

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee

5th July 2006

AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

**S/0835/06/F – Great Shelford
Hotel (Amended Design) on Land at Whitefields/Uplands, Off Hinton Way for
Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group & Masters, Fellows & Scholars of the College of St John
the Evangelist in the University of Cambridge**

**Recommendation: Refusal
Date for determination: 28th July 2006 (Major Application)**

Members will visit the site on Monday 3rd July.

Departure Application

Site and Proposal

1. This 6.9 hectares/17 acres approximately elevated site comprises woodland and the extensive former gardens of Whitefields and the approaches to Uplands. Whitefields, formerly a substantial two-storey house, has been demolished. Uplands is now a fire damaged shell of what was once a country house and hotel. On the northwest side of Hinton Way, outside the application site, is a pair of semi-detached cottages and a detached house. Opposite the former is a detached cottage. Other than this, the site is surrounded by agricultural land which separates the site from a ribbon of houses on Hinton Way to the northeast. Some belts of trees within the site are protected by a Tree Preservation Order. Planning permission for a golf course has been granted on land to the northeast, northwest and southwest of the site.
2. This full application, registered on the 28th April 2006 and amended by Flood Risk Assessment and 'Trees To Be Retained Plan' drawing date stamped 5th June 2006, proposes the erection of a 100 bedroom hotel with accommodation spread over four floors, including a 'lower ground floor', plus a basement providing space for plant and the parking of 120 cars. In addition to the 120 spaces in the basement, a further 38 car parking spaces would be provided at ground level. The proposed building is 'U-shaped', of classical design and would be sited on land southeast of where Whitefields stood. At its nearest point, the building would be approximately 55m from the boundary with 197 Hinton Way to the southeast. Access to the hotel would be via the existing access to Whitefields, widened to 5.5m for the first 15m back from Hinton Way. The existing access to Uplands would be stopped-up. The application states that the gross floor area would be 19,799 square metres (213,122 square feet) of which 9401 square metres (213,122 square feet) would be above ground. The main ridge line measures 15.9m above ground level at the north elevation with the highest part of the ridge standing approximately 18.1m high. Due to the fall in the land and the proposed excavation, the south elevation would measure 21m to the main ridge and 23m to the highest part of the ridge above proposed ground levels. The proposed ground floor level is 44.5m. Approximate grounds levels on the north and south sides of the building are 44m and 41m respectively.

3. In addition to the Flood Risk Assessment and 'Trees To Be Retained Plan' drawing, the application is accompanied by a Planning Justification Statement, a Transport Assessment and the November 2001 Environmental Statement for the Golf Course.

Planning History

4. In the 1970's, various permissions were given in respect of the use of, and extension to, Uplands for hotel-related purposes.
5. In 1989 an appeal against refusal of an outline for a 31 bedroom hotel extension to Uplands with associated car parking, squash courts, enclosed swimming pool and a third tennis court was allowed.
6. In 1990 a full application for extensions to Uplands as hotel (33 suites/66 rooms) and leisure accommodation with parking for 100 cars was approved. Consent was renewed in 1995.
7. In 1997 outline planning permission was granted for a hotel with associated parking on the larger site (10.12 hectares/25 acres) of Uplands and Whitefields (reference **S/1633/96/O**). It was accompanied by a Section 106 Agreement which required the hotel and grounds to be occupied and managed as a single planning unit, precluded implementation of earlier consents, prevented the use of the site by helicopters and limited use of the grounds to informal recreation by guest or visitors.
8. A reserved matters application was subsequently approved under reference **S/0778/97/RM** for a hotel with pool, fitness room, bar, lounge, restaurant and function, meeting and administration rooms. It comprised 7440 square metres (80,000 square feet) total floorspace – three floors with part basement and part fourth floor, 115 bedrooms and parking for 217 vehicles.
9. The 1997 outline permission was renewed in 2000 under reference **S/1883/99/O**.
10. A full application for a 99 bedroom hotel with 91 car parking spaces in the basement and a further 38 car parking spaces on land southwest of Whitefields was approved in February 2004 following the completion of a S.106 Agreement under reference **S/1229/00/F**. Access to the hotel was to be via the existing access to Whitefields, widened to 5.5m for the first 15m back from Hinton Way. The existing access to Uplands was to be stopped-up. The hotel was to be positioned on the lawn to the south and southeast of Whitefields, which was to be demolished. The proposal comprised a 4-storey building, including basement, with attic accommodation above. The application stated that the gross floor area would be 12,722 square metres (136,940 square feet). Its principal orientation was north-south with cross-wings at either end. It was of a classical design with a height to parapet wall above ground floor level of 13.6m and to roof/ridge level of 18.2m. On the roof was a domed cupola 8.5m high. Basement and ground floor finished levels were 40m and 44m respectively. Approximate grounds levels on the north and south sides of the building were 44m and 41m respectively.
11. Details of applications for a golf course and clubhouse on adjacent land are set out in the report for application **S/0836/06/F** on this agenda.

