

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Development and Conservation Control Committee      10<sup>th</sup> May 2006  
**AUTHOR/S:** Director of Development Services

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**S/0311/06/F – Highfields Caldecote**  
**Erection of Dwelling following Demolition of Existing Barn adjacent Highfield Farm  
for P Bird**

**Recommendation: Refusal**  
**Date for Determination: 25 May 2006**

Members will visit this site on 8 May 2006.

### **Departure Application**

#### **Site and Proposal**

1. The application relates to a roughly rectangular shaped site measuring 0.29 hectares (0.72 acres) and with vehicular access from Highfields Road. The site is approximately 260m to the north-east of Highfields Road and is accessed by a private single-lane access track. The site contains a timber-framed barn in dilapidated condition. Signage around the barn, identifies it as an “unsafe building”. The barn is partially roofed in slate with sections of timber and brick walls remaining. The main section of the barn is estimated as measuring 17m in width and 8m in length, with a ridge height of approximately 7m. Adjacent the barn is a timber frame and slate structure in better condition, measuring approximately 11m by 5m, with an approximate ridge height of 5m.
2. The site forms part of a cluster of agricultural buildings and four existing dwellings, accessed from the same access track. To the north-west of the site is a two storey detached cottage (Highfield Farm Cottage), with a row of three two-storey terrace houses to the south and south-west. Adjacent the site to the north and east is a field, with an agricultural building adjoining the site to the south. The entire site is outside the village framework boundary of Highfield Caldecote.
3. The full planning application received on 20 February 2006 and amended on the 3 and 4 April 2006, is for the erection of a three-bedroom dwelling with integral garage/car port. The dwelling is of barn-like dimensions and appearance with a two-storey section measuring 13.7m in width and 7.3m in width, with a ridge and eaves height of 7.0m and 5.1m respectively. At the rear of the property is a single storey element measuring 5.3m in width and 9.1m in length with a ridge and eaves height of 5.0m and 2.4m respectively.
4. The site area has been amended to include the full length of the vehicular access from Highfields Road, with notice of the application formerly served on all landowners of the access track.

#### **Planning History**

5. The existing barn is of some age and was erected without the need for planning permission. There is no planning history on this site.

6. Nevertheless, the following planning applications is considered relevant to the assessment of the application.
7. Planning permission was refused for a house on land adjacent the nearby property of Westwind, Highfields Road, Highfields Caldecote on the 10 November 2003, and subsequently dismissed at appeal on the 24 May 2004 (Ref: S/2005/03/F). This application involved the demolition of an outbuilding. The reasons for the refusal referred to new residential development in the countryside, being contrary to policy.

### **Planning Policy**

8. National guidance contained in Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (PSS 7) aims to strictly control new building development in the open countryside. It states that isolated new houses in the countryside will require special justification.
9. This policy supports the re-use of appropriate located and suitably constructed existing buildings in the countryside, where this would meet sustainable development objections. Re-use for economic development purposes will usually be preferable, but residential conservations may be more appropriate in some locations, and for some types of building.
10. The policy is also supportive of the replacement of suitably located, existing buildings of permanent design and construction in the countryside for economic development purposes. The replacement of buildings should be favoured where this would result in a more acceptable and sustainable development than might be achieved through conversion, for example, where the replacement building would bring about an environmental improvement in terms of the impact of the development on its surroundings and landscape. The replacement of non-residential buildings with residential development in the countryside, should be treated as new housing development.
11. **Policy P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 ('the County Structure Plan') states that development will be restricted in the countryside unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location. This policy is supported by Policy DP/7 of the Local Development Framework, Submission Draft 2006.
12. **Policy P1/3** of the County Structure Plan requires a high standard of design and sustainability for all new development and which provides a sense of place which responds to the local character of the built environment. This policy is supported by policy DP/2 of the Local Development Framework, Submission Draft 2006.
13. **Policy P5/5** of the County Structure Plan states that small scale housing developments will be permitted in villages only where appropriate, taking into account the need for affordable rural housing, the character of the village and its setting, and the level of jobs, services, infrastructure and passenger transport provision in the immediate area.
14. **Policy SE4** of the adopted South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 ("The Local Plan 2004") states that residential development and redevelopment will be permitted within the village frameworks of Group Villages (including Highfields Caldecote), subject to meeting various criteria.
15. **Policy SE8** of the Local Plan 2004 states that residential development outside the village frameworks will not be permitted.

