

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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**REPORT TO:** Planning Committee

7<sup>th</sup> May 2008

**AUTHOR/S:** Executive Director / Corporate Manager - Planning and Sustainable Communities

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### **S/0376/08/F – WESTON COLVILLE**

**Erection of Country House, 2 Staff Dwellings, Barn Together with Parkland, Associated Site Works and Excavation of Lake and Pond at Mines Farm, Weston Green for H D'Abo**

**Recommendation: Refusal**

**Date for Determination: 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2008 (Major Application)**

#### **Notes:**

**This Application has been reported to the Planning Committee for determination because the application is a Departure from the Development Plan for which letters of support have been received.**

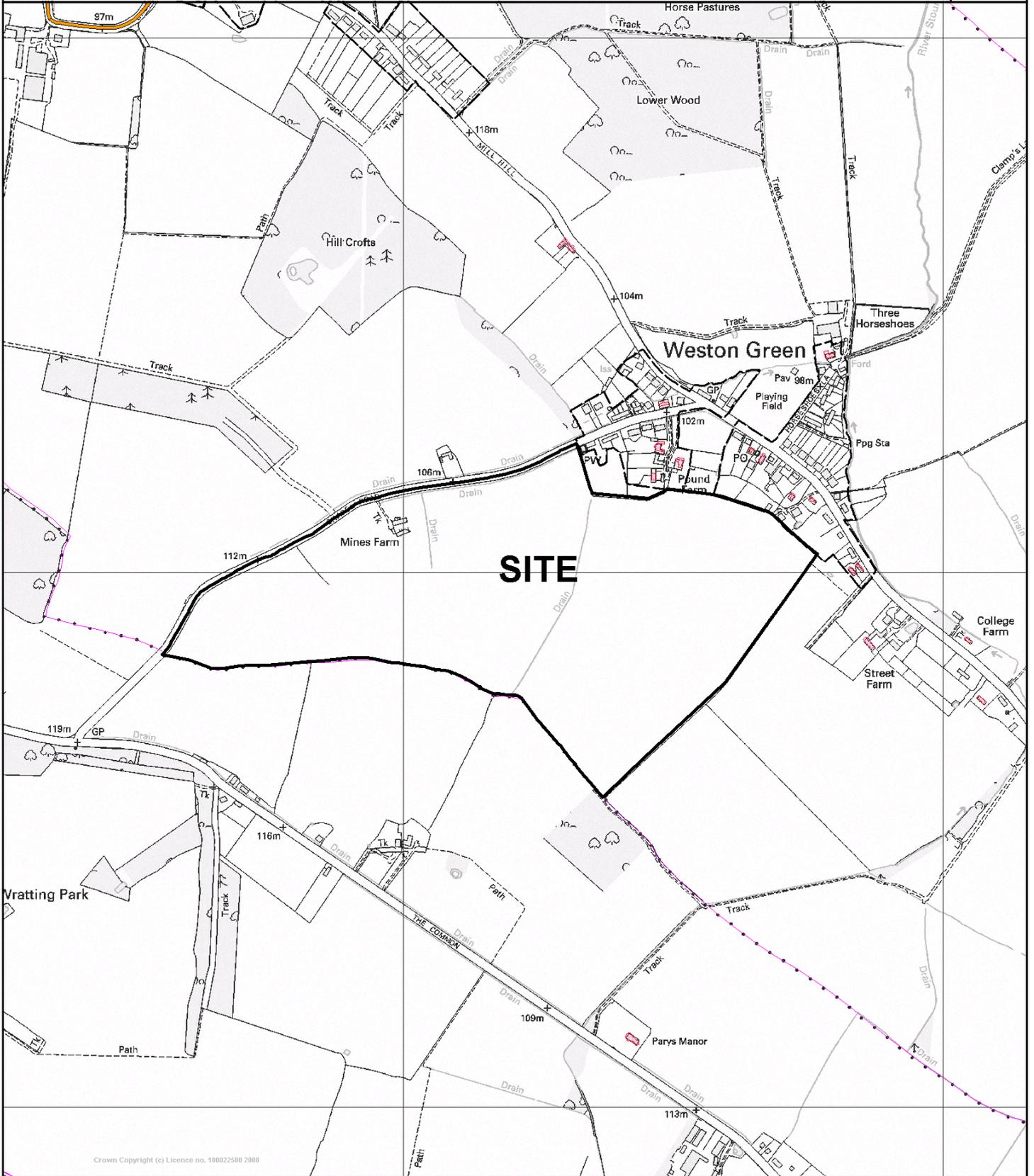
**Members of Committee will visit the site on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2008.**

#### **Departure Application**

##### **Site and Proposal**

1. The application site, an area of approximately 39 hectares, is located immediately to the south-west of Weston Green. It is situated within gently rolling countryside typified by blocks of woodland, hedgerows and large, irregular shaped fields. The site is made up of two arable fields separated by a deep drain, hedgerow and footpath, the western field triangular in shape and tapering towards the west, with Chapel Road defining the long northern boundary of the field. The eastern field is more rectangular, its northern boundary forming part of the framework of Weston Green.
2. Mines Farm comprises a group of derelict agricultural buildings (dating from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century) within the western field, set 50 metres back from Chapel Road with an intervening overgrown concrete hardstanding. They consist of a two storey weather-boarded and brick structure and a single storey structure beyond repair. The field rises up from the road to a plateau about half way across the field. The roadside boundary is unfenced but there is a good hedgerow along the south boundary of this field. Within the eastern field, ground levels again are lowest at the northern end, closest to the village.
3. The full application, submitted on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2008, proposes the erection of a country house, two staff dwellings and a barn, all within a parkland setting comprising new woodland, meadows, a lake and pond.
4. The proposed country house would be located in the western field and on the crest of the rise, approximately 150 metres to the south-west of the derelict farm buildings and around 220 metres back from the road. It would be a contemporary three storey, eight bedroom dwelling comprising kitchen/lounge/family areas on the ground floor,