Planning Policy

Development in the Countryside and Green Belt

12. Structure Plan 2003 **Policy P1/2** states that development in the countryside will be resisted unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
13. Structure Plan 2003 **Policy P9/2a** states that 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.
14. Local Plan 2004 **Policy GB2** states that planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development in the Green Belt unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. The proposed hotel is not one of the types of development designated as not 'inappropriate' in the Policy. It also states that any development considered appropriate in the Green Belt must be located and designed so that it does not have an adverse effect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt.
15. Local Plan 2004 **Policy EN1** states that relevant parts of the Landscape Character Areas of England are defined on the Proposals Map. In all its planning decisions the District Council will seek to ensure that the local character and distinctiveness of these areas is respected, retained and wherever possible enhanced. While recognising that landscape is a dynamic concept, planning permission will not be granted for development which would have an adverse effect on the character and local distinctiveness of these areas.
16. Local Plan 2004 **Policy EN3** states that, in those cases where new development is permitted in the countryside, the Council will require that (a) the scale, design and layout of the scheme (b) the materials used within it, and (c) the landscaping works are all appropriate to the particular 'Landscape Character Area' (the East Anglian Chalk Landscape Character Area in this instance), and reinforce local distinctiveness wherever possible.
17. Relevant Government Policy is incorporated in Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 2, "Green Belts", and Planning Policy Statement (PPG) 7, "Sustainable Development in Rural Areas".

Tourism Development

18. Structure Plan 2003 **Policy P4/1** states that new tourism developments should: maintain or increase employment opportunities; meet the needs of local communities as well as visitors; be accessible by a choice of sustainable transport modes; protect or improve the local environment, landscape and residential amenity; and strengthen and diversify the local economy.
19. Relevant Government Policy is incorporated in PPG21, "Tourism".

Overnight Visitor Accommodation in the Countryside

20. Local Plan 2004 **Policy RT11** states that development to provide overnight accommodation, public houses and restaurants will not be permitted outside the framework of settlements except (where the site is outside the Green Belt) in the cases of modest extensions to existing facilities or the change of use/conversion of existing buildings not requiring large extensions.

Trees

21. Local Plan 2004 **Policy EN5** states that the District Council will require trees to be retained wherever possible in proposals for new development; and landscaping schemes will be required to accompany applications for development where it is appropriate to the character of the development, its landscape setting and the biodiversity of the locality.

Nature Conservation

22. Local Plan 2004 **Policy EN13** states that the District Council will not grant planning permission for development which could adversely affect, either directly or indirectly, the habitats of animal and plant species which are protected by law unless the need for the development clearly outweighs the importance of conserving that habitat and the advice of English Nature is to the effect that permission may be granted. Where development is permitted which may have an effect on these species, the District Council will impose conditions, where appropriate, and seek to use its powers to enter into planning agreements to: facilitate the survival of individual members of the species; reduce disturbance to a minimum; and provide adequate alternative habitats to sustain at least the current levels of population.
23. Relevant Government Guidance is included in PPS9 "Biodiversity and Geological Conservation".