16. **Policy EM10** of the Local Plan 2004 allows for the change of use and conversion of rural buildings to employment use, subject to various criteria including that “the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction and are capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction”. This policy is supported by Policy ET/8 of the Local Development Framework Submission Draft 2006.

***Local Development Framework Submission Draft 2006***

17. Policies in the LDF largely reflect existing policies. The following policies represent significant changes from adopted plans.
18. Policy HG/8 of the LDF states that “planning permission for the conversion of rural buildings for residential use will not generally be permitted. Planning permission will only exceptionally be granted where it can be demonstrated, having regard to market demand or planning considerations:
1.
    - a. Firstly, it is inappropriate for any suitable employment use; and
    - b. Secondly, it is inappropriate for employment with residential conversion as a subordinate part of a scheme for business re-use.
  2. Any conversion must meet the following criteria:
    - a. the buildings are structurally sound;
    - b. the buildings are not of a makeshift nature and have not been allowed to fall into such a state of dereliction and disrepair that any reconstruction would require planning permission as a new building;
    - c. the buildings are capable of re-use without materially changing their existing character or impact upon the surrounding countryside; and
    - d. the form, bulk and general design of the buildings are in keeping with their surroundings; and
    - e. perform well against sustainability issues highlighted in policy DP/1.
  3. Any increase in floor area will not be permitted except where it is necessary for the benefit of the design, or in order to better integrate the development with its surroundings. Future extensions to such buildings will not be permitted.
  4. Development must be in scale with the rural location. Residential uses must be located close to local services and facilities, and in an accessible location with a choice of means of travel, including non-motorised modes”.
19. Paragraph 4.33 of the supporting text adds that there “there has been considerable pressure to convert barns and vacant rural buildings into residential units, but this is clearly contrary to the general policy of restricting housing proposals outside established village limits. Conversion for a purely residential use will only be permitted as a last resort, particularly to secure the future of buildings of particular architectural quality or character”.
20. Policy ET/9 of the LDF states that “when considering proposals for replacement buildings in the countryside for employment use, 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”.

## Consultation

21. **Caldecote Parish Council** – Recommendation of refusal.

“Inappropriate change of use in agricultural area. Outside the village envelope”.

Should the application be approved, it is requested that the following be imposed as conditions of consent:

- a. Traffic movements to protect the area;
  - b. No construction work to be carried out before 08.00 hours or after 18.00 hours Monday to Friday; or 08.00 hours to 13.00 hours on Saturdays;
  - c. No construction work to be carried out on Sundays or Bank Holidays;
  - d. Any spoil removed should not be used to raise ground levels;
  - e. Site traffic should be diverted away from existing roads if possible, roads if used should be kept free of mud and if necessary, regularly swept. Wheel washing facilities should be used;
  - f. Parking and site compounds should be provided to ensure that disturbance to nearby properties is kept to a minimum;
  - g. Planting plans should be agreed before any construction is started to ensure existing planting is preserved if possible;
  - h. Wildlife, all development should make due consideration of problems associated with wildlife disturbance;
  - i. Observation of the Crime and Disorder Act Section 17;
  - j. Any construction should specify good quality materials.
22. **Environment Agency** – No objection, but notes that surface water harvesting may be necessary due to geological considerations.
23. **Local Highways Authority** – Response to be verbally reported
24. **Ecology Officer** – Response to be verbally reported
25. **Chief Environmental Health Officer** – No objection. There are no significant impacts from an Environmental Health standpoint. Recommends the use of informatives, in the event that the application is approved.
26. **Councillor Robert Martlew** - has requested that the application be determined by Committee, following a site visit.

