

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee

2nd August 2006

AUTHOR/S: Head of Planning Services

**S/1195/06/F – Steeple Morden
Change of Use of Land to Station Car Park, Land at Station Road, Odsey
for Mr C J K Fordham**

**Recommendation: Delegated Approval
Date for Determination: 11th August 2006**

Departure Application

Site and Proposal

1. This application, registered on 16th June 2006, proposes the change of use of land to a station car park to serve Ashwell and Morden Station.
2. The site, which has an area of 0.36ha, is located to the east of Station Road, Odsey. It is part of a larger field, the remainder of which is in agricultural use. Vehicular access is gained at the northern end of the site. There is a pedestrian path within the site leading from the southern end to link into an existing bridleway that joins Station Road approximately 130m to the north of the road leading down to the Station itself. There is no footpath on the east side of Station Road. The site is well screened from Station Road.
3. The main part of the site, which is already hardsurfaced is currently being used as a car park for a trial period by the applicant and can accommodate around 40 cars. The application shows provision for 50 vehicles with a controlled gateway with CCTV although no details of this are provided.
4. Opposite the site in Station Road are residential properties.
5. The site is in the countryside and the application has been advertised as a departure from the Development Plan.

Planning History

6. The application site was used as the vehicular access to and hardstanding for works in association with the construction of an earth bund on the applicants land to the east of the application site.
7. At that time the entrance was upgraded from an agricultural access. A condition attached to that application (a County Matter) (**Ref: S/2101/99/CW**) required the restoration of the access to a condition suitable for agriculture in accordance with a scheme to be agreed with the County Council.

Planning Policy

8. **Policy P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 (“The County Structure Plan”) - Environmental Restrictions on Development states (in part) that development in the countryside will be restricted unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
9. **Policy P1/3** of the County Structure Plan - Sustainable design in built development states (in part) that a high standard of design and sustainability for all new development will be required which minimises the need to travel and reduces car dependency.
10. **Policy P9/9** of the County Structure Plan - Cambridge Sub-Region Transport Strategy outlines the transport strategy for the Cambridge Sub-Region.
11. **Policy TP1** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 (“The Local Plan”) - Planning for More Sustainable Travel states (in part) that the Council will seek to promote more sustainable transport choices, to improve access to major trip generators by non-car modes, and to reduce the need to travel, especially by car.
12. **Policy EN5** of the Local Plan 2004 requires landscaping schemes for new development, where appropriate.

Consultation

13. **Steeple Morden Parish Council** recommends approval but makes the following comments. “Whilst welcoming the formalisation of the additional parking area after its trial period, we are concerned that it might attract commuters from railway stations outside the Parish with even less parking availability, adding to traffic flows. We also wonder whether the introduction of a parking charge (which the Parish Council assumes will occur) would cause commuters to revert to roadside parking.
14. We also have concerns regarding the type and after-care of the additional screening foliage around the parking area, and the means of accessing the rest of the field for agricultural purposes. To cover these points the following conditions are suggested.
 1. If a charge is to be made for parking, some concessionary price should be available for users from the Parishes of Steeple Morden, Guilden Morden, Ashwell and Litlington.
 2. The indicated screening should comprise local species of tree and bushes, to be agreed with the District Council’s Trees Officer together with an after-care programme that would also include the stretch of roadside hedge along one side of the car park, all to be maintained to a suitable standard.
 3. The means of accessing the remainder of the field for agricultural purposes to be agreed.
 4. Should the area no longer be required for this new use, it should revert to its previous use.”
15. The **Local Highways Authority** requests the submission of amended drawings that address issues of improvements to visibility splays and access width. The provision of the required visibility splays to the north is likely to require slight alteration to the

boundary enclosure north of the access point and will require some regarding of the highway verge together with clearance of vegetation.

16. The **Environment Agency** has no objection but requests that various informatives are attached to the decision notice.
17. The **Chief Environmental Health Officer** has considered the application in terms of noise and environmental pollution and concludes that there are no significant impacts from the Environmental Health standpoint.
18. Given the concerns of local residents set out below in respect of safety issues a copy of the application has been sent to **Police Architectural Liaison Officer, Cambridgeshire County Council** and any comments will be reported to the meeting.

Representations

19. The occupiers of 94 Station Road object to the proposal stating that they moved to the Odsey for the peace and tranquillity that Station Road affords. There has previously been two years of construction traffic when the owner of the land constructed an earth bund. The application for the bund contained a condition requiring that the vehicular access from Station Road be returned to its previous condition and that there would be planting on the mound. The concrete access has not been dug up and the planting, which was severely delayed, has nearly all died. The temporary car park has confirmed worst fears as it attracts thieves during the day and a place at night that because of its obscurity attracts all sorts of undesirable activity and noise. The place for a car park is adjacent to the station with proper lighting and security cameras, with proper management and control and not 100m up the road in a field that has no security control and will soon become a problem for the local police and council.
20. The occupiers of 100 Station Road have concerns in respect of drainage, additional traffic and car park charges. The letter states that Odsey is not on mains drainage and the field where the car park is located contains the soakaways and at three septic tanks for at least five houses in Odsey and there is concern that building work could damage or disrupt drainage/sewage flow. There is concern that the development of a car park may encourage commuters from further away to come to Ashwell and Morden Station thus creating extra traffic on an already busy road. The success of any charging scheme that might be introduced is questioned, as the reason for much of the parking along the verges in Station Road was to avoid paying the parking fees at the existing Station car park.
21. The occupier of 102 Station Road objects to the application. There is the potential of light pollution affecting local residents and wildlife, in an area which is used to darkness. There is no mention of the type of lights to be provided. There will be increased traffic due to commuters coming from further a field to use the improved facilities. There will be increased hazardous parking on Station Road as a result of charges being levied, resulting in additional hazards to other road users and pedestrians. There will be increased litter and maintenance requirement as a result of higher volume usage. The letter states that the objection would be reviewed if environmentally friendly low level low brightness lighting installed that switched off automatically shortly after the last train; if the parking is priced reasonably, with a subsidy for local users; if arrangements are made for yellow lines along Station Road to stop commuters parking on the verge and reducing the speed limit to 30mph; clearly identify the maintenance arrangements.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