Sustainable Travel

24. Relevant Government Guidance is included in PPG 13, "Transport". Local Plan 2004 **Policy TP1** states that the Council will seek, through its decisions on planning applications, to promote more sustainable transport choices and to reduce the need to travel, especially by car, by amongst other things restricting car parking to a maximum of 13 spaces for 10 guest bedrooms for hotel developments and requiring the preparation of a Travel Plan.

Consultations

25. **Great Shelford Parish Council** makes no recommendation and states that "This is a difficult amended scheme for the Parish Council to comment on. The development of the hotel and golf course are inextricably linked in that the developers state one cannot go ahead without the other and the Parish Council could be said to have a vested interest in seeing the existing planning permission implemented as it will benefit the village in terms of open space, increased access to the countryside and traffic calming on Hinton Way. We have these benefits with the existing scheme which the developers state is uneconomic. In order to secure these benefits for the future the Council is being asked to approve a larger hotel, two and a half times bigger than that approved in 1998 and over half as big again as the Quinlan Terry proposal. Some argue for local economic reasons the hotel which is obviously a prestigious development should go ahead but the increase in size has to be considered in terms of its effect on the green belt and this area of best landscape. The approved hotel would not have been permitted on this site were it not for the considerable tree screen and members of the planning committee felt that the District Council should be completely satisfied that the larger building would not adversely affect this tree screen and would not be visible in long views.

Additional concerns related to:

- a. the lack of provision of staff accommodation and the possible need to provide additional buildings for this in the future,.
 - b. the extended wings which are 50% longer than in the approved design which brings them and overlooking windows closer to Beechwood and to protected trees.
 - c. the traffic generated by additional staff and the need for adequate transport arrangements.
 - d. some felt the design was inappropriate for the site and would be better located in a parkland setting.
27. If the amended scheme is given approval all the previous conditions should be imposed on this application, the hotel should not be implemented without the golf course and the sustainability of the building in terms of energy and water efficiency should be carefully considered.
28. All the previously agreed benefits for the Parish must be provided in connection with this application if approved and secured for a further 5 years. The benefits were obtained by a stand alone agreement but because of the variations and the possibility of more the Parish would want a Section 106 agreement to protect the position of the stand alone agreement.”
29. Subsequent to its original comments above, further correspondence from the Parish Council states that “The comments of the Parish Planning Committee were discussed (at the full Parish Council meeting) because of the range of views and it was agreed by the full Council that the impact of the hotel on the tree screen and long views was the main factor to be considered by the District Council. In addition it was felt that if approved, additional benefits should be given to the Parish because of the greater staff numbers needed to service a luxury hotel and the traffic arising from this. A suggestion was made that funding could be provided to continue the footpath on the north west side of Hinton Way which ceases just after Coppice Avenue and link it up with the path outside 173 and 175 Hinton Way avoiding the need to cross a very busy road.”
30. **Stapleford Parish Council** recommends approval but asks “would there be a Section 106 gain for traffic calming in Church Street Stapleford in view of increased traffic generated?”
31. **Conservation Manager** makes the following comments. The revised and enlarged design has adopted a very formal classical design, reminiscent of a large stately home that is verging on the palatial. The precedents for this type of building would require the building to be part of an equally substantial landscaped parkland setting, that would be treated in a formal manner around the building, and employ a variety of devices such as vistas, avenues of trees, lakes etc.
32. The site for the hotel may be relatively large, but by the parkland standards of a stately home it is quite modest and lacks both the space or opportunity to create the landscape statement required for such a large and formal structure. The site plan suggests a minimum number of the existing trees are to be removed, but given the very substantial earthworks necessary to form the two basement levels, I would envisage a number of the trees in close proximity to the proposed new hotel would be lost.
33. Given the relatively modest size of the site, I am concerned that such a large, formal building will not fit comfortably into the context of this site, but would take on the appearance of a 'beached whale'.