S--0376-08-F Weston Colville



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three bedrooms/bathrooms at first floor level, and five bedrooms/bathrooms on the second floor. There would also be a basement containing car parking, a staff flat, swimming pool and gym. To the south-east of the house, there would be a walled garden surrounded by a 5 metre high concrete wall with circular openings cut into it to provide views through to the surrounding landscape. The walled garden would accommodate a kitchen garden and greenhouse, formal orchard, scented garden and pleasure garden. Immediately to the north and west of the house would be grass mounding whilst the main private garden area would be to the south. The house would be an oak timber framed building with exposed timbers and hempcrete infill. Metal standing seam with hidden gutter detail would be used for the roof. The house would be 12.8 metres high above the grass mounding. To the rear, the land would be cut away to expose the basement areas, giving the house a total height of 15.8 metres above the reduced ground level.

5. The proposed staff cottages would each comprise four bedrooms and would be constructed on the site of the existing derelict farm buildings. They would be predominantly single storey (4.2 metres high) white concrete buildings arranged around a central courtyard. Two elements of the building near to the main access would have first floor accommodation and would be 6.5 metres high. The design and access statement explains that the cottages would be constructed in environmentally friendly white GGBS concrete with no gutters or downpipes. Instead, the surface water would stream down the roof and walls streaking the surface and, over time, staining it as a controlled pattern of weathering like an old ruin.
6. The proposal also seeks to erect a barn, to be used for housing the wood chip boiler, to provide drying space for coppiced timber and for agricultural equipment storage, near to the south-western corner of the site, approximately 80 metres back from the road. The barn would be a timber clad building measuring 30.7 metres long x 9.5 metres wide and standing 8.5 metres high.
7. The landscaping proposals include the creation of a lake to the south of the staff cottages and a pond in the eastern field. Willow energy woodland, on a 4 year short rotation coppice, would be planted alongside the main road, on the north-east side of the lake, and in the eastern field. Standard woodland (oak, ash and pine), on a 7 year mid-rotation coppice, would be introduced alongside the main road, the southern boundary of the western field and the eastern boundary of the eastern field. Sweet chestnut woodland, on a 14 year mid-rotation coppice, is proposed south of the willow areas and along the southern boundary of the eastern field. Finally, alder carr woodland would straddle the boundary between the two fields surrounding the pond outflow.
8. Access to the house and staff cottages would be via the existing access point onto Chapel Road. The driveway would be 6 metres wide and would pass the staff accommodation before turning east along the lake, and then turning back on itself to approach the house from the west with the walled gardens to one side and the meadow to the other. A secondary route from the main house would run westwards and exit at the western point of the site onto Chapel Road. This road would be used to transport coppiced willow to and from the storage building as well as an alternative route to the main house.
9. The application has been accompanied by a Design and Access Statement; an Archaeological Desk Based Assessment and Specification of Archaeological Works; and a Flood Risk Assessment. Key points in the Design and Access Statement, including the supporting case for the proposal, are set out in the following section.

## **Design and Access Statement**

10. The design and access statement explains that the site forms part of the West Wrating Park Estate, comprising 2500 acres of arable, woodland, pasture and meadow, around Weston Colville and West Wrating. A Manor House (named Moynes) stood to the east of the site of the derelict farm buildings for around 700 years. It is believed to have been demolished in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century and to have been a moated building.
11. The statement goes on to explain that, when PPS7 came into effect, the applicant initiated an architectural competition in late 2006 for a new country house at Mines Farm. The competition was organised by the Professor Echenique, the Head of the Department of Architecture at Cambridge University, who invited a shortlist of leading young architects to participate. It was judged by the Professor along with Mr Thompson (Chair of RIBA East), Mr Brown (Landscape Architect) and the applicant, Mr d'Abo. 6a were selected as the winners, with the jury concluding:

“In summary, the whole proposal is beautifully designed and well-placed in the landscape. The prominent presence of the building, with its reminders of historical connections to English country houses, is well achieved. The proposed construction and its response to the environmental imperative of our times are very well judged. The panel thinks that this building will contribute in a distinguished way to 21<sup>st</sup> century building in the countryside.”
12. In late 2007, a design review was set up with Inspire East, who commented as follows:

“In our view, the point about the tradition is that it has to accommodate change in architectural approach but that the essential relationship of building and landscape is preserved. In our view, it is and we are happy to support this scheme.”
13. It is argued that the proposal would provide a new country house and ancillary buildings of the highest architectural quality; a contemporary interpretation of 18<sup>th</sup> century informal gardens and parks set within a new sustainable landscape setting. It would provide renewable energy for the new house in the form of coppice woodlands, significant new ecological habitats, sustainable water management and an enhancement of the beauty of the rural landscape. The proposal is considered to offer a new chapter in the long story of the English Country House where sustainability, low energy design and biodiversity form an integral part of a contemporary picturesque landscape. If the country house of the past was central to the economic and political management of the region, the country house of the future could make a contribution to the ecological management of rural landscapes – from the production of biomass fuel to re-introducing biodiversity on former sites of intensive arable farming.

