

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

7th February 2007

AUTHOR/S: Executive Director / Head of Planning Services

**S/1936/06/F - SWAVESEY
Workshop and Warehouse Extension
at MG Owners Club, Octagon House, Over Road for Merreloak Ltd**

Recommendation: Delegated Approval

Date for Determination: 4th December 2006

Notes:

This Application has been reported to the Planning Committee for determination because the application is a departure from the Development Plan.

Departure Application

Site and Proposal

1. The application site lies in the countryside immediately to the north of the old railway line that bisects the villages of Over and Swavesey, the future route of the Guided Bus.
2. To the south and west lies the Swavesey Conservation Area, approximately 180m from the proposed position of the extension.
3. The site currently contains a building approximately 102m long and 8.4m high that is used by the MG Owners Club as its national headquarters, accessed from Over Road. The southern boundary is used for car parking and an area of outside storage lies to the rear at the eastern end of the site. The northern boundary contains mature trees along its entire length although these thin at the eastern end.
4. The full planning application, received 9th October 2006, proposes to extend the building by a further 36m to provide additional warehousing storage (432 sq.m.) and enlarged workshop (216 sq.m.). The extension would follow the design, form and materials of the existing. A hardstanding and compound area is proposed at the eastern end of the site for the stationing of vehicles. The number of full time workers is expected to increase from 48 to 52.

Planning History

5. Full planning permission was granted for the building in September 1991.
6. Planning permission was granted to extend the building in October 1998.

Planning Policy

7. **Policy P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 (the Structure Plan) – ‘Environmental Restrictions on Development’ states that

development will be restricted in the countryside unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.

8. **Policy P1/3** of the Structure Plan – ‘Sustainable Design in Built Development’ states (in part):

A high standard of design and sustainability for all new development will be required which:

- (a) Minimises the need to travel and reduces car dependency by providing:
 - a. An appropriate mix of land uses and accessible services and facilities;
 - b. Good access by public transport;
 - c. Managed access for the private car and other motor vehicles.
- (b) Provides a sense of place which:
 - a. Responds to the local character of the built environment;
 - b. Is integrated with adjoining landscapes;
 - c. Creates distinctive skylines, focal points, and landmarks;
 - d. Includes variety and surprise within a unified design;
 - e. Conserves important environmental assets of the site;
 - f. Pays attention to the detail of forms, massing, textures, colours and landscaping.

9. **Policy P2/1** of the Structure Plan - ‘Employment Strategy’ states:

“The economic growth of the Plan area will be supported in the Cambridge Sub-Region by:

- (a) Encouraging the continued expansion of high technology and knowledge-based industry;
- (b) Securing investment in new infrastructure needed to relieve obstacles to growth using existing land allocations and making new allocations where appropriate;
- (c) The selective management of employment which does not need to be located in or close to Cambridge (see Policy P9/7); in Peterborough and North Cambridgeshire by:
 - a. Securing investment in physical infrastructure and supporting social, environmental and community initiatives which will assist economic regeneration;
- (d) Taking full advantage of the range of existing land allocations and vacant or under-used sites in the area; in both areas by:
 - a. Encouraging a wider range of business and industrial development;

- b. Developing the skills of the labour force in line with the needs of the economy;
- c. Enabling the diversification of the rural economy (see Policy P2/6).”

10. **Policy P2/2** of the Structure Plan – ‘General Location of Employment’ states:

Where there is a need for new land allocations for employment, provision will be mainly concentrated in Cambridge, in Peterborough, in market towns and in Rural Centres where this could help reduce out commuting and also on the strategic sites identified in **Policy P2/3**.

Local Plans will review existing employment allocations and allocate a range of sites for the continued growth of employment and to broaden the local economy. Development will be located in line with the objectives of **Policy P1/1** so as to:

- (a) Work towards a balance of jobs and housing;
- (b) Maintain a range of types and sizes of premises for business requirements;
- (c) Encourage a range of employment opportunities for local people;
- (d) Reduce the need to travel, particularly by private car;
- (e) Enable the fullest use of public transport, walking and cycling for work-related journeys;
- (f) Maximise the use of previously developed land and buildings;
- (g) Support rural services and facilities (see Policy P3/4).

