

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee
AUTHOR/S: Executive Director / Head of Planning Services

7th February 2007

S/1630/06/F - LONGSTANTON
Change of use of land to Goods Yard at Land adjacent The Sidings, Station Road
For John Henry Engineering Ltd

Recommendation: Delegated approval

Date for Determination: 19th March 2007 (Major Application)

Notes:

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

Departure Application

Site and Proposal

1. The site lies outside of any defined village framework and immediately to the south of the applicant's existing goods yard which lies south of the old railway line that cuts through Longstanton.
2. It forms part of a large and open field. The southern boundary of the proposed area for expansion (shown hatched on the plans) has no existing boundary definition. The remainder of the site to the south is open fields. There is a good boundary screen along Station Road.
3. The full planning application, received on 8th August 2006, proposes to change the use of the hatched area (0.745 ha) from agricultural land to goods yard as an expansion of the existing yard and to provide access and a balancing pond for run off from the access and the site. The hatched area of land will be hard surfaced. The proposed access and balancing pond was incorporated within an enlarged application site in amended drawings franked 18th December 2006.

Planning History

4. The existing goods yard does not benefit from any planning permission but has been operating for many years. There is no suggestion that the existing use should be regularised.
5. In February 1992 planning permission was refused for an alternative access onto Station Road as it would harm the rural appearance of the undeveloped road frontage. An appeal was dismissed in January 1993.
6. The County Council is in the process of acquiring land formally owned by the applicants for the Guided Busway Park and Ride site. The applicants will retain the area shown hatched and the semi-circular area to the east along with the existing goods yard site.

7. In March 2006 planning permission was applied for the change of use of land to extend the goods yard into the area of retained land. This area of land was larger than the current application site, the application contained no access and generally the information accompanying the application was insufficient. The applicant withdrew the application in June 2006.
8. Following negotiations with officers the application has been resubmitted but does not include the semicircular portion of land to the east.

Planning Policy

9. **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.
10. **Policy P1/3** of the Structure Plan – ‘Sustainable Design in Built Development’ states (in part):
 1. 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;
 - (b) An appropriate mix of land uses and accessible services and facilities;
 - (c) Good access by public transport;
 - (d) Managed access for the private car and other motor vehicles;
 2. 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) Includes streets, squares and other public spaces with a defined sense of enclosure;
 - (f) Includes attractive green spaces and corridors for recreation and biodiversity;
 - (g) Conserves important environmental assets of the site;
 - (h) Pays attention to the detail of forms, massing, textures, colours and landscaping.
11. **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:
 - (d) Securing investment in physical infrastructure and supporting social, environmental and community initiatives which will assist economic regeneration;
 - (e) Taking full advantage of the range of existing land allocations and vacant or under-used sites in the area; in both areas by:
 - (f) Encouraging a wider range of business and industrial development;
 - (g) Developing the skills of the labour force in line with the needs of the economy;
 - (h) Enabling the diversification of the rural economy (see **Policy P2/6**).”
12. **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**.
13. 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**).
14. **Policy P2/5** of the Structure Plan - Distribution, Warehousing and Manufacturing states:
 “Distribution, warehousing and manufacturing activities which generate large volumes of freight movement will only be located on sites with good access to rail freight facilities, and to motorways, trunk or other primary routes (see also **Policy P8/11**).

Distribution and warehousing facilities will not be permitted within or close to Cambridge (see **Policy P9/7**).”

15. **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**).

16. South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 encourages the expansion of existing firms within village frameworks or on suitable brownfield sites next to or very close to the village frameworks (**Policy EM7**) and otherwise limits employment development outside frameworks to the conversion and change of use of rural buildings (**Policy EM10**).
17. **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

18. **Longstanton Parish Council** recommended refusal of the application as originally submitted. It stated:

“There is not enough information with regards to traffic, specific goods and storage details”

In relation to the amended plan, it made no recommendation and commented:
“The Parish Council is disappointed that there is no inclusion of a cycle path extension.”

19. **Local Highways Authority** in relation to the application as submitted:

"I have no objection to this proposal provided use of the land does not commence until alternative access via the Park and Ride access infrastructure is in place.

In addition, prior to the use of this site commencing a scheme for the permanent and effective closure of the present access to the private road leading to Station Road should be submitted for approval".