34. Finally, I have some concerns over some of the more 'contrived' aspects of the design, which results in partial flat roofs hidden behind pitched roofs etc. The previous Quinlan Terry design suggested a much more rigorous application of classicism and, were Mr Terry to carry his scheme through to fruition, I am confident he would deliver a true classical building as opposed to something on which the classicism is only an applied veneer. The roof material would also be more appropriate in Welsh slate rather than 'terne coated grey metal'.
35. Recommendation: The current application, by virtue of its increased size, will have a significantly increased impact on the Green Belt, while the formal architectural design will not sit comfortably into the context of this site. The application should therefore be refused. In the event that the application is approved, it would be important to impose conditions in respect of extract ventilation plant to ensure this is not allowed to compromise the design.
36. **Trees & Landscape Officer's** comments will be reported verbally at the meeting.
37. **Ecology Officer's** comments will be reported verbally at the meeting.
38. **Local Highway Authority's** comments will be reported verbally at the meeting.
39. Having considered the submitted Flood Risk Assessment, the **Environment Agency** states that the proposal for surface water to discharge to a sustainable system incorporating attenuation and grey water usage is commended although considerable details will be necessary to ensure that third parties are adequately protected. It recommends that any permission is subject to conditions relating to surface water drainage and pollution control, makes advisory comments and states that Anglian Water should be consulted.
40. **Anglian Water** has been consulted.
41. **County Archaeological Office's** comments will be reported verbally at the meeting.
42. **Police Architectural Liaison Officer** states that provision of underground car parking will deny opportunities for natural surveillance and, in the absence of access control, it may be advisable to consider a formal surveillance system such as CCTV. He takes the point that there may be a wish for the grounds to have a countryside appearance but states that: thought could be given to locating the car park closer to the hotel to improve security, particularly during hours of darkness; care should be taken with planting adjacent to the car park, with the use of low growing thorny species to prevent the creation of hiding spaces; and lighting for the car park should be by means of column mounted white downlighters.
43. **Cambs Fire & Rescue Service** comments will be reported at the meeting.
44. The comments of the **Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)** were sought on the design of the building but, as it is consulted on more schemes than it has the resources to deal with, it was not able to comment.
45. **Campaign to Protect Rural England** states that it has no comments on the application.

Representations

46. Occupier of Willow End, King's Mill Lane is concerned about the golf course (which is not affected by this revised application) and asks what the people of Great Shelford get in return for the increase in traffic, servicing and spoiling of the natural area.
47. Occupiers of 245 Hinton Way make the following comments: the reduction in height is welcomed; the proposed substantial increase in the size and activity associated with the bar, restaurant, banqueting room, hotel area and car parking means that it is no longer appropriate for a small village setting; it is essential to formulate more realistic transport provision for the 200 or so staff on site at shift changeover times if Hinton Way is not to become an unofficial staff car park; and the enlarged scheme will cause even more significant disruption to nearby and distant residential properties, including causing intolerable pressure on the access roads which will be clogged due to inadequate provision on-site for staff parking.
48. Occupier of 173 Hinton Way comments that the amended plans for the hotel and clubhouse (S/0836/06/F) are an improvement on the approved schemes but she is concerned that, due to the very limited parking on-site for staff, Hinton Way may be used for parking which would be a safety issue if parked vehicles obstructed visibility for those pulling out of or turning into nearby properties in Hinton Way.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