## **Architecture**

14. The architecture of the house itself is a re-interpretation of traditional country house design (eg – Little Moreton Hall in Cheshire and Paycocke House in Essex). The form of the house has been designed to be ambiguous. From some angles, it offers a familiar domestic form of gable and pitched roof, but from other angles, the traditional form has been adjusted and skewed to present a more abstract figure. The house would comprise an exposed oak timber frame, with horizontal, vertical and diagonal members, infilled with lime-based hempcrete. The external appearance of the house would be of soft, low contrasting tones of silvering oak and buff colour infill, a more

subtle appearance than the traditional black and white. From a distance the house will appear solid but, as one approaches, the pattern and texture will emerge. The fenestration pattern is an interpretation of the country house picture gallery wall, with the windows positioned apparently casually across the façade but, internally, positioned precisely to frame landscape views. On the north façade, the windows are fitted flush with the external wall whilst south facing windows are set back to the internal line of the reveal to act as a solar shade. The principles of sustainable construction are applied to the selection of materials for the building structure, using locally sourced materials where possible.

## **Landscape**

15. The landscape strategy aims to achieve a functional relationship between the new buildings, the immediate site and the wider landscape. The local character of arable fields with intervening small copses and settlements is reinforced by the proposed arrangement of new coppice woodlands flanking the house and gardens. The house itself would take advantage of an elevated position but will be screened by modulated landform and woodland to reduce its visual impact upon the landscape. The coppice willow fields will be fringed by permanent woodland to ensure there is no loss of screening during coppicing operations. Much of the site will be planted as new coppice woodland for biomass, biodiversity and screening purposes – 4 coupes of willow plantation, with the cuttings chipped for use in the woodchip boiler and stored in a drying barn. The perimeter of the site and fringes of willow coupes will be planted as mid-rotation coppice, consisting of hazel and sweet chestnut, for biomass and to provide fencing posts. Oak, ash and scots pine will be planted to form a woodland canopy and, in the wet area downstream from the pond, alders will be planted and coppiced as carr woodland. These taller woodland areas will screen and shelter the new development and reduce the visual impact of the short rotation coppice areas. The woodland will be intersected by meadow pastures, mown seasonally to encourage wildflowers. The lower pastures may be used for grazing. The lake fringes will be sown with wet meadow species with the grassland becoming more formal towards the house. Existing landscape features – a large tree, hedgerows and a boundary ditch would be retained. The landscaping would be phased so that the house is set within a landscape that is already becoming established.
16. The landscape treatment would enhance the biodiversity of the site. Coppiced woodland, water, wetland and meadow will replace the intensively farmed arable land. The woodland will provide shelter and nesting opportunities for small animals and birds and habitat for invertebrates. The ditches, reedbeds and lakes will provide new wetland habitat for fish, birds and invertebrates. The fields will be managed as meadows, with native wildflowers and grasses providing habitat for invertebrates and therefore encouraging birds and butterflies.
17. The two public footpaths that run through the site will be retained and improved with the addition of stiles and provision of seats at a point from where a vista of the new house, lake and landscape can be obtained.

## **Environmental Strategy**

18. The development seeks to minimise carbon emissions by reducing the demand for energy (by focussing on passive aspects of building design including orientation, façade performance and insulation), and by incorporating low or zero carbon technologies. The house has been orientated on an east-west axis so that the longer facades face north or south. The hempcrete construction achieves a high level of

thermal insulation and thermal inertia. The south façade has been designed to admit solar gain through the windows in the winter but to exclude it in the summer.

19. Hot water will be generated by a boiler fuelled using short rotation energy crops harvested from the surrounding estate. A crop chipping and drying facility will be located in a separate compound, with the process feeding a woodchip boiler, which will generate hot water that will be pumped to the buildings. Hot water for washing will mainly be heated from solar panels on the roof of the proposed barn. Electrical energy for artificial lighting in the house will be offset by the use of photovoltaic solar panels, to be positioned on the glass house building. The new house and staff accommodation block will be provided with a mechanical whole house heat recovery ventilation system. Drinking water will be from a borehole located on the site. Rainwater will be collected from the roofs of the new dwelling and staff accommodation and stored in underground tanks, to be used for flushing toilets and irrigation.
20. It is argued that the substantial increase in woodland, combined with land drains and new lakes, would make significant improvement to the discharge of rainwater onto Chapel Road and into Weston Green. The Flood Risk Assessment states that current discharges from the site to the local drainage systems will be controlled, such that there will not be an increase in the flood risk either at the site or downstream of it. Interception of rainwater in the wooded areas, the use of runoff for irrigation and the storage effect of the lake will combine to reduce the runoff from the site and to reduce the risk of flooding in the Chapel Road area.

### **Planning History**

21. **S/1472/02/F** – An application for the erection of a country house, staff cottage, stables, together with parkland, landscaping and excavation of lakes was refused in May 2003. The proposal was not considered to demonstrate exceptional quality in the following ways:
  - a) The site lies in rolling countryside with fields, hedges and blocks of woodland that produce an attractive and rural landscape with no intrinsic need for improvement. The proposed country house, due to its proximity to and elevated position above the road, would be visually prominent and, with the associated development of formal gardens, swimming pool and tennis court, would be detrimental to the open and rural character of the landscape and would not therefore accord with the policy guidance for new country houses;
  - b) The reconstruction of former agricultural buildings and the proposed additional dwelling would further erode the open and rural character of the site;
  - c) The proposed house and gardens is not considered to be truly exceptional in terms of the quality and design of its architecture and its landscape design to justify an exception to the normal countryside policies and would not enhance its immediate and wider setting.