In relation to the amended plan:

"I note that the application site area now includes the access road and junction with Station Road. As such, full details of the junction with the B1050 should be submitted in support of this application.

I must reiterate the two issues raised within the consultation dated 8th September 2006. i) The use of this land should not commence until alternative access via the Park and Ride infrastructure is in place and ii) prior to the use of this site commencing, a scheme for the permanent and effective closure of the existing access to Station Road should be submitted for approval.

In respect of item ii) I note the comments within the submitted statement but note that the applicant controls all the existing depot site including the existing access to Station Road. The applicant must therefore be in a position to negotiate with other users / tenants of his land.

It is essential that the existing access to the old depot site be closed as part of this new development."

20. **Environment Agency** - Recommends that if permission is granted that a condition should require a scheme for the provision and implementation of pollution control of the water environment to include foul and surface water drainage to be submitted to and agreed by SCDC prior to development commencing.

21. **Landscape Design Officer**

- (a) "The northern boundary to the site (a goods yard) will be opposite the Longstanton CGB stop. Most of the existing boundary vegetation will be removed during construction of the CGB stop, and there will be little space remaining for any replacement planting.
- (b) I would suggest that the northern boundary should be moved southwards into the site by approximately 2m to enable an effective screen or green wall to be planted between the site and the CGB stop.
- (c) As it is proposed to move the entrance to the site south to share the entrance with the Park and Ride I would suggest that the western boundary is linked/harmonised with new fencing and further planting to add amenity to the existing houses and views from the B1050. (what will happen to the redundant road area?)
- (d) I suggest that the proposed landscape treatment on the northern side of the Park and Ride access is continued in a minimum 5m wide strip to end behind the proposed cycle storage area."

22. **Chief Environmental Health Officer** - No objections subject to safeguarding conditions restricting the hours of use of power operated machinery, details of the location and type of any power driven plant or equipment and informatives regarding no bonfires or burning of waste without prior consent.
23. **Delivery Manager – Cambridgeshire Guided Busway** - “We have no objections to the proposals from a CGB perspective and they are compatible with the acceptable delivery of the guided busway scheme. Please also note Adrian Shepherd’s email of 11th May setting out the interface between the guided busway scheme and the John Henry land.

It should be noted that in the first paragraph of the letter from Redmayne Arnold and Harris, dated 26th July 2006, we would clarify that the objection withdrawal was on the basis of any, if possible, future potential for use of land for “operational” purposes rather than any compensation for any existing loss of storage, as no planning permission existed for storage on the land etc”.

The 11th May 2006 email referred to above is reproduced below:

“I have attached a copy of the agreement plan between J Henry and the County Council which shows marked in red the area of land (see attached Atkins plan) which it was agreed that the County would not under its Cambridgeshire Guided Busway Order powers acquire for the Park & Ride site from J Henry.

This agreement was entered into after the draft Order application had been made which had originally included this land.

This is indicated on the Illustrative Technical Development Drawing (CGBE -012 attached as background FYI), an Order application plan, an extract of which appears to have accompanied the recent planning application made to SCDC LPA from J Henry.

I can confirm that under the present arrangements the County has no requirement for the land subject to planning application S/0643/06F as part of the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway project.”

Representations

24. Three letters of objection have been received from the occupiers of Southwell, Station Road. The points of objection are summarised below:
- (a) Concern that the proposed extension of the goods yard has been the subject of prior negotiations with the County Council and SCDC Planning Department. It appears to have been pre-determined without public consultation.
 - (b) Impact on character of rural area.
 - (c) Additional traffic generation.
 - (d) Proposal is premature as there are more proposed sites for Northstowe and the Park and Ride may be located elsewhere.
 - (e) Impact on amenity of Southwell.
 - (f) Objections to location of access opposite Southwell due to increased air pollution affecting health.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

25. The key issues are:
1. Impact on the countryside
 2. Neighbour amenity
 3. Highway Safety

Impact on the countryside

26. The present site is not operating under any planning permission. As such there are no conditions, such as landscaping, hours of operation etc. that control the operation.
27. The new area will almost double the size of the site and intensify the goods yard operation. However, material is the proposed new Park and Ride site, the Guided Busway and Northstowe. The site and surroundings will change in character significantly should these go ahead. The proposed Park and Ride site is shown indicatively on the plans accompanying the application.
28. I consider there is a balance to be made between an intensification of a use that would otherwise not be appropriate in the countryside and the likely change in character of the surroundings alongside any other potential benefits of the proposal.

