

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 2nd August 2006
AUTHOR/S: Head of Planning Services

**S/1069/06/F – Bassingbourn-Cum-Kneesworth
Change Of Use Of Buildings To Class B1(C), B2 & B8 Use
Wireless Station, Chestnut Lane, for E W Pepper Ltd**

**Recommendation: Delegated Approval/Refusal
Date for Determination: 24th August 2006**

Major Application

Site and Proposal

1. This 5ha site comprises a group of agricultural buildings that are accessed from Chestnut Lane to the east of Kneesworth. The buildings consist of a range of different types and sizes, some of which are modern, relatively large, sheet clad buildings. Some of the buildings are already used for commercial purposes under a planning consent granted in 2002 (see History below).
2. This application, registered on 25th May 2006 proposes the change of use of all buildings within the site to business uses within Class B1(C), B2 and B8. The application site includes those buildings that already benefit from consent so that the site can be dealt with comprehensively. The total floor area amounts to 10,000m².
3. A concrete access serves the site leading to the buildings and the large area of hardsurfacing that surrounds them. The site is partly screened by an earth bund and landscaping on the north and east sides.
4. To the north of the site, fronting Chestnut Lane, are two pairs of semi detached houses that are owned by the applicant.
5. The application is accompanied by a Traffic Impact Assessment which can be viewed as part of the background papers and will displayed at the meeting.

Planning History

6. Planning consent was granted in 2002 for the change of use of 3350m² of buildings within the site to Class B1(c), B2 and B8 use (**Ref S/2335/00/F**). That consent required demolition of certain buildings and the retention of other open buildings for use for covered car parking. The consent was subject to various conditions, including restricting certain buildings to specified use classes in order to limit the potential traffic generation from the site, and requiring upgrading works to be carried out to the vehicular access.
7. Planning permission was granted in 2003 for the extension and change of use of buildings within the site, covered by the earlier consent, to B2 use (**Ref S/1762/02/F**). That consent was not implemented.

8. Earlier this year an application identical to the one now under consideration was withdrawn in order that a Traffic Impact Assessment could be carried out (**Ref: S/0130/06/F**).

Planning Policy

9. **Policy P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 (“The County Structure Plan”) restricts development in the countryside to that which can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
10. **Policy P1/3** of the County Structure Plan states that a high standard and sustainability for all new development will be required.
11. **Policy P2/6** of the County Structure Plan states that sensitive small-scale employment development in rural areas will be facilitated where, amongst other objectives, it enables the re-use of existing buildings.
12. **Policy EM10** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 (“The Local Plan”) states that planning permission will be granted for the change of use and conversion of rural buildings to employment use provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction and are capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction; conversion does not lead to dispersal of activity on such a scale as to prejudice town and village vitality; the form, bulk and general design of the buildings, both before and after conversion are in keeping with their surroundings; the buildings are capable of re-use without materially changing their existing character or impact upon the surrounding countryside; 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 or the landscape within which it is located; the scale and frequency of traffic generated by the proposal can be accommodated on the road system without undue adverse effects.
13. The text to the Policy states that because most rural buildings in South Cambridgeshire are small the potential scale of activity in converted buildings will usually be similarly modest.
14. **Policy TP1** of the Local Plan states that where a proposal is likely to have ‘significant transport implications’ the Council will require the preparation of a Transport Assessment and a Travel Plan. The latter can be secured by condition.

Consultation

15. **Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth Parish Council** recommends refusal. “No further business use until the site conforms to existing consents. Can a meeting be arranged on site with Parish Councillors to look at proposals?”
16. The **Local Highways Authority** comments that the Traffic Statement infers that the County Council has confirmed that the existing access would be satisfactory to serve the proposed change of use. It is stated that this is not the case and the improvements to the access required in respect of the earlier planning consent have not been fully implemented. At that time development was restricted in terms of change of use footprint to restrict the level of daily traffic likely to be generated, to avoid the necessity for a right turn facility in Chestnut Lane.