22. The site is located in the countryside and the proposal is therefore contrary to Policy P1/2 of the Structure Plan. It is therefore necessary for Members to consider whether there is sufficient justification for supporting this application as a departure to that Plan, having regard to issues of visual impact, highway safety and neighbour amenity.
23. Over the years there have been a considerable number of cars parked on the highway verge along the east side of Station Road, to the north of Ashwell and Morden Station. The recent introduction of traffic calming measures along part of this stretch of road has reduced the ability of vehicles to park. However there are regularly some 20 vehicles parked on a daily basis on a 90m stretch of the road to the north of the railway bridge. The loss of this parking from the verge offers a possible environmental gain to the area.
24. There is an existing small Station car park to the east of the Station itself. Whilst planning consent was granted for an extension to the car park in 1989 that consent was not implemented. Access to the Station car park is immediately to the north of the railway bridge and visibility to the south is severely restricted, with very little opportunity for improvement. In the 1990's an appeal was lodged against the Councils decision to take enforcement action against a series of unauthorised uses on the land to the east of the current Station car park. In dismissing the appeal the Inspector commented that any increase in vehicular traffic using the Station Road entrance raised issues of highway safety.
25. I have passed the comments of the Local Highway Authority onto the applicant and have invited the submission of revised drawings which incorporate the amendments requested. At the present time visibility to either side of the entrance to the site is below that required by the Local Highway Authority, and whilst to some extent this can be addressed by maintenance of the highway verge, there is a need to assess the works needed to improve visibility to the north to ensure that they do not detract from the character of the area. When planning consent was granted for the upgrading of the former agricultural access to serve the works in association with the creation of the earth bund a condition was attached requiring the access to be returned to its former condition once work on the bund was complete. Whilst that condition has not been enforced by the County Council, there is no reason why the owner cannot seek to apply to retain the access in association with the proposed use.
26. I have asked the applicant to comment on the point raised by the Parish Council as to how access will be obtained to the remainder of the agricultural land.
27. In terms of the visual impact the site is well screened from Station Road. At the present time the remaining three boundaries are open. However the applicant has included space within the application site for new planting and this can be increased if it is considered necessary. The area for parking is already hardsurfaced. The application proposes the installation of CCTV, the details of which can be controlled by condition. Whilst I am of the view that the basic use of the land as a car park need not, with appropriate additional landscaping, be visually intrusive I have asked the applicant to comment on the need for lighting. Given the position of the car park it is difficult to see how it could operate safely without the introduction of some form of lighting and this may, depending on how it is carried out, impact on the visual character of the area.

28. The car park, being well screened from Station Road, has no natural surveillance and concerns have been expressed about the potential for crime etc. The view of the Police Architectural Liaison Officer will be reported on this point.
29. I have asked the applicant to supply details of the proposed controlled entrance gateway and comment on the Parish Councils comment that reduced parking fees should be available to residents of adjoining villages. There has been no charge for the car park during the trial period.
30. If consent is granted details of planting would be required by condition and agreed with the Councils Trees and Landscapes Officer, as required by the Parish Council. A condition can be attached to any consent requiring the land to return to agricultural use should its use as a car park cease.
31. I have asked the applicant to comment on the question raised by a local resident about existing septic tanks within the site and will report the response. The Environment Agency has not objected on drainage grounds.
32. There is local concern that the introduction of car parking charges will result in more cars parking on the verges. In discussions prior to the submission of the application the applicant indicated that he would only wish to pursue the project if parking restrictions were introduced by Cambridgeshire County Council prohibiting the current parking on the grass verges. Whilst the introduction of such restrictions does not fall within the powers of this Authority I am of the view that if the use of land as a car park is to be supported as a departure from the Development Plan it could only be on the basis that, having considered all material issues, members are of the view that the proposal will result in a significant overall environmental gain to the area. In my view this could only be achieved if parking along the grass verges is prohibited. I have asked the applicant to comment on this point and will explore with the Councils Legal Officer of possibility of restricting any consent in this way.
33. If the above issues can be satisfactorily resolved and the use of the car park can be made dependant on the restriction of existing car parking on the highway verge I would support the application as a departure from the Development Plan.
34. Given the need for such parking and the potential to remove existing parking from Station Road, I do not consider that it will be necessary to refer the application to the Secretary of State as a Departure. The proposal, by reason of its scale and nature is not considered to significantly prejudice the implementation of the Development Plan's policies and proposals.

Recommendation

35. Subject to the provisions of the preceding paragraph that delegated powers be given to approve the application subject to safeguarding conditions, regarding landscaping, highway safety, details of CCTV and lighting and restoration of the land if the use of the land for parking ceases, and Environment Agency informatives.

Reasons for Approval

1. Although the use of land as a car park is contrary to Policy P1/2 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 the Local Planning Authority is of the view that the environmental gain to the area resulting from the creation of an off street car park and the loss of existing car parking from the grass verge in Station Road, outweighs the harm to that policy.

2. The development is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the following material planning considerations which have been raised during the consultation exercise:

- Residential amenity including noise disturbance
- Highway safety
- Visual impact on the locality
- Crime and Safety issues

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/1195/06/F & S/2101/99/CW

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