The application was subsequently dismissed at appeal. The Inspector commented that, whilst the design reflected the popular image of the English country house, he could find little in the design to suggest that the building would be truly outstanding. In addition, the scheme was considered to contain nothing so original or distinctive as to advance the country house tradition, in terms of the design of the house itself and the landscaping around the dwelling. The proposed landscape treatment (mixed deciduous woodland along Chapel Road, pockets of woodland close to the south-

eastern boundary of the site and along the line of an existing hedgerow, and parkland) was considered to reflect much that is typical of traditional parkland design, but to offer little linkage with the landscape of the surrounding area. The landscaping would provide the house with an attractive domestic setting but would not make a positive contribution to the countryside setting of the development. The Inspector concluded by stating:

“A house of the size and in the position proposed would, in my opinion, draw much from its rural setting but contribute little to it.”

22. **S/0805/83/F** – Planning permission was refused for the extension and conversion of buildings at Mines Farm to a house on the grounds that a house in the countryside was contrary to policy and the buildings were not of sufficient quality to warrant an exception to these policies. An appeal was dismissed.
23. **S/0352/88/F** – Planning permission was refused for conversion of buildings at Mines Farm to a house on the grounds that a house in the countryside was contrary to policy, that the buildings were not of sufficient quality to warrant an exception to those policies and the development substantially represented reconstruction.
24. **S/0373/89/F** – Planning permission was refused for the conversion of the buildings to a house and equestrian centre, on essentially the same grounds with an added reason that access visibility was inadequate.

### **Planning Policy**

25. **Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas** states:

“Isolated new houses in the countryside will require special justification for planning permission to be granted.....Very occasionally the exceptional quality and innovative nature of the design of the proposed, isolated new house may provide this special justification for granting planning permission. Such a design should be truly outstanding and ground-breaking, for example, in its use of materials, methods of construction or its contribution to protecting and enhancing the environment, so helping to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas. The value of such a building will be found in its reflection of the highest standards in contemporary architecture, the significant enhancement of its immediate setting and its sensitivity to the defining characteristics of the local area.”
26. **Policy P1/3** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 stresses the need for a high standard of design and a sense of place which corresponds to the local character of the built environment.
27. **Policy DP/1** of the Local Development Framework Development Control Policies 2007 states that development will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that it is consistent with the principles of sustainable development, including, where practicable: use of sustainable building methods and locally sourced materials; minimisation of use of energy and resources; maximisation of use of renewable energy sources; use of water conservation measures and sustainable urban drainage systems; conservation/enhancement of biodiversity of wildlife and natural environment and local landscape character.
28. **Policy DP/2** requires all new development to be of high quality design and to: preserve or enhance the character of the local area; conserve or enhance important environmental assets; include variety and interest within a coherent design; and

include high quality landscaping compatible with the scale and character of the development and its surroundings.

29. **Policy DP/3** states that permission will not be granted for proposals that would have an unacceptable adverse impact on (amongst other issues): residential amenity; from traffic generated; on village character; on the countryside and landscape character; from undue environmental disturbance; on ecological, wildlife and archaeological interests; and on flooding and flood risk.
30. **Policy DP/7** states that outside village frameworks, only development for agriculture and other uses that need to be located in the countryside will be permitted.
31. **Policy HG/9** states that development of a new permanent dwelling for agricultural purposes will only be permitted if it is demonstrated that:
  - a) There is a clear, existing functional need relating to a full time worker or one who is primarily employed in agriculture;
  - b) It relates to a well-established agricultural unit which has been established for at least three years, has been profitable for at least one of them, is currently financially sound, and has a clear prospect of remaining so;
  - c) There are no suitable existing buildings available in the area;
  - d) The conversion of appropriate nearby buildings would not provide suitable accommodation;
  - e) No existing dwelling serving the unit has recently become separated from it.
32. **Policy NE/1** requires development to demonstrate that it would achieve a high degree of measures to increase the energy efficiency of new and converted buildings, and encourages developers to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 10% compared to the minimum requirement.
33. **Policy NE/4** states that development will only be permitted where it respects and retains or enhances the local character and distinctiveness of the Landscape Character Area in which it is located. The site lies within the South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands which is characterised by undulating high land and large arable fields with woodland and hedgerows.
34. **Policy NE/11** states that, in relation to flood risk, applications will be judged against national policy.
35. **Policy NE/12** requires development to incorporate all practicable water conservation measures.

### **Consultations**

36. **Weston Colville Parish Council Chairman** has made the following interim comments:

“We have a Parish Council meeting on April 24<sup>th</sup> to discuss the above and we will write to you immediately after this meeting to give you our recommendation. In the meantime I wish to record that a number of residents and the Parish Council are very concerned about flooding in Chapel Road. It appears this is largely caused by run off

of water from the proposed site in times of heavy rain exacerbated by the lack of maintenance of ditches and culverts. Therefore if planning permission is granted for this development then we request it should be subject to the following condition:

- A continuous drainage ditch on the whole of the frontage to Chapel Road should be reinstated [in places to the south west of the site this has been filled in]. Where the ditch needs to be bridged [for access points or because of the land profile] then a pipe with a minimum diameter of 600mm must be provided. The ditch and culverts to be maintained on an annual basis each autumn.”