The floorspace contained in the application has the potential to generate a considerable daily vehicular trip rate. If each building is not to be limited to a specific use class the worst-case scenario in terms of traffic generation must be assumed, which in this case would be a general industrial use (B2) which generates 9-22 vehicle trips per 100m².

The Transport Assessment fails to provide the total daily traffic likely to be generated by the scheme nor does it address the suitability or otherwise of the access/junction with Chestnut Lane. At the very least it would be expected that the access road should be a minimum of 7.3m wide and comprise junction radii of 15.0m. In addition the central island within the access, anti-skid surfacing and street lighting required in respect of the earlier permission must be installed. The daily level of traffic to be generated now is likely to require the provision of a right turn facility within Chestnut Lane.

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.

Representations

18. None received at the time of writing the report

Applicant's Representations

19. In a letter accompanying the application the applicant's agent points out that the Wireless Station site currently has a mix of both business and agricultural uses (including residential accommodation for seasonal workers, which is now the subject of a separate application to relocate at Wyndmere Farm, Steeple Morden, which gives rise to obvious operational and management difficulties. The applicant would therefore like to move towards business uses only at the Wireless Station site, which can now be more easily assessed in the light of experience to date with the existing business users at the site.

The letter states that the applicants are an existing farming company with extensive agricultural and business interests who are seeking to obtain certainty for the long term future of the business use of the Wireless Station site, (within Classes B1(c), B2 and B8). They have decided that due to health and safety reasons, as well as traffic generation concerns, they are concerned at having a mixed-use site and feel that given they already own more suitable premises with existing buildings that lend themselves well to the required uses, they would prefer to relocate.

During flower packing months and potato storage, the use of the existing agricultural buildings increases significantly and involves large agricultural vehicles using Chestnut Lane often during anti-social hours. The removal of the agricultural use from the site would make a considerable improvement to the residential amenity of the occupants of Chestnut Lane.

The application site is the remainder of the applicant's Wireless Station Farm holding, where planning permission already exists for some business uses and a farm managers dwelling. The proposal is that there should be a change of use of the remainder of the site from agricultural to business use (Classes B1(c), B2 and B8). The application is drafted to include the whole of the site (including those buildings with the benefit of commercial use), in order for there to be some uniformity with regard to conditions.

The letter states that the buildings in question are substantial former agricultural buildings and that they lend themselves to the proposed change of use without affecting the character of the area, or causing demonstrable “harm” to the locality.

The letter states that the access complies with current highway standards and the site is well related to the road network, and is particularly suited to low key B8 or similar uses.

20. The conclusion of the Traffic Impact Assessment submitted with the application states that at present the site is operating in mixed use being half agricultural produce and distribution and half low key business use in conversions of the agricultural buildings. The agricultural usage is very noticeable at various seasonal times of the year by the high numbers of large heavy goods vehicles that service the site. All of these large vehicles pass along Chestnut Lane and the A1198.

The likely traffic impact of the proposed redevelopment is predicted to be less than half a vehicle per minute in the evening peak hour. This would be practically undetectable despite the low flows along Chestnut Lane. There would be no perceptible change to traffic flows in the morning peak hour.

The proposed change of use would have no significant adverse impact on the highway. However, the removal of 62 large agricultural heavy goods vehicles and the tractors with trailers each day would have a noticeable benefit for the residential frontages along Chestnut Lane. There would also be a benefit in terms of reducing road maintenance and congestion along this stretch of road.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

21. The key issues to be considered with this application are whether the buildings are capable of conversion without materially changing, appearance or impact on the countryside; whether the proposal would have an adverse impact on the area in terms of traffic generation, including whether safe and satisfactory access can be provided; and whether the activities generated by the proposal would have an adverse impact on the amenity of residential properties. It is also necessary for Members to consider whether the scale of the proposed development is appropriate in this location.
22. The buildings are of sound construction and those that have already been converted have been done so without materially changing their character or altering the appearance on the surrounding countryside. I anticipate the remaining conversion could be carried out in a similar way, although buildings 16 and 17 are currently open sided and should remain so.
23. The application is accompanied by a Traffic Impact Assessment. Although the previous consent required improvement works required to be carried out in respect of the existing vehicular access to the site the Local Highway Authority is of the view that this has only partly been carried out, although the number of persons currently employed in the converted buildings falls well below the level that might have been anticipated from the amount of floorspace involved. As a result the level of traffic using the site has not been at the level that was suggested by the County Council trip rate figures at the time.