The main benefits are:

- (a) The use of an existing access by large HGVs in close proximity to dwellings will be reduced by ensuring that a physical barrier is placed so that large vehicles have to access the site using the new Park and Ride access. This will improve the amenities of occupiers of these properties and highway safety.
 - (b) Landscaping conditions can be imposed to ensure that the site is better assimilated into its surroundings, including from the Park and Ride site, existing dwellings and to the new station alongside the Guided Bus route which would otherwise be poorly related to the existing site.
29. There are some issues in relation to the timing of this proposal.
- (a) Firstly the proposal was originally submitted without access to the public highway and could not therefore be considered. The application now includes access but the intention is not to install this but to rely on the sharing of the access to the Park and Ride. As such the access arrangement may change and it is not certain at this time if the Park and Ride access can cater for the proposal although I understand talks between the applicants and Cambridgeshire County Council are progressing.
 - (b) Secondly the proposal relies on its southern boundary on the landscaping proposed as part of the Park and Ride site.
 - (c) Thirdly the applicants do not intend to install the balancing pond and the application contains no details of this. This is required for run off from the new access. The applicants intend that this will also serve their increased site and again I understand that talks are in progress with Cambridgeshire County Council who will ultimately install it if the Park and Ride goes ahead.

- (d) Fourthly the proposed point of access from the indicated Park and Ride site into the application site is inadequate but again the applicants are not sure yet how this will finally be achieved until the plans for the Park and Ride access are approved. (at the time of writing approval has not been given).
30. In order to overcome these difficulties the applicants would accept that any planning permission would be subject to the completion of the Park and Ride site and that unresolved issues could be dealt with by conditions.

Highway Safety

31. I note the comments of the Local Highways Authority requiring the existing access to be closed off. This is not possible as it serves other users that are not within the control of the applicant. However, I consider that the reduction in the use of this access is sufficient to improve the amenity relationship with existing properties and improve highway safety such that this weighs in favour of the proposal. Moreover a condition of any consent can preclude the use of the existing access by HGV vehicles accessing the goods yard.

Type of storage

32. I do not consider it necessary to restrict the type of storage but I think it reasonable to restrict the height of storage. This will have to be negotiated with the applicants but I consider that 4m would be necessary to prevent the site from having a damaging visual impact on the surroundings.

Prior negotiations

33. I note the concerns from a local resident in relation to pre-determination.
34. The County Council has stressed to the applicant through its negotiations that any proposed use of the application site as an extension to the goods yard would be subject to planning permission being granted.
35. Planning officers at SCDC have given no indication that planning permission will be granted but have entered into pre application discussions in order to assist the process and not to assist the developer in gaining a consent in any way.

Neighbour amenity

36. As stated above the impact on neighbour amenity at the point of access will be improved with the reduction in large vehicles accessing the site from here. With regards to noise I propose to restrict this in line with the recommendations of the Chief Environmental Health Officer. With regard to the impact on Southwell, this property is on the other side of Station Road, some 45m approximately to the south of the proposed extended goods yard. It will be opposite the balancing pond and I do not consider at this distance that amenity will be materially affected.

Recommendation

37. That the Committee be minded to approve the application subject to the resolution of storage height restrictions and referral to the Secretary of State as a Departure from the Development Plan. If the application is not called in for her determination, it is recommended that the application be approved subject to conditions to ensure that no development commences until the Park and Ride is in place, prior submission of

details of the access into the site, measures for physically preventing HGV vehicles from accessing the goods yard from the existing access, a scheme for pollution control, restrictions on the use of power operated machinery, details of any power driven plant or machinery, landscaping and implementation and details of the balancing pond to be submitted.

Reasons for approval

1. The development is not considered to accord with the Development Plan but the following material considerations are felt to outweigh the Policy objections in this case:
 - Landscaping, including improved relationship with future Guided Bus station.
 - Improved highway safety.
 - Improved neighbour amenity.
 - Change in character as a result of proposed Park and Ride, Guided Bus and Northstowe.
 - Expansion of an existing local firm.

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
 - Drainage and flood risk
 - Type of storage
 - Impact on rural character
 - Neighbour amenity

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/1630/06/F and S/0643/06/F

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