37. **West Wrattling Parish Council** recommends approval. It comments: “However it contravenes Development Control Policies within the DPD for South Cambs sections 7 - natural environment, objective NE/b and objective NE/j.

Also Policy NE/4 Landscape character areas which advises development only where it respects and retains or enhances the local character and distinctiveness etc“.

38. **The Conservation Manager** states:

“ I was asked to comment on this proposal in June 2007 at a pre-app stage following the architectural competition. At that time my comments were as follows:

*“One of my main concerns over the previous application was that as a piece of pastiche architecture it only added to the number of country houses without adding to the story of their evolution or development. A carefully considered piece of contemporary architecture, such as that now proposed, is a different matter and in that respect Mr d’Abo is to be congratulated on organising a proper architectural competition to seek a quality contemporary proposal.*

*However, while the resulting winner undoubtedly is of merit, I have some very real concerns as to the impact it will have on its setting. Country Houses are traditional sited within large, landscaped estates, such that the house itself is not visible from beyond the boundaries of the landscaped park. In this proposal the house will be visible, indeed the assessors report sees this as a positive virtue of the scheme but I am not so sure. While in many respect the site is large, in country house terms it is not, and is in quite close proximity to adjacent settlements. The house, along with the new staff accommodation located on the site of the former farm buildings, will add a very significant amount of built form into what is currently an open rural landscape. In his conclusion on the previous appeal the inspector noted; ‘A house of the size and in the position proposed would, in my opinion, draw much from its rural setting but contribute little to it.’ I think the same criticism could be levelled at this current proposal. Had the site been larger, such that the collective impact of the new buildings would be less visible from the road, then I might have been more supportive of this bold architectural proposal, but on balance I believe this erosion of the open countryside outweigh the merits of the design.”*

Having now had the opportunity to study the proposal in more detail, including reading the background to the proposal as set out in the Design and Access statement and re-visit the site, I remain concerned that while this may be an interesting piece of contemporary architecture, the site is relatively restricted and the house will not sit back into the landscape, but will be a significant feature in it. The house is sited almost at the highest point of the site and in spite of the new planting it will be a conspicuous feature in the landscape.

In addition to this concern I have 3 other concerns over the proposal:

- a) Planting and adjustments to ground levels. I am aware that the landscape design includes extensive tree planting, including along the boundary to the public highway which will provide a degree of screening of the new house (and with some permanent planting for screening alongside coppice planting that is intended to provide fuel for the woodchip boiler. The Design and Access statement includes a history of the site which lays some significance against the site having previously contained a manor house (Moynes Manor). The presumed site of this manor has been located from an old map and crop marks (indicating the site of a possible moat). This location would appear to be included within the area of new woodland and the roots of the trees will damage any remaining archaeology. The area would also appear to be within/adjacent to new roadside mounding from excavated material, which may also cause further damage to the archaeology and possibly result in the complete loss any remains of the moat. I would have thought that this site should be left open within the planned park and, subject to the views of the County Archaeologist, there may be scope to excavating and reinstating the moat. In English country house architecture there are many precedents for the site or shell of the original house becoming part of the landscaped setting for the new house.
- b) Main House. The house is to include an exposed timber frame structure, with a 'hempcrete' infill. The timber frame sections are relatively modest (125 x 50mm) and, as indicated on the section contained on page 82 of the Design and Access Report, are effectively to be buried in the 'hempcrete'. The way that these timbers are encapsulated in the 'hempcrete' will make the timbers very vulnerable to rot. The 'hempcrete' is likely to shrink back from the timber as it cures, creating a fine gap between the timber and the 'hempcrete' where water will migrate by capillary action, and this trapped water will result in wet rot attack on the timber. I also note that when Inspire East reviewed the design they expressed concern over the lack of an eaves overhang. I would echo this concern, which is in marked contrast to the tradition for timber frame buildings in England (not just Cambridgeshire) – as typified in the photographs of Little Morton Hall included in the Design and Access Statement. I would also observe that the contemporary re-interpretation of a traditional timber-frame would appear to owe more to the square frame and diagonal traditions of Cheshire rather than the vertical, close studded traditions of Cambridgeshire (as seen in buildings such as Queens' College Cambridge, or The Guildhall, Whittlesford).
- c) Staff Accommodation. The Design and Access statement states that: *“These simple traditional forms would be constructed in environmentally friendly white GGBS concrete. A relatively new construction material these monolithic structures would be a pure distillation of the farm building structures; that on first sight would appear traditional but on closer inspection their modernity would be revealed through material and detailing. There will be no gutters or downpipes for rainwater run-off. Instead the surface water will stream down the roof and walls streaking the surface and overtime staining it as a controlled pattern of weathering like an old ruin”.*

I am not familiar with GGBS concrete and, at the very least, would like to have the opportunity to view a structure built in this material. I have very real concerns over the medium to long term appearance of these buildings, which are to be left to weather without the benefit of gutters or, apparently, drip moulds. The result will not appear as some romantic stone ruin but more like a wartime bunker, or a

brutalist piece of 1970s architecture.....The white GGBS concrete roofs will also not appear 'traditional' as suggested in the description.

- d) Maintenance Shed. The proposal includes a sizable maintenance shed which is to be located within woodland. However, this is again sited in a very prominent location and given its height of approx 8.5m to the ridge it will be very visible from the road. I cannot see the logic behind siting the shed in this location and believe a more sensitive location could be found on the lower part of the site.
- e) Lake. The scheme includes a lake, but this is to be sited halfway up a hillside. Lakes are normally sited in valley bottoms and in my opinion the proposed lake will look rather incongruous and artificial.

