

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

7th February 2007

AUTHOR/S: Executive Director / Head of Planning Services

S/2454/06/F – HIGHFIELDS CALDECOTE
Extension and Conversion of Barn into Dwelling at Barn adjacent Highfields Farm
For P Bird

Recommendation: Refusal

Date for Determination: 15th February 2007

Members will visit the site on 5th February 2007

This Application has been reported to the Planning Committee for determination at the request of the local Member.

Departure Application

Site and Proposal

1. The application relates to a roughly rectangular shaped site measuring 0.29 hectares (0.72 acres). The site is approximately 260m to the northeast of Highfields Road and is accessed by a private single-lane access track. The site contains a timber-framed barn in dilapidated condition. The barn is a timber frame and slate structure, measuring approximately 11m by 5m, with an approximate ridge height of 5m. The adjacent taller element has been removed, and relevant materials have been salvaged.
2. The site forms part of a cluster of agricultural buildings and four existing dwellings accessed from the same access track. To the northwest of the site is a two storey detached cottage (Highfield Farm Cottage), with a row of three two-storey terraces to the south and southwest. Adjacent the site to the north and east are fields, 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 application received on 21st December 2006 is for the conversion of the existing structure and an extension to provide a three-bedroom dwelling. The existing barn on site would be converted to form the entrance, kitchen/dining room and toilet. It would measure 4.7m and 2.8m to the ridge and eaves of the roof respectively and measure 10.1m in length and 4.1m in width. The extension would create a two-storey element and provide the bedrooms, study and lounge. This element would be 6.2m in height to the ridge and 2.7m in height to the eaves, 15m in length and 7.5m in width. The integral garage of the previous scheme has been removed. The northeast and northwest flanks of the dwelling would be gravelled for vehicles to park in these locations.

Planning History

4. The existing barn is of some age and was erected without the need for planning permission.

5. **S/0311/06/F** – Members will recall a previous application on the site, which was refused by the Planning Committee on 10th May 2006 following a site visit. This application was on the same site, and also included the access to Highfields Road within the red line. The scheme involved the conversion for the then two barn buildings on site. The proposal was an L-shaped building, with three bedrooms and an integral double garage. The scheme was significantly taller, with the two-storey element measuring 7m and 5m to the ridge and eaves respectively. It did however have a smaller footprint, measuring 13.6m in length and 7.3m in width. The single storey element was slightly taller at 4.9m to the ridge, and had a larger footprint, measuring 9.1m by 5.4m. The cars and other materials on the site have now been removed.
6. The application was refused for three reasons
 - 1) The application is within the countryside, and the barn appears structurally unsound and not capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction.
 - 2) The proposed fenestration is of regular distribution and domestic in appearance, not in keeping with the barn-like form and materials of the proposed dwelling, and
 - 3) Insufficient information has been provided to allow the potential impact upon the terrestrial habitat of the Great Crested Newts believed to be living in the pond adjacent the site.
7. Other further recent relevant applications of note are as follows. Reasons for the refusal of these applications referred to new residential development in the countryside, being contrary to policy.
8. 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.
9. Planning permission was refused and dismissed at appeal for the erection of bungalow and garage following demolition of existing barns at Barns at Woodside, Longstanton on the 7 July 2005. This application was refused by Councillors at the 6 July 2006 Development and Conservation Control Committee Meeting (**Ref: S/2481/04/F**).

Planning Policy

10. National guidance contained in **Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (PPS 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.
11. 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 conversions may be more appropriate in some locations, and for some types of building.
12. 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 environment 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.

13. **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.
14. **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.
15. **Policy 5/5** 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.
16. **Policy P7/2** of the County Structure Plan seeks all development to conserve and enhance the biodiversity value of the areas which they affect
17. **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.
18. **Policy SE8** of the Local Plan 2004 states that residential development outside the village frameworks will not be permitted.
19. **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 "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.
20. **Policy EN13** of the Local Plan 2004 states 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 development clearly outweighs the importance of conserving the habitat.

Local Development Framework Submission Draft 2006

Policies in the LDF largely reflect existing policies. The following policies represent significant changes from adopted plans, although limited weight can be attached to them in advance of the Inspector's Report.

