

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 10th May 2006

AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/0517/06/F – Stow-cum-Quy
Extension to house two anechoic Chambers at Far Field House, Albert Road
for Garrows Farm Ltd and Antenova Ltd

Recommendation: Refusal
Date for Determination: 11th May 2006

Departure Application

Site and Proposal

1. This site measuring 0.6 hectares is part of a former farm complex. The building is a former barn that has recently been converted and is in use as an office. The site is accessed from Albert Road. The building is reasonably prominent within the surrounding countryside, being sited on an elevated point within the landscape. It is visible from Albert Road and the A1303 Newmarket Road, although field hedges to Albert Road and other buildings at The Bury provide an element of screening. The site is outside of the village framework, separated by agricultural land and is within the Green Belt.
2. This full planning application, received on 16th March 2006, proposes to add a 1.5 storey high wing to the barn to house specialist testing equipment required by the business currently occupying the building. The extension will measure 26.0m x 8.5m and will be 9.5m to the ridge. The extension has been designed to reflect the existing structure. A letter detailing the need for the proposals is attached at Appendix 1 and accompanied the application.

Planning History

3. The barn was converted following the grant of planning permission in December 1998 under application ref. **S/1112/98/F**. This application included access, parking and associated works.
4. A subsequent planning application in 2003 (ref. **S/0419/03/F**) approved the conversion of a cycle shed into engineering workshops for the business.

Planning Policy

5. **Policies GB2** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2004 (Local Plan) and **P9/2a** Cambridge and Peterborough Structure Plan, 2004 (Structure Plan) set out the purpose of the Green Belt and define what is considered to be 'appropriate' development within the Green Belt.
6. **Policy P1/2** of the Structure Plan sets out environmental restrictions on development. In particular, 'Development will be restricted in the countryside unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location'.

7. **Policy P1/3** of the Structure Plan requires a high standard of design and sustainability for all new development including minimising the need to travel and reducing car dependency; providing a sense of place; and making efficient use of energy and resources.
8. **Policy P2/6** of the Structure Plan provides for 'sensitive small-scale employment development in rural areas' where it contributes to one or more of the objectives of this policy, including amongst others, farm or rural diversification; re-use of existing buildings; helping to maintain or renew the vitality of rural areas.
9. Where it is not possible for small-scale development under **Policy P2/6** to be located in a highly accessible area or where it can be made highly accessible by public transport the remaining requirements should so far as possible be met. These requirements include:
 - a. reducing the need to travel, particularly by car;
 - b. provides travel choice;
 - c. provides for the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users; and
 - d. provides appropriate access to the public highway network without compromising safety.
10. **Policy EM4** of the Local Plan, allows for the development of new research establishments and the expansion of existing research establishments if it can be demonstrated that:
 - a. such development is intended to provide accommodation for organisations whose primary purpose is to research or investigate ideas, theories and concepts and/or to design and develop instruments processes or products, up to and including production for testing, but excluding manufacture; and
 - b. that the organisations are required in the national interest to be located close to existing major establishments in related fields (such as the universities, the teaching hospital or private research establishments) in order to share staff, equipment or data, or to undertake joint collaborative working for the purposes specified in (a) above.
11. This policy includes provision for development that conflicts with other policies and requires development permitted under this policy to be regulated through conditions or planning obligation to restrict future occupation and use of the premises for the purposes specified.
12. **Policy EM7** of the Local Plan allow for the expansion of existing firms within village frameworks or on suitable brown field sites next to, or very close to, the village frameworks if the firm or business has been based in the Cambridge Area for a minimum of two years prior to the date of any application for development.
13. **Policy EM10** of the Local Plan makes provision for the change of use and conversion of rural buildings, including any future extensions to employment use subject to a number of requirements:
 - a. the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction and are capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction;

- b. conversion does not lead to dispersal of activity on such a scale as to prejudice town and village vitality;
- c. the form, bulk and general design of the buildings both before and after conversion are in keeping with their surroundings;
- d. the buildings are capable of re-use without materially changing their existing character or impact upon the surrounding countryside;
- e. safe and satisfactory vehicular access can be provided together with adequate space within the curtilage to accommodate ancillary requirements such as car parking and lorry manoeuvring without significant detriment to the setting of the building and the landscape within which it is located, and
- f. the scale and frequency of traffic generated by the proposal can be accommodated on the road system without undue adverse impacts.