## Representations

27. Letter of support received from occupant of Highfields Farm Cottage. Letter raises the following issues:-
- a. Proposal will increase local surveillance of area and discourage people from hanging around; and
  - b. Proposal will remove a derelict barn, which is an eyesore and possible an unsafe structure
28. Letter received from the occupant of 3 Highfields Farm, asking to be kept informed of the planning application.

## **Planning Comments – Key Issues**

29. The key issues for consideration in the assessment of this planning application are as follows:
1. Principle of new residential development on site;
  2. Design and appearance of proposed dwelling;
  3. Impact on Residential Amenities of Adjacent Properties; and
  4. Impact on Highway Safety.

### **Principle of New Residential Development on Site**

30. The proposal represents a departure from the adopted Structure Plan, South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004, and national advice set out in Planning Policy Statement No. 7 (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas). No policy document makes provision for the replacement of an existing derelict rural building which appears to have fallen into such a state of dereliction and disrepair that any reconstruction would require planning permission as a new building; with a residential dwelling, outside the village framework of Highfields Caldecote.
31. No justification has been presented by the applicant/agent to override the policy objection to residential development within the countryside. Given the previous agricultural use of the land and building, the site is considered as not previously developed (i.e. not brown-field land), so there is no presumption in favour of development. It is noted that the existing barn in its current condition is of no architectural merit.
32. It is noted that concerns regarding the appearance and safety of the site could be potentially dealt with through other procedures, rather than the grant of consent for a dwelling.
33. I am of the view that the granting of consent for this application, could create an undesirable precedent for the replacement of derelict and structurally unsound redundant rural buildings with new dwellings in the countryside.

### **Design and Appearance of Proposed Dwelling**

34. The proposed dwelling with integral garage/car port occupies a smaller footprint than the existing barn and is of comparable height. The dwelling has been designed to resemble a barn conversion, although the regular distribution and design of the windows does not reflect the character of a barn.

### **Impact on Residential Amenities of Adjacent Properties**

35. The proposal is not considered to seriously harm the residential amenities of existing dwellings within the vicinity. No party has objected to the application on the grounds of residential amenity.

### **Highway Safety**

36. The proposed site provides ample room for off-street car parking and turning.
37. Nevertheless a question remains as to the adequacy of the junction of the access track and Highfields Road to serve an additional dwelling. An upgrade to this junction may be necessary, subject to comments received from the Local Highways Authority.

38. It is expected that any works required to the junction could be imposed as conditions of consent, if necessary, and are unlikely to constitute a reason of refusal for the application.

### **Recommendation**

39. Refuse as amended by new landownership certificate franked 3 April 2006 and Drawing No. 4445/2 franked 4 April 2006, for the following reasons:
1. The application site lies outside the village framework for Highfields Caldecote. The proposal involves the replacement of a derelict agricultural barn with a new dwelling, contrary to the provisions of Policies P1/2 and P5/5 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 which seek to avoid new residential development in the countryside unless essential to a particular location; and policies SE4 and SE8 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 relating to new housing development in Highfields Caldecote and village frameworks generally. Nevertheless, the existing barn appears structurally unsound and not capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction. There is no policy support for the conversion or replacement of the existing barn with a new dwelling under the provisions of the adopted South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 or emerging Local Development Framework Submission Draft January 2006.
  2. Notwithstanding the above reason for refusal, the proposed fenestration is of regular distribution and domestic in appearance, neither of which would be in keeping with the barn-like form and external materials of the proposed house. The proposal would therefore be contrary to Policy P1/3 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003, which requires a high standard of design for all new development.

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

- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- Local Development Framework Submission Draft 2006
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
- Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas
- Planning File Refs: S/0311/06/F, and S/2005/03/F

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