21. **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:

Firstly, it is inappropriate for any suitable employment use; and
Secondly, it is inappropriate for employment with residential conversion as a subordinate part of a scheme for business re-use.

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**.

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. 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....”

Paragraph 4.33 of the supporting text adds that “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 purely for residential use will only be permitted as a last resort, particularly to secure the future of buildings of particular architectural quality or character”.

22. **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

23. **Caldecote Parish Council** – Recommend refusal. “The proposal is outside the village framework suitable only for continuing agricultural use. Should the application gain approval the council ask:
- (a) That consideration is given to land drainage issues and the capacity of the current foul water system in the village which is believed is already beyond its capacity already;
 - (b) Wildlife, all development should make due consideration of problems associated with wildlife disturbance;
 - (c) Observation of the Crime and disorder act Section 17;
 - (d) Any construction should specify good quality materials;

- (e) Consideration of the effect on the street scene;
- (f) Any rights of way effecting any development should be the responsibility of the applicant to move;
- (g) Any access should not be allowed to increase risks.

Conditions should be applied on the following during construction.

- (a) No work should be carried out before 8am and should finish by 6pm (1pm Saturdays),
- (b) No work on Sundays or Bank Holidays,
- (c) Any spoil removed should not be used to raise ground levels and create neighbouring flood problems,
- (d) Site traffic should be diverted away from existing roads if possible, roads used should be kept free of mud and if necessary regularly swept. Wheel washing facilities should be used.
- (e) Parking and site compounds should be provided to ensure that disturbance to nearby properties is kept to a minimum,
- (f) Planting plans should be agreed before any construction is started to ensure existing planting is preserved if possible.”

24. **Conservation Manager** – The current design has been prepared by a different architect who has sought to work with what remains of the existing barn and extend it in a more appropriate manner. Building now sits more comfortably on the site and will look more appropriate in its rural setting. From a design perspective, this scheme is far superior to previously. Happy to support the new design. It will ensure the site is tidied up while at the same time retaining an appropriate “agricultural” appearance to the buildings. If approved, would wish to see conditions removing pd rights, samples of materials to be agreed, rooflight types and a condition preventing further windows to prevent loss of its barn-like appearance.

25. **Environment Agency** – The application as submitted does not consider sufficiently foul water drainage. Recommends a condition regarding a scheme for the provision and implementation of foul water drainage to prevent the increased risk of pollution to the water environment. Also, list of informatives should the approval be given regarding soakaways, connections to public foul sewers, foul drainage treatment, oil tank legislation and prevention of pollution of surface and underground waters from contaminated waters.

Also, soakaways/infiltration drainage systems, surface and foul water, may not operate satisfactorily in view of local geology.

26. **Ecology Officer** – The original objection to the previous application is removed due to the submission of the Amphibian survey. The survey concludes that the adjacent ponds and surrounding land do provide a habitat for Great Crested Newts. Maintenance of their population meets with the second objective in PPS9. Wishes the opportunity to negotiate appropriate habitat management and partial restoration of the adjacent pond. This has been discussed informally with the applicant who is aware that it would improve the local environment.

27. **Councillor Robin Martlew** – has requested that the application be determined by Planning Committee, following a site visit.

Representations

28. No representation received.

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.
 5. Impact upon Great Crested Newts

Principle of New Residential Development on Site

30. The proposal represents a departure from the adopted 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 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. 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 the Proposed Dwelling

33. Reason 2 of the previous refusal on the site related to fenestration and the domestic appearance of the dwelling. Comments from the Conservation officer confirm the new design is much more appropriate to the setting of the rural site. I am therefore content with this element of the scheme.

Impact on Residential Amenities of Adjacent Properties

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

Highway Safety

35. The proposed site provides ample room for off-street car parking and turning.
36. 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.

37. 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.

Impact upon Great Crested Newts

38. Condition 3 of the previous refusal on the site referred to a pond adjacent to the site. The new application has an amphibian survey and the Ecology Officer no longer objects. The applicant has informally stated he aims to preserve the local environment, although securing this by condition may prove difficult.

Recommendation

39. Refuse, for the following reasons

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.

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/2454/06/F, S/0311/06/F, S/2481/04/F and S/2005/03/F

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