consulted as a neighbouring authority. Any comments received will be reported verbally.

#### Representations

13. None.

#### Planning Comments – Key Issues

14. **The Key Issues in relation to this application are:**
  - **The proposed development in terms of countryside policies; and**
  - **The impact of the development on the visual amenities of the countryside and the Landscape Character Area.**

#### ***Countryside Policies***

15. The application relates to a greenfield site in open countryside 2km from the nearest settlement. The timber to be stored in the buildings is sourced from all over the country rather than a local/adjacent forest or plantation and the use is essentially commercial/storage rather than forestry. Whilst I can understand why the applicants would want to expand onto this site, the use could equally be accommodated on an industrial estate or within a complex of redundant agricultural storage buildings rather than requiring the erection of new buildings in the countryside. During pre-application discussions, I suggested that any submission should be accompanied by an explanation as to why further space is essential and why it is essential that it is provided on this site (ie. why alternative/additional premises, including the many large redundant agricultural buildings in the area – especially those whose accesses rule out an intensive use – could not be used). In my opinion, the letter submitted as part of the application does not demonstrate that the erection of the proposed new buildings is essential in this particular rural location. In my opinion the proposal does not therefore meet the requirements of Structure Plan Policy P1/2 which states that development will be resisted in the

countryside unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.

### ***Visual impact***

16. Furthermore, the erection of two 60.0m x 13.7m x 7.6m high storage buildings on this site would seriously detract from the visual amenities of the countryside and the East Anglian Chalk Landscape Character Area. The buildings would be clearly visible from Barley Road, particularly when approaching from the south, and from the bridleway which runs east-west to the northwest of the site. Over time, appropriate landscaping could reduce the impact of the buildings on the countryside but, by virtue of their size and height, the buildings would still be very conspicuous.

### ***Other matters***

17. As Members will see from the planning history, the Local Planning Authority has supported the applicants over the years. However, for the reasons set out above, I cannot support this application. The application forms indicate that the proposal would provide 3 more jobs, albeit away from any settlements. This would not outweigh the harm identified above.

### **Recommendation**

#### **REFUSAL**

1. The site is an undeveloped site in open countryside and is 2km from the nearest settlement. The Local Planning Authority is not satisfied that this countryside location is essential for the proposed development. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy P1/2 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 which states that development will be resisted in the countryside unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location; and the aims of Policy EM7 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 which supports the expansion of existing firms, but only if they are within village frameworks or on suitable brownfield sites next to or very close to village frameworks.
  2. Furthermore, the erection of two 60.0m x 13.7m x 7.6m high storage buildings on this site as proposed would seriously detract from the visual amenities of the countryside and the East Anglian Chalk Landscape Character Area. The proposal is therefore contrary to South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 Policy EN1 which states that planning permission will not be granted for development which would have an adverse effect on the character and local distinctiveness of Landscape Character Areas.
18. **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 Ref. S/0468/04/F

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