49. The main issues in relation to this application are: the design and impact of this development on the openness and rural character of the countryside and Green Belt, including impact on trees, compared to the approved scheme; highway issues including parking provision; and impact on amenity of occupiers of 197 Hinton Way.
50. This proposal involves inappropriate development in the Green Belt, is contrary to Local Plan Policy RT11 and has been advertised as a departure from the development plan. However, the principle of erecting a hotel on this site has previously been established. This revised scheme has been submitted to address what the applicant has identified as deficiencies with the existing permission which means that, quoting from the submitted Planning Justification Statement, the existing permission “would only allow construction of a combined facility with a maximum rating of no more than 4 stars, falling materially short of the standards required of the luxury 5 star sector in which Mandarin Oriental operates.” The identified deficiencies are: insufficient back of house space; inadequate circulation space; insufficient plant; inadequate car parking; size of spa; sizes of restaurant/bar; and limited meeting/banqueting facilities. The consequence of improving these facilities is a building which, based on the agents' figures, whilst being between 2-3m lower than the approved scheme, has a gross external floor area 7046m² larger than the approved scheme of which 1490m² would be above ground. This equates to a 55% increase in total gross external floor area and a 19% increase to the above ground gross external floor area. The 'Scheme Comparison' contained in the submitted Planning Justification Statement is attached as an Appendix. The design of the building has also been revised.

Design and Visual Impact of the Development

51. Like the previously approved scheme, the proposed building is of a classical design. The submitted Design Statement comments that “The consented scheme established use of a period style as being appropriate to the location and site context. The current proposals therefore return to one of the greatest periods in the history of country house design, reflecting the tenets and traditions of the Palladian revival of the early part of

the eighteenth century. This places great emphasis on the setting of the building in the landscape, with the stress on the horizontal rather than the vertical. The entrance is indicated by a portico in the Italian Renaissance tradition of Andrea Palladio, popularised in England by the work of Colen Campbell. The symmetrical placement of column elements makes reference to various precedents such as the work of Paine and Brettingham at Kedleston and William Kent at Holkham.”

52. Mindful of the Conservation Manager’s comments, I consider that the formal architectural design of the building now proposed and its larger footprint and massing compared to the approved scheme demands a more substantial setting. In my opinion, the proposed building would not sit comfortably into the context of the site and would have a greater impact on the openness and rural character of the countryside and Green Belt than the approved scheme.
53. The submitted ‘Trees to be Retained’ Plan suggests that no more trees than would be removed as a result of the approved scheme would be lost. The Trees and Landscape Officer’s comments were awaited at the time this report was compiled but, due to the depth of excavation proposed and the proximity of the two rear wings to trees, it seems likely that more trees than this are likely to be lost. The loss of additional trees would exacerbate the impact of the building in the landscape.

Highway and Parking Matters

54. The access arrangement off Hinton Way is as previously approved. The application indicates that the increase in facilities now proposed (enlarged restaurant and bar, banqueting areas, conference facilities and health club and spa) are primarily for hotel guests but will also be available for non-residents (mostly during off-peak periods). Subject to the comments of the Local Highway Authority, and conscious that the previous permission was (and should Members be minded to approve this application, this proposal could also be) subject to a S.106 Agreement which included a financial contribution towards traffic calming along Hinton Way, I consider that the additional movements associated with these expanded facilities would be acceptable. Subject to comments received from the Local Highway Authority, I do not however consider that Stapleford Parish Council’s request for a Section 106 obligation with respect to traffic calming in Church Street, Stapleford, could be justified. The Local Plan sets out a maximum parking standard of 13 spaces for 10 guest bedrooms which equates to a maximum of 130 for the proposed 100 bedroom hotel. A total of 158 spaces are proposed for the hotel, an increase of 29 compared to the approved scheme, of which 120 would be provided in the basement under the hotel with the remaining 38 being sited some 110m to the northwest in the same position as previously approved. Whilst the proposed provision is 22% above the Local Plan standards, I consider it sensible to ensure that there is sufficient parking provision on site and as the number of ground level spaces now proposed is the same as previously approved, I consider the proposed provision to be acceptable.

