

**S/0164/04/F - STEEPLE MORDEN
EXTENSION AND CONVERSION INTO FOUR DWELLINGS AND ERECTION OF
GARAGE BLOCK, CHEYNEYS LODGE, STATION ROAD, FOR MR R PARMEE AND MRS
B WHITE**

DEPARTURE APPLICATION

SITE AND PROPOSAL

1. Cheyneys Lodge is a large detached red brick property with a slate roof to the south of Cheyneys Lodge Farm. It has its own access from Station Road. The building is currently in employment use.
2. This full application, registered on 29th January 2004, proposes the extension and change of use of the existing building to four dwellings. The extension involves constructing a new double pitched roof over an existing two storey flat roofed extension on the east elevation of the existing building and two new bay windows on the north elevation.
3. The building will be subdivided into 4 dwelling units – a one bedroom unit with mezzanine in the rear section of the building; 2 two bedroom units in the eastern end of the building, one at ground floor and one at first floor; and a four bedroom unit in the western end. A five bay garage block is proposed close to the southern boundary of the site, with an additional four parking spaces adjacent.
4. The site is outside the village framework.

HISTORY

5. The building has been used commercially for a number of years, an extension for use as office being granted in 1969.

POLICY

6. Policy P1/2 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 states that development will be restricted in the countryside unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
7. Policy EM8 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 sets out criteria when considering the conversion, change of use or re-development of existing employment sites to non-employment uses within village frameworks. It does not refer to sites outside village frameworks.
8. Policy SE8 of the Local Plan 2004 states that residential development outside village frameworks will not be permitted.
9. Appendix 11/1 of the Local Plan 2004 suggests standards for assessing the proposals for new residential development near to existing commercial, industrial or recreational activities.

10. There are no policies in the Local Plan 2004 that support the conversion of buildings in the countryside to residential use, other than as holiday lets.

CONSULTATIONS

11. Steeple Morden Parish Council recommends refusal. “The Parish Council regrets the loss of any local employment opportunities and consequently fully supports Policy EM8 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, covering change of use of such a site to a non-employment use. We therefore trust that, in line with paragraph 5.43 of this Policy, the Planning Officers have received documentary evidence that the site has been adequately marketed over the past 12 months to confirm its non-viability for such a purpose.
12. Should this be the case, we would still oppose the Application on the following grounds.
13. The accompanying documentation suggests that the proximity of the proposed four dwellings to Ashwell and Morden railway station would allow easy commuting to London and Cambridge. This is contrary to current planning legislation, which seeks to discourage long-distance commuting.
14. We find the proposed alterations to the external appearance of the building not unattractive and, in some cases, a positive enhancement. However, there are concerns over the provision of services to the four dwellings and, in particular the need for adequate sewage disposal, since Odsey is not on mains drainage. We suspect the works involved in the provision of this could cause root damage to the neighbouring mature trees and would strongly urge that the District Council’s Trees Officer be consulted for his opinion and guidance.
15. Should it be decided to approve the Application, we would wish to see the following conditions attached:
 - a) That permitted development rights be withdrawn from the garden areas of the four dwellings, since the site is outside the development envelope.
 - b) That adequate screening be provided to the rear of the proposed garage block and parking area, to minimise their visual impact.”
16. The Chief Environmental Health Officer has considered the implications of the proposal in terms of noise and environmental pollution and concludes that there are no significant impacts from an Environmental Health standpoint.
17. The Chief Financial Planning Officer, Cambridgeshire County Council is concerned that adequate secondary school capacity is not available at Bassingbourn Village College, where additional pupils generated by the housing development are expected to go. It is therefore requested that a contribution of £9000 be sought to cover the cost of providing an additional place.
18. The Trees and Landscapes Officer comments that the location of the proposed garage block will compromise a mature Beech tree. A minimum of 6m clearance should be given to this tree. Regarding the concerns expressed about the location of any new sewerage route and the possible impact on trees a plan should be requested showing these details.

19. The comments of the Environment Agency will be reported verbally.

REPRESENTATIONS

20. Correspondence has been received from the owner of the adjacent land and buildings expressing concern on the following grounds:

21. Drainage is currently to a septic tank on adjacent land over the road. It is not of sufficient size or quality for four separate dwellings. The applicant will not be permitted to enlarge it. There is concern that existing trees will need to be felled to install a new drainage system. Water supply is from a pipe through adjoining land, which is sub-metered on the site boundary. There is a restrictive covenant against tapping into the supply above the meter. A new water supply would have to be brought to the property
22. What is at present a very nice house will be turned inside and outside into four small units with four different freehold occupations, which will be situated in the middle of the writer's estate/farm and adjacent to a cottage which he owns. The development will be next to farm buildings where there is a grain drying plant of approximately 2,000 tonnes capacity. The method of drying is by forced air and is therefore a very noisy process. In addition there is both pigeon shooting, night shooting of rabbits and other shooting, on the immediately adjoining land. Problems are therefore envisaged as due to the size of the units proposed the occupants are likely to have no interest or understanding of the countryside. There will be problems with children and dogs straying and the noise of shooting which they may well consider is an "unacceptable practice"
23. Last year it was brought to the attention of the Parish Council that the Beech trees surrounding the house and which form part of the landscape have become covered with ivy which is suffocating them. Nothing has been done. If there are four small dwellings, no gardens and only a parking area who will be responsible for the grounds?
24. The proposal is completely inappropriate and should be refused. The proper use is as a single dwelling with maybe a granny flat or annexe for staff or family

APPLICANTS REPRESENTATIONS

25. A letter of support from the applicant's agent is attached as Appendix 1.
26. A further letter has been received commenting on points raised. In terms of sustainability it is advised that there are no employees of the company who live in the immediate area. The closest reside in Royston (x3), but most travel from St Albans, Bedford, Newmarket and London, Safeline being a specialist technical firm which draws its employees based on their skills, rather than geographical location. Accordingly they rely heavily on the private car and are unsustainable. A residential use of the premises will generate significantly less vehicular movements and would be, the applicant believes, more sustainable.
27. It is not considered that the concern regarding damage by any new drainage system on the root system of trees within the site is justified. It is likely that the existing drainage system will be used and any additional capacity would be via a new system. This could be accommodated either within the rear courtyard, or a position anywhere within the car parking area shown on the submitted drawing away from the trees. There is no intention to remove any of the character trees within the grounds.

28. It is pointed out that Policy EM8 deals with the change of use of employment sites within village frameworks. The site is outside any village framework. It is pointed out that despite its concerns the Parish Council suggests conditions be attached if approval is recommended. The withdrawal of permitted development rights would be welcomed and screening to the rear of the new garage block would be considered.
29. Since discussions first commenced with Safeline to relocate them to a new unit on the Royston Business Park, planning permission has been submitted, approved and the unit subsequently built out. In that time there has been no interest for Cheyneys Lodge from other firms wishing to locate in the area. Information is available if required on the unsuitability of the building for continued commercial use.

PLANNING COMMENTS

30. The key issues to be considered with this application are; whether there is sufficient justification to warrant a departure from the Local Plan to allow residential development in the countryside; the impact of the development on existing trees; the adequacies of the existing services and; the impact of surrounding land uses on the amenity of the occupiers of any residential units.
31. This building was previously in residential use and although it has been used for employment purposes for some years there is no development plan policy that requires its continued use, given its countryside location. I can see no objection therefore in principle to the building returning to a residential use. In my view the issue to be determined is whether the building should be occupied as one unit or split into smaller units as proposed. As proposed the conversion provides a mix of housing types which in my view is to be encouraged. I do not consider that the residential use for four dwellings in this location is any less sustainable than the previous employment use. I do not consider that the proposed physical alterations to the building are an issue and the double pitch roof over the existing two-storey flat roof extension will enhance its appearance.
32. I have written to the applicant's agent passing on the concerns of the Trees and Landscapes Officer regarding the position of the proposed garage block and the need for more detail as to the route of any services. I will report any response.
33. Although the Chief Environmental Health Officer has raised no objection to the application I have forwarded a copy of the correspondence received from the adjoining landowner and asked for specific comments on the concerns raised about the compatibility of a residential use with adjoining land uses. I will report the response.
34. I will also report the views of the Environment Agency concerning the adequacies of the existing drainage system.
35. The contribution required towards education provision at Bassingbourn Village College can be secured by a legal agreement.
36. Provided that the concerns of the Trees and Landscapes Officer can be satisfactorily addressed and that the Chief Environmental Health Officer and Environment Agency raise no objection I will recommend that the application be supported as a departure from the development plan.
37. Any consent should include the conditions suggested by Steeple Morden Parish Council withdrawing permitted development rights and the submission of a landscaping scheme.
38. Subject to the nature of representatives to the Departure advertisement, I do not consider that it would be necessary to refer the application to the Secretary of State, by reason of the scale of the proposal and history of the site, I do not consider that it would significantly prejudice the implementation of the development plans, policies and proposals.

RECOMMENDATION

39. That subject to the concerns of the Trees and Landscapes Officer being satisfactorily addressed, no objections being raised by the Chief Environmental Health Officer and Environment Agency and the prior signing of a S106 Agreement in respect of an education contribution, that Members indicate that they are minded to approve the application as a departure from the development plan.