24. The Local Highway Authority has commented that the proposed scheme has the potential to generate a considerable amount of additional traffic and is of the view that the transport statement submitted fails to address this and the suitability, or otherwise of the access/junction. It points out that further improvement to the entrance will be required as a result of the proposed development and further information/supporting plans have been requested.
25. When this additional information is received the Local Highway Authority and Parish Council will be given the opportunity to make further comment. It will also be necessary for officers to take a view as to whether the required highway works are appropriate in this rural area in terms of the impact on its character and appearance.
26. I have also asked the Local Highway Authority if it is satisfied that the potential level of traffic that might be generated by the proposal can be accommodated on the surrounding road network and in particular the suitability of Chestnut Lane.
27. Adequate car parking and turning provision can be made within the site without have an adverse effect on the character of the surrounding countryside.
28. In terms of the potential impact on adjoining residential properties the Chief Environmental Health Officer has considered the application and has raised no objection.
29. Development Plan policies that refer to re-use of rural buildings infer that such uses will normally be small scale. In this case because of the scale of buildings within the site this will not be the case. The proposal does however comply with the aims of rural diversification and if it can be achieved without adverse harm to the issues identified above then in my view the proposal can be supported. The ability to satisfactorily address highway issues will be the key to this support being forthcoming.
30. A site meeting has been arranged with members of Bassingbourn Parish Council as requested. There is concern that the existing conversion scheme has not been carried out in accordance with the approved plans. I am aware that there are areas of open building that were to be used as car parking that are now being used for employment floorspace and there may be buildings where the occupiers are not in compliance with the use restrictions imposed on the original consent. By including all buildings within the site this application seeks to address these issues. I will report the outcome of that meeting verbally.
31. If consent is granted it may be necessary to consider restricting the use of buildings within the site to specified use classes to further control potential traffic generation. This approach was adopted on the previous consent. Any consent should contain a condition requiring the submission of a Green Travel Plan. This was a requirement of the previous consent but a Plan has not been submitted to date.
32. At present there is an extant consent for the erection of a farm managers dwelling within the site. If consent is granted to a change of use of buildings away from agricultural use the need for this dwelling is removed. The applicant should be asked to enter into a Section 106 Agreement as a condition of any consent, revoking, without compensation, the extant consent for that dwelling.

Recommendation

33. That, subject to the submission of additional information that demonstrates that a safe and satisfactory access to the site can be provided in a way which will not have an adverse impact on the character of the area, delegated powers of approval be granted subject to safeguarding conditions, to include the following:
- Standard time limit
 - Details of surface water and foul water drainage
 - Landscaping (SC51 and SC52)
 - No outside storage (SC36)
 - Highway Improvements
 - Restriction of Uses
 - Section 106 Agreement in respect of the farm mangers dwelling
 - Green Travel Plan
 - Car Parking Provision

Reasons for Approval

1. The development is considered generally to accord with the Development Plan and particularly the following policies:
 - **County Structure Plan 2003:**
P1/3 (Sustainable Design in Built Development)
P2/6 (Rural Economy)
 - **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004:**
EM10 (Development in Rural Growth Settlements)
TP1 (Planning for More Sustainable Travel)
 2. The development is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the following material planning considerations which have been raised during the consultation exercise:
 - Highway safety
34. If satisfactory access details are not submitted it is recommended that the application be refused.

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 Refs: S/1069/06/F; S/0130/06/F and S/2335/00/F
- Traffic Impact Assessment dated May 2006

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