Impact on Amenity of Residents of 197 Hinton Way

55. Whilst this building now proposed is closer to the boundary with 197 Hinton Way than the previously approved scheme, it is still some 55m from this boundary and there is a substantial intervening area of woodland. Whilst the submitted ‘Trees to be Retained’ Plan indicates that none of these trees are to be removed, it seems likely that, due to the proximity of the northernmost of the two rear wings to this area of trees, some of the trees will be lost. However, in terms of neighbour impact, subject to confirmation from the Trees & Landscape Officer that this area of woodland could be largely

retained, I consider that it would be difficult to demonstrate that the occupiers of 197 would suffer serious additional harm as a result of the revised design of the hotel.

Summary

56. There is an extant planning permission for a 99-bedroom hotel on the site and, whilst the proposed hotel constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt, so does the approved, albeit smaller, scheme. Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 'Green Belts' makes it clear that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and it is for the applicant to demonstrate the very special circumstances why such development should be approved. Permission is now sought for a larger building than previously approved and, to support the proposal, Members would need to be satisfied that there were very special circumstances to justify the larger scheme. Furthermore, by reason of the formal architectural design of the building now proposed and its larger footprint and massing compared to the approved scheme, the development now proposed would not sit comfortably into the context of the site and would have a greater impact on the openness and rural character of the countryside and Green Belt than the approved scheme. I am mindful that the proposed expanded facilities are likely to result in more employment opportunities, the proposed building is 2-3m lower than the previously approved building and of the applicant's aspirations to develop a 5-star rather than a 4-star hotel. However, in my opinion, these nor any other reasons I am aware of constitute the very special circumstances required to justify such a large inappropriate development in the Green Belt or outweigh the visual harm to the openness and rural character of the countryside and Green Belt identified above.
57. Notwithstanding the above comments and in the event that Committee is minded to approve the application, it will need to be referred to the Secretary of State under The Town and Country Planning (Green Belt) Direction 2005 as an application for planning permission involving inappropriate development on Green Belt land and involving the construction of a building of more than 1,000 sq metres.

Recommendation

58. Refusal (as amended by Flood Risk Assessment and 'Trees To Be Retained Plan' drawing no. (PA)014 both date stamped 5.6.06) for the following reasons:
- a. The proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the countryside and Green Belt and, whilst there is an extant permission for a hotel on the site (planning reference S/1229/00/F), it is considered that there are no very special circumstances to justify the enlarged hotel now proposed.
- The proposal is therefore contrary to: Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 Policy P1/2 which states that development in the countryside will be resisted unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location; South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 Policy GB2 which states that planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development in the Green Belt unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated; and Structure Plan Policy P9/2a which states that, within the Green Belt, new development will be limited to that required for agriculture and forestry, outdoor sports, cemeteries, or other uses appropriate to a rural area.
- b. Furthermore, by reason of the formal architectural design of the building now proposed and its larger footprint and massing compared to the approved scheme (planning reference S/1229/00/F), the development now proposed

would not sit comfortably into the context of the site and would have a greater (than the approved scheme) and unacceptable impact on the openness and rural character of the countryside and Green Belt.

The proposal is therefore contrary to: Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 Policy P4/1 which states that new tourism developments should protect or improve the local environment and landscape; the aims of South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 Policy GB2 which requires development in the Green Belt to be located and designed so that it does not have an adverse effect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt; 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 (the East Anglian Chalk Landscape Character Area in this instance); and South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 Policy EN3 which states that, in those cases where new development is permitted in the countryside, the Council will require that the scale, design and layout of the scheme are all appropriate to the particular Landscape Character Area.

Plus any additional reasons resulting from comments received from the Trees & Landscape Officer, Ecology Officer, Local Highway Authority, County Archaeology or Cambs Fire & Rescue Service

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

- Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 'Green Belts' 1995.
- Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 'Transport' 2001.
- Planning Policy Guidance Note 21 'Tourism' 1992.
- Planning Policy Statement 7 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas' 2004.
- Planning Policy Statement 9 'Biodiversity and Geological Conservation' 2005.
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
- Planning file Refs: S/1633/96/O, S/0778/97/RM, S/1883/99/O, S/1229/00/F, S/0835/06/F and S/0836/06/F

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