### **Conclusion:**

As I noted in my comments last year, Mr d'Abo is to be congratulated on undertaking an architectural competition to find an appropriate contemporary design for a country house in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However I believe the current design has a number of shortcomings including ones that will result in the scheme not standing the test of time and I doubt that it will 'grow old gracefully'. The scheme also fails to adequately acknowledge the history of the site and in particular the location of the former Moyne's Hall. Therefore, if the proposal is found acceptable in planning policy terms, I believe further refinements are required before the scheme can be granted planning permission."

- 39. The comments of **The Landscape Design Officer** will be reported verbally at the meeting.
- 40. The comments of **The Ecology Officer** will be reported verbally at the meeting
- 41. **The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment** makes no comment, stating that it does not have the resources to be able to consider the application.
- 42. **The Environment Agency** objects to the application as it does not satisfactorily demonstrate that the development will neither cause nor exacerbate flooding to existing property. In addition, a scheme for long term maintenance of the surface water drainage system must be agreed prior to commencement of development.
- 43. **The Definitive Map Officer** raises no objections, but points out that public footpaths Nos. 11 and 12 run through the site. Points of law relating to the footpaths should be drawn to the applicant's attention through informatives.
- 44. **The Ramblers Association** states that the application includes no detail as to how the two public footpaths Weston Colville 11 and 12 are to be treated. In the short term, there is concern about the disruption to the individual paths. Will they need to be diverted during construction, how long will any disruption last, how will walkers be kept informed of changes, and how will reasonable walking surfaces be maintained during construction? In the longer term, the Ramblers Association would be likely to object to any proposal for permanent diversion of either footpath, as the current routes are simple and direct.
- 45. **The County Archaeologist** commented before the application was formally registered and stated that the site should be subject to an archaeological evaluation, to be carried out prior to the granting of planning permission. The evaluation results should allow for the fuller consideration of the presence/absence, nature, extent, quality and survival of archaeological remains within the development area. An

informed judgement can then be made as to whether any planning consent will need to include provisions for the recording and, more importantly, the preservation of important archaeological remains in situ. The desktop assessment and project specification have been forwarded to the County Archaeologist and any further comments will be reported verbally at the Committee meeting.

## **Representations**

### ***Letters of Objection***

46. Letters of objection have been received from No. 59 and East View in Common Road, Weston Colville; and from Nos. 14, 29, 31, 37, 47 and 49 The Common, West Wrating. The main points raised are:
- a) No in principle objections to a country house in this general location (29, 47 The Common, East View);
  - b) The southern boundary hedge is thin and open, reaching 5-7 feet in height with slow growing trees set at intervals which are between 20 and 30 feet in height. This does not provide the type or scale of screening suggested in the photomontages presented with the application;
  - c) The proposed dwelling, due to its height, would be extremely prominent in the rural landscape, including from public footpaths, and visible over a considerable distance;
  - d) The development would destroy this large area of attractive landscape;
  - e) The barn would be extremely conspicuous in the open landscape due to its height (8.5 metres) and the fact it would be positioned on the highest part of the site. It should be relocated nearer to Chapel Road;
  - f) Normally, the concept of a country house within a parkland estate is to centre the property within the parkland landscape and not within a few metres of one edge;
  - g) Country houses are normally discreet and the proposed dwelling does not achieve this;
  - h) The building should be considerably lower, as the dwelling height, together with the mounding, total 16 metres is extreme;
  - i) The house has no overall concept guiding its design and hence has no integrity in appearance. There is a mish-mash of unrelated window sizes and positions, the roof has a lack of consistency in the pitch employed, and the wall structure provides a fussy appearance;
  - j) The design is over engineered resulting in the use of more oak than would be needed with a more refined layout, which would relate the scale of the panels better to the size of the building;
  - k) The appearance is similar to a warehouse or research and development building rather than a fine domestic residence;
  - l) The access roads would be excessively long. A relocation to the centre of the site would reduce vehicle journey lengths and the visual impact of the development;

- m) The reuse of the Mines Farm buildings for the staff accommodation would be a good use of this piece of land;
- n) How will the large lake affect the water table locally?
- o) Residents of The Common, West Wrattling would be most affected by the development;
- p) The building would disrupt the views from properties within The Common, West Wrattling;
- q) The proposed dwelling is not aesthetically pleasing to the eye and its design is not truly outstanding;
- r) The development does not result in a significant enhancement of its immediate setting;
- s) The use of biomass as a significant contributor towards energy provision is questioned;
- t) The proposed staff dwellings may not be used for that purpose. They would almost certainly not meet the criteria in Annex A of PPS7;
- u) The development would contravene planning policies that seek to protect the character and appearance of the landscape and natural heritage;
- v) The development would be contrary to sustainability objectives;
- w) Why does the proposed barn have such a tall chimney?