11. **Policy P2/6** of the Structure Plan – ‘Rural Economy’ states:

Sensitive small-scale employment development in rural areas will be facilitated where it contributes to one or more of the following objectives:

- a. Helping to achieve a balance of employment with the type and quantity of local housing;
- b. Supporting new and existing business and research and technology clusters (see Policy P2/4);
- c. Providing opportunities for home working, or making good use of new information and communication technologies;
- d. Enabling farm or rural diversification where appropriate to the local area, including appropriate rural tourism (see Policies P4/1 and P4/2);
- e. Enabling the re-use of existing buildings;
- f. Enabling the re-use of vacant, derelict or under-used land within villages;
- g. Helping to maintain or renew the vitality of rural areas.

Employment allocations in local plans for rural areas will be predominantly located in Rural Centres (see Policy P1/1).

12. **Policy P9/7** of the Structure Plan - Selective Management of Employment Development states (in part):
 - a) "Employment land in and close to Cambridge will be reserved for development which can demonstrate a clear need to be located in the area in order to serve local requirements or contribute to the continuing success of the Sub-Region as a centre of high technology and research. Development proposals must demonstrate that they fall into one or more of the following categories:
 - b) Other small-scale industries which would contribute to a greater range of local employment opportunities, especially where this takes advantage of, or contributes to the development of, particular locally based skills and expertise."
13. **Policy EM7** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 supports the principle of the expansion of existing firms within village frameworks or on suitable Brownfield sites next to or very close to village frameworks.
14. **Policy EN1** of the Local Plan states: "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."

Consultation

15. **Swavesey Parish Council** has recommended approval. It states:

"Swavesey Parish Council raises no objections to the extension proposed, however it would like to request that consideration be given to minimise the impact of these works on the rural environment. The following comments were put forward:

 - (i) To minimise the impact of light pollution. The extension will intrude further into open countryside at the edge of the Conservation Area of the village. If additional lighting is to be installed, this should be low level both in height and brightness.
 - (ii) To minimise the impact of new building on the rural environment, in particular the views across to the Manor House and Church in this part of the conservation area."

Conservation Manager

16. The Conservation Manager is not opposing the application. His detailed comments will be updated verbally at the meeting.

Chief Environmental Health Officer

17. No objections subject to conditions to limit the hours of use of power operated machinery and to require the submission of details of the location and type of any power driven plant or equipment.

Chief Engineer - Middle Level Commissioners

18. “The Board is content that the proposals should not detrimentally affect the Board’s system and that its consent is not required”

However the Board makes detailed comment in relation to its consideration of the Flood Risk Assessment and states that in its view there are inadequacies within it, including the issue of disposal of surface water.

Local Highways Authority

19. “The access, parking and manoeuvring areas are remaining as existing. Consequently, I have no objections to or comments to make on the proposal.”

Environment Agency

20. Comments are awaited.

Representations

21. None

Further representations of the applicant

22. Following a request for additional information to justify the proposed new build in the countryside the applicants made the following comments:

“MGOC are seeking to expand on their own land without encroaching on adjoining green space. The area to be developed is currently a compound containing cars awaiting repair. The club has looked into the option of relocation. Their current building is purpose made to their particular requirements. To move elsewhere would mean starting again on a fresh site. There are many reasons why this would not be practical. It would be unlikely a suitable site could be found locally, there would be a substantial delay and the mostly local workforce would be lost.

As with any successful business it is hard to stand still. The demands on the club from an increasing membership at home and abroad coupled with a wider range of products means they must expand or risk losing out in a competitive market. If they are refused this option to expand onto the remaining area of their site the adverse financial implications for the club could be significant”.

23. The business case was submitted with the application. Additionally:

“The business has operated in Swavesey since 1979 and on this site since 1992. The business is diverse requiring specific skills sets provided by an established local workforce. These include: Publishing, specialist sales and marketing of MG car parts, restoration and repairs of classic and modern MG cars. With a total staff compliment of over fifty predominantly local personnel, the prospect of moving to an alternative site to gain more space is impractical and hazardous to the future of the business.

Storage: The requirement to purchase component MG parts in bulk to obtain competitive prices is now critical to the ongoing financial viability of the business and extension of warehousing is essential to accommodate this. With the demise of MG

Rover there is an additional requirement to stock larger volumes of MG components to fulfil demand.