Extensions under this policy are limited to those that are necessary to achieve an enhanced design or integrate the scheme with its surroundings.

14. **Policies TP1** 'Planning for More Sustainable Travel' of the Local Plan and **P8/1** 'Sustainable Development – Links Between Land Use and Transport' of the Structure Plan require new developments to promote more sustainable transport choices and to provide appropriate access to the public highway. **Appendix 7/1** of the Local Plan sets out the car parking standards that the Authority will seek for new developments, while **Appendix 7/2** sets out the requirements for cycle parking provision.

Consultations

15. **Stow-cum-Quy Parish Council** has recommended approval.
16. **Swaffam Internal Drainage Board** has no comment from a drainage point of view.
17. The **Local Highways Authority** comments that, as the extension is not associated with any increase in staff numbers, it will not increase traffic generation to the site. No objection from a highway point of view has been raised.

Representations

18. No representations have been received.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

19. The issues in assessing this application are the Green Belt, employment in the countryside and, whether the occupiers are primarily involved in research or are required to be located in close proximity to the University.

Green Belt

20. The site is located within the Green Belt. The development proposed is by definition 'inappropriate'. The applicants suggest that the retention of the firm on this site and the associated local employment constitute 'very special circumstances' that justify an exception to Green Belt policy. In the letter supporting the application it is argued that the firm employs highly skilled staff for its research; technology advances have led to the requirement for improved facilities and the existing facilities are not adequate for the level of accuracy now required; the chambers cannot be physically accommodated within the existing structure; the site is ideal for the purpose being relatively remote and does not suffer noise, vibration or electromagnetic interference. They do not suggest that other sites have been considered but do comment that it may be difficult to reproduce these conditions elsewhere.

21. While it is clear that remaining on the existing site will be convenient for the Company they have not adequately demonstrated that they could not be located elsewhere. The proposals have not been sufficiently justified as a departure from Green Belt policy in terms of any 'very special circumstances'. The building proposed is a significant structure and, will be visible from public viewpoints on the A1303 and Albert Road. The scale of the proposals in terms of the size and bulk will increase the prominence of the building within the surrounding countryside and will be harmful to the openness, character and appearance of the Green Belt.

Employment

22. The main activities of this Company are testing equipment and as such can be considered as 'research'. The proposals accord with part (a) of policy EM4 of the Local Plan. The main issue in relation to employment is the failure to identify a 'national interest' that requires the business to be located on this site or indeed that it has any links to the major establishments referred to in part (b) of policy EM4. There is no evidence of need that outweighs the harm that would be caused to the Green Belt and surrounding countryside. It should also be noted that the applicants do not benefit from planning permission to operate a research business from the site.

Recommendation

23. The application is recommended for **REFUSAL** on the following grounds:
1. The proposed building is located within the Green Belt where development is by definition 'inappropriate'. The site is set within an open rural landscape. The building proposed will be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt and, due to its size, height, and siting, will detract from the appearance of the surrounding countryside. The proposals are contrary to policies GB2 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, adopted 2004, and P9/2a of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan, 2003. No very special circumstances have been put forward to justify an exception to these policies.
 2. The development proposed is not essential to the rural location and will introduce unnecessary development within the countryside, it is not sustainable in terms of minimising the need to travel or providing a sense of place that responds to the surrounding landscape and as such is contrary to policies P1/2 and P1/3 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan, 2003.
 3. No evidence of need in the national interest has been put forward that would justify departing from adopted policies referred to above and as such the proposals are contrary to policy EM4, EM7 and EM10 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2004.

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 files Ref. S/1112/98/F, S/0517/06/F and S/0419/03/F

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