### ***Letters of Support***

- 47. 9 The Common, West Wrattling; and Peacehaven & 4 Church End in Weston Colville all support the application. The latter, in particular, points out that the architect presented the proposal at the Parish Council meeting and the majority of those attending the meeting appeared to be in favour of the proposal. The proposed woodland and water features are considered to be a positive benefit.
- 48. Weston House in Chapel Road, Weston Colville, the property sited almost opposite the development, states that the proposed tree planting and meadow format for the land restores the landscape to a more appropriate environment. The addition of water via the proposed lake/ponds can only be of benefit to wildlife and to walkers using the footpath. This is a marked improvement to the current use of the land which reflects an aggressive agricultural system with little habitat for wildlife. The design of the house appears aggressively modern but this is a matter of individual taste. As the house, staff accommodation and barn will be nestling in beautifully planted woodland, the occupier of this property is very much in favour of the development.
- 49. The Architecture Foundation, an independent organisation that is dedicated to communicating the best in contemporary architecture to a wide public, states that the proposal will lead to an exceptional work of architecture that will enhance and enrich its location. The design is thoughtful and creative in its approach to its site, its brief and to issues of sustainability. It is particularly impressive for the way building and landscape

work together, in a contemporary version of a strong tradition in English country house design. This is the sort of proposal that should be supported under PPS7.

50. Mark Girouard, author of *Life in the English Country House*, states that he is impressed by the proposal. Country houses should be distinguished from other domestic buildings in the countryside by having 'importance' in some way and, to achieve this, architects have either produced versions of old country house formulas or contemporary designs that are eccentric in form or have an over-emphasis in detail. This proposal is less assertive and more subtle in its approach. It takes familiar historic themes as a starting point (the gabled roof, the half timbered wall and the 18<sup>th</sup> century concept of combining country house, outbuildings, woodland, water and open space into an integrated whole of generous scale) but develops them in an outstandingly creative way, with a contemporary feeling for abstract form and pattern and a contemporary emphasis on getting the whole property working together to provide biodiversity, an integrated water and energy strategy and minimum carbon imprint. The half-timber construction is very interesting and, when combined with the carefully modelled mass of the house, should produce the architecture of simple form with subtle and delicate surfaces that the architects are aiming for. In general, both the house and setting are designed with a feeling for the Cambridgeshire landscape.
51. Penoyre & Prasad Architects commend the design of the house, stating that it is a sophisticated combination of modern and traditional, and sets new standards in sustainable and zero carbon design. It will be regarded as a good addition to our country's heritage in years to come.
52. Wilkinson Eyre Architects state that the proposals are of high quality and show how a house can be integrated into the landscape and how the principles of sustainable development can permeate every aspect of the proposals. The house demonstrates exceptional ingenuity in combining these aspects into the design but is architecturally sensitive and appropriate. It is just this sort of approach that should be encouraged.

### **Representations by the applicant**

53. In response to comments made by the Conservation Officer, the applicant states that, since his initial observations at the pre-application stage, the woodland layout has been revised to provide more perimeter screening along Chapel Road, leaving only one open section of woodland to the north east of the site. The one view of the house from Chapel Road, framed by woodland on each side, will make a positive contribution to the environment. The mound forming the base of the house has been lowered and the basement now half buried in the ground. The 'openness of today's site is relatively recent and the strategy returns the site to a more gentle land use pattern.
54. In response to the comment that country houses are traditionally sited in large landscaped estates, the applicant argues that the history of the country house is extremely varied, and that the scale of houses and their sites varies a great deal. Mines Farm is modest by country house standards but continues a tradition of engagement between house and surroundings. The proposal is very much concerned with contemporary issues of design, landscape and sustainability, but is connected to many notions central to the long evolution of the country house. The claim that the buildings will not grow old gracefully is refuted.

### **Planning Comments – Key Issues**

55. The key issues to consider in the determination of this application are:

- a) Whether the design of the dwelling is truly exceptional and innovative;
  - b) Impact of the proposal upon the countryside and upon the landscape character of the area;
  - c) Need for staff accommodation;
  - d) Flood risk.
56. The proposed development would be sited outside the defined village framework and within the countryside and therefore represents a departure from policies in the development plan. It is therefore necessary to consider whether the proposal can be justified as an exception to normal restrictive countryside policies, using the criteria set out within paragraph 11 of PPS7 – namely that the design must be of an exceptional quality and innovative nature, and must be truly outstanding and ground breaking. As PPS7 states – the value of the building will be found not only in the use of the highest standards of contemporary architecture but also in the significant enhancement of the immediate setting.
57. As stated within the history section, above, an application for a country house has previously been refused and dismissed at appeal on this site. At that time, the application was considered against PPG7. This has now been superseded by PPS7, which has a reduced emphasis on landscape design and a leaning towards contemporary architecture as opposed to reinterpretations of historic forms. The Conservation Manager has stated that the previous application, for a piece of pastiche architecture, only added to the number of country houses without adding to the story of their evolution or development. He acknowledges that the current application differs from the previous scheme in this respect in that it proposes a carefully considered piece of contemporary architecture, with the design being of some merit.
58. It is generally agreed that the proposal is innovative in nature and offers a carefully thought out contemporary approach to the country house tradition. Whether or not the design of the house itself can be said to be truly outstanding and exceptional, however, is more of a subjective matter and opinions on this issue have diverged markedly. The support for the development amongst responses received from architectural professionals is unanimous. The Architecture Foundation considers the scheme ‘will lead to an exceptional work of architecture that will enhance and enrich its location’ whilst the author of *Life in the English Country House* is of the view that the proposal, in terms of the design of the house and the way the scheme encompasses contemporary issues such as sustainability and biodiversity, develops the country house tradition in an ‘outstandingly creative way’. The competition jury considered the whole proposal to be ‘beautifully designed and well-placed in the landscape’ whilst Inspire East also expressed support for the scheme.
59. Local support has tended to focus more on the environmental and wildlife improvements offered by the scheme, which are generally considered to outweigh any perceived harm caused by the buildings. Opposition to the proposal has been received mainly from residents of The Common, West Wrattling to the south of the development. In some of these cases, no in principle objections have been raised to the erection of a country house on the site, but strong concerns have been expressed about the design of the building which is considered by one resident to lack integrity, to be over engineered and to be similar in appearance to an industrial building rather than a fine residence.