Workshop: The additional demand for work on modern MG models since the demise of MG Rover has increased and placed a considerable strain on our existing workshop facility. Without additional workshop space growth would be impossible and the additional business could not be realised”.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

24. The key issues are:

Justification for new build in the countryside
Visual impact – design and landscaping.
Drainage and flood risk
Highway safety

Justification

25. The application is a departure from the Development Plan in that the proposal is for new building in the open countryside that is not essential for any recognised rural uses. However, MGOC are an important local employer and as such an asset to the village and the locality. Further expansion is limited by the size of the site and on balance I accept the case put forward by the company, detailed above, and within the business plan with regard to its needs for the development.
26. The case officer visited the site and noted that within the building there was very little space left for additional storage. Many items such as gear boxes and engines, that are awaiting restoration, are deteriorating by being stored outside. It would appear that the company does need additional internal storage space. Moreover expansion of existing firms is supported by Policy EM7 of the Local Plan on Brownfield sites, albeit this is some 350 metres north east of the village framework.

Visual impact – design and landscaping

27. The existing building is reasonably well screened and only particularly visible from limited vantage points. The best views are probably from the high point of Over Road heading south towards Swavesey from Over. The extension to the building will continue its form and design. The Council’s Landscape Officer has stated that there is scope for additional planting to help assimilate it on the northern boundary by extending the existing tree line further to the east. The extension will increase the length of an already long building but its position and potential for additional screening will result in acceptable impact on the wider landscape.
28. I note the concerns of the Parish Council with regard to external lighting. This can be controlled through conditions on any permission granted.
29. The Parish Council has also raised concerns regarding the impact on the Conservation Area and in particular to the Manor House and Church. The Conservation Area is approximately 180m from the position of the proposed extension and both the Manor House and the Church are well screened by existing tree planting on the northern edge of the Manor House grounds.

30. The existing building will have a visual impact on future users of the Guided Bus route. I consider the extension will only marginally add to this however and on balance will not be unduly dominant.

Drainage and Flood risk

31. Prior to the submission of the application the applicants discussed the proposals directly with the Environment Agency. A flood risk assessment was produced which satisfied the Agency's initial concerns. Although I am still waiting for the formal response to this application I would expect that, subject to safeguarding conditions, the Flood Risk Assessment will be acceptable and all concerns can be addressed through appropriate conditions. It proposes a floor level to match the existing, giving 400mm freeboard as protection against extreme flood events, and by the provision of compensatory flood storage volume north of the proposed extension.

Traffic generation and Highway safety

32. I note the comments of the Local Highways Authority. Whilst the proposal could intensify the use of this site, the use of the existing building has exceeded its capacity and much of the additional space will be used to better organise existing arrangements. I note that the application forms indicate that there will be no greater vehicular movements to and from the site. I consider that any additional traffic movements, if they occur, will be modest and acceptable.
33. One of the key benefits of this site is that it employs a local workforce. I consider that increasing the available floorspace has the potential to intensify the use of the site and it would therefore be reasonable to require a Green Travel Plan by condition.

Noise

34. The original planning permission and the subsequent permission for extension did not require a restriction on the hours of operation of power operated machinery. They did however require that the use of all power operated machinery shall be limited to within the workshop only. I consider a similar approach to be acceptable here if Members are minded to approve the application.
35. Due to the nature of the proposal as an extension of an existing facility providing employment locally with the possibility of further landscaping I do not consider the matter needs to be referred to the Secretary of State as a departure, which would significantly prejudice the implementation of the Development Plan's policies and proposals.

Recommendation

36. Delegated approval subject to the comments of the Environment Agency and to appropriate safeguarding conditions to remove permitted development rights to change the use to another use within the same use class, control drainage, flood risk, external lighting, materials to match existing, landscaping and landscaping implementation, limitation on use of power operated machinery and location of power driven plant or machinery, no outside storage (other than vehicles) and subject to a Green Travel Plan.

Reasons for approval

1. The development is not considered to accord with the Structure Plan Policy P1/2, but the following material considerations are felt to outweigh the Policy objections in this case:
 - Important local employer
 - Acceptable visual impact
 - Limited additional intensification
 - Expansion of a local firm in accordance with the principles of Policy EM7 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.

2. The development is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the following material planning considerations which have been raised during the consultation exercise:
 - Drainage and Flood Risk
 - Light pollution
 - Impact on adjacent Conservation Area, Church and Manor House

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 Files Ref: S/1936/06/F, S/1574/98/F and S/0645/91/F

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