60. A number of concerns about the detail of the development have been raised by the Conservation Manager - the longevity of the design of the house and whether its appearance would stand the test of time; the design of the timber frame being unrepresentative of Cambridgeshire traditions; and the landscaping scheme failing to take account of the historical position of Moyne's Hall. These factors could, however, be addressed through amendments and refinements to the scheme if it was considered that the proposal could be supported in principle.
61. The overwhelming serious concern about the proposal relates to the impact the development would have upon the landscape. The existing landscape between Weston Colville and West Wrattling is attractive rolling countryside with no intrinsic need for improvement. As stated by the Conservation Manager, country houses are traditionally sited in large landscaped estates such that the house is not visible from beyond the boundaries of the landscaped park. When visiting the site, it was apparent that the proposal is on a much more intimate and smaller scale than expected from initially observing the plans. The proposed house would be almost 13 metres high and would occupy an elevated position (almost at the highest point of the land), well above Chapel Road, from which it would only be set back by about 200 metres. Given its scale, elevated position above the road level and proximity to the road, the building would not sit back into the landscape but would be an extremely dominant feature in it and would add a significant amount of built form into what is currently an open rural landscape. In spite of the new planting, the scale of which is modest (the landscape design officer advised on site that the roadside planting would take some 20 years to reach a similar height to nearby trees sited alongside the road), the building would be a conspicuous feature within the landscape. It would be prominent from Chapel Road itself, from dwellings sited on The Common, and from the public footpaths that run near to the site of the proposed house. In the appeal decision relating to the previous application, the Inspector considered that a house of the size and in the position proposed would draw much from its rural setting but contribute little to it, and it is considered that the same criticism applies to the current proposal.
62. The visual impact of the development upon the landscape was referred to by the competition panel, which stated:
- “The proposed design has enormous presence in the landscape and establishes itself as a prominent exemplar of a country house for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is not a scheme which seeks to ‘disappear’ in the landscape. It is confidently assertive through the manner in which it adopts a traditional approach. Whilst this may represent a ‘risk’ in planning terms, we believe the design will gain strong architectural support.”
63. In addition, Inspire East expressed reservations about the siting of the house on the high point of the land and stated that the tree screening and views of the house would need consideration.
64. Although the design of the house is innovative and contemporary and could be argued to be exceptional, the proposal is not considered to result in a significant enhancement of its immediate setting, as stipulated within PPS7. As such, the proposal is not considered to be so exceptional as to justify the scheme contrary to normal settlement policies.
65. Whilst the country house seeks to satisfy the requirements of PPS7, the proposed staff cottages do not fall within this category of development, and need to be considered against the criteria set out within Policies DP/7 and HG/9. The latter permits the erection of dwellings in countryside locations only if they can be justified as essential to serve the needs of an agricultural holding. No justification for these

dwellings, and very little information about their use, has been put forward as part of this application. It is assumed that the cottages would accommodate staff employed at the country house, but there is a staff flat contained within the basement of the country house itself. Given the small scale of the overall site, I would very much doubt there is sufficient need for two full time members of staff to manage the house and its grounds and for these staff to be permanently accommodated on the site rather than being housed in nearby villages. If required in association with the wider running of the West Wrattling Park Estate, again no justification has been put forward on the grounds of agricultural need, and support cannot therefore be given for these properties. Notwithstanding these in principle concerns, the design of the cottages, notably the use of white concrete for the walls and roofs, is considered to be inappropriate and harmful to the character of the landscape.

66. The proposed barn, given its height and proximity to the road, would be very visible until the new woodland around it grows and would add to the visual harm caused by the development as a whole upon the landscape.
67. Finally, the Environment Agency has objected to the proposal on the grounds that the application fails to demonstrate that the development will not cause or exacerbate flooding to existing properties in the area.

### **Recommendation**

68. Refusal, for the following reasons (in summary):
  - a) The proposed country house, due to its height, scale and proximity to and elevated position above the road, would be visually prominent and, together with the associated development of staff cottages and the barn, would be detrimental to the open and rural character of the landscape. The scheme as a whole would not result in a significant enhancement of its immediate setting and the proposal cannot therefore be justified as an exception to Policy DP/7 of the LDF which restricts development outside village frameworks. The proposal would be contrary to Policies DP/2, which requires new development to preserve or enhance the character of the area and DP/3 which states permission will not be granted for proposals that would have an unacceptable adverse impact on the countryside and landscape character;
  - b) In the absence of sufficient justification on the grounds of agricultural need, the proposed staff cottages contravene Policy DP/7 of the LDF which states that, outside village frameworks, only development for agriculture and other uses that need to be located in the countryside will be permitted.
  - c) The application fails to satisfactorily demonstrate that the development will neither cause nor exacerbate flooding to existing property. Consequently, the proposal contravenes Policy NE/11 of the LDF, which requires proposals to adequately consider the issue of flood risk.

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- Planning Policy Statement 7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas;
- South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework (LDF) 2007;
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003;
- Planning application references: S/0376/08/F, S/1472/02/F, S/0373/89/F, S/0352/88/F and S/0805/83/F.

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