

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation
Control Committee

6th October 2004

AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

**S/1453/04/F and S/1452/04/LB - Swavesey
Conversion Of Barns Into Offices and Erection of Offices and Children's Day Nursery,
Mill Farm, Middlewatch for Nationwide Ltd**

Recommendation: Refusal

Departure Application

Site and Proposal

1. The application site is located on the east side of Middlewatch within a countryside gap of some 100 metres between dwellings to the north and south. Opposite is residential development.
2. The site includes two grade II Listed Barns early 18th Century with attached single storey outbuildings. The barns, both three bays, are timber framed and weatherboarded with corrugated iron roofs. They form a group with the Listed Farmhouse (Mill Farm), which is in separate ownership to the south of the site. To the east within the site are a number of large modern agricultural buildings.
3. The planning and listed building applications, registered on 12th July 2004, propose the change of use and refurbishment of the historic barns to B1 offices, including a new mezzanine floor in the Listed barns, the erection of four business units comprising ground floor accommodation of 504 sq metres at the eastern end of the site and, at the widest and southern most part of the site, a 75 place full children's day care nursery in a single storey building of some 403 sq metres footprint. The application quotes a total office floorspace of 1,258 sq metres.
4. A new 5 metre wide carriageway road with 1 metre wide footway is proposed along the north boundary of the site. This will give access to 65 car parking spaces.

Planning History

5. Planning application (S/0787/03/F) for the conversion of barns into offices, rebuilding of a barn for office and erection of a children's day nursery has not been determined.

Planning Policy

6. The site is located in the countryside outside the Swavesey Village Framework.
7. Structure Plan 2003 **Policy P1/2** restricts development in the countryside unless the proposal can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
8. Structure Plan **Policy P2/6** encourages sensitive small-scale employment development in rural areas where it contributes to one or more of several objectives, including enabling farm or rural diversification and the re-use of existing buildings.

9. South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 (Local Plan) **Policy EM10** encourages the change of use and conversion of rural buildings outside village frameworks to employment use subject to a number of criteria.
10. Structure Plan **Policy P7/6** and Local Plan Policies **EN26, EN27 and EN28** require the historic built environment to be protected and enhanced and set out criteria against which applications for the change of use of Listed Buildings and for development within the curtilage of Listed Buildings should be assessed.
11. Local Plan **Policy TP1** promotes more sustainable transport choices by amongst other measures, restricting car parking to maximum levels set out in appendix 7/1.
12. Government's Planning Policy Statement 7 (2004), "Sustainable development in rural areas", supports the re-use of appropriately located and suitably constructed existing buildings in the countryside where this would meet sustainable development objectives. Re-use for economic development is preferred. Para 19 states: "The Government is also supportive of the replacement of suitably located, existing buildings of permanent design and construction in the countryside for economic development purposes. The replacement of buildings should be favoured where this would result in a more acceptable and sustainable development than might be achieved through conversion, for example, where the replacement building would bring about an environmental improvement in terms of the impact of the development on its surroundings and the landscape."

Consultation

13. **Swavesey Parish Council** recommends refusal on parking grounds. It comments:
14. "**Parking.** For the proposed office space and in particular the children's day nursery, insufficient parking spaces have been provided. For the children's day nursery only 3 drop-off spaces are shown, this is less than in the previous application (S/0787/03/F). Parents may be forced to park along Middlewatch when dropping-off and collecting children, which is likely to cause serious problems along Middlewatch. Mill Farm is close to the junction with Whitton Close, close to two bus stops and along the busy main road through Swavesey. There are also less parking spaces in total for all the office space proposed, than for the previous application. The Parish Council is extremely concerned that staff and visitors to the development will end up parking along Middlewatch and not within the development site."
15. **Local Highway Authority** has no objections, but requires an amended layout plan to address recommended conditions including demonstrating that a 4.5 m x 90.0 m visibility splay can be achieved to the south.
16. **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** does not require additional water supplies for fire fighting.
17. **Environment Agency** recommends the imposition of conditions requiring surface water drainage and pollution control schemes to be submitted, agreed and implemented.
18. **Middle Level Commissioners** opposes the application until such time as an appropriate flood risk assessment has been submitted and approved.

19. **Chief Environmental Health Officer** has no objections subject to the imposition of a condition requiring submission, approval and implementation of details of the location and type of any power driven plant or equipment.
20. **Conservation Manager** has no objections in principle to the conversion of the listed barns but the following is suggested:
21. “Barn A – The proposals make good use of the existing openings but the additional openings in this barn and the single storey range need to be rationalised. Where shutters exist they should be retained. The large glazed opening should be recessed to provide a shadow line.
22. Barn B – There is a discrepancy between the survey drawings and the proposals, which implies that the roof and the eaves are to be heightened. Previous discussions were to retain the existing building and insert a mezzanine floor without disturbing the existing timber frame elements; if this is not possible then this building should be single storey. The method of lighting this space needs to be addressed, the number of rooflights is not acceptable, it is important that this prominent elevation retains its agricultural appearance.
23. The openings on the front elevation do not respect the existing openings and would result in a significant loss of historic fabric, I suggest that this part of the scheme is looked at in detail to find a more acceptable approach.
24. The single storey meeting room should have less glazing and more weatherboarding for the same reasons.
25. Barn C – The addition of a pitched roof will be an enhancement and the use of the existing openings appears to be acceptable but again the glazing of the large opening needs to be set back and existing timber shutters retained.”
26. In respect of the new build, the **Conservation Manager** objects. The scheme would neither preserve nor enhance the appearance or setting of the Listed Buildings. Detailed comments are:
27. “Access – There is concern over the close proximity of the proposed access to the listed buildings and the effect this will have on their setting and their shallow footings. The access should be narrower and sited further to the north. Of particular concern are the hard landscaping and the visibility splay and the impact on the setting of the Listed Buildings.
28. Layout – The scale of new build and the amount of parking is overdevelopment of the site and bears no relationship to the existing barn complex. The proposal reads as a completely separate development with a large area of car parking between the two, it should be re-designed as an extension to the farmyard perhaps with the parking to the rear of the site.
29. Design – The design needs to be looked at in detail, in particular the scale and massing and the span of the buildings. The scale should emulate the existing barns in order to avoid the large spans and over complicated roof forms, which are out of character with the listed buildings. The fenestration detailing is poor and needs to be simplified.”
30. **Ecology Officer** requires, by condition, an ecological assessment to be undertaken to ensure any species of biodiversity interest are protected and enhanced. There is

evidence of a barn owl and possibly evidence of great crested newts and bats being on site.

31. No comments have been received from the **Wildlife Trust, Anglian Water** or the **Early Years Directorate, OFSTED**.

Representations

32. One resident of 94 Middlewatch objects to the application on the following grounds:
- a) Increase volume of commuter traffic; Middlewatch cannot cope;
 - b) The access will be close to two bus stops and frequently parked cars; it would be better sited south of Mill Farm House opposite Whitton Close junction with a mini roundabout;
 - c) Screening of the barns, roadway and car parking is necessary;
 - d) Children's day nursery will generate up to 150 vehicle movements per day on top of staff and delivery vehicles; cars will park on Middlewatch, compounding bad traffic problems; and there is insufficient parking space on site for this use.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

33. Whilst planning policies encourage the re-use of rural buildings and, subject to a number of criteria, of historic buildings, construction of new buildings in the countryside are severely restricted by reference to Structure Plan Policy P1/2.
34. Hence the application is a Departure from the Development Plan given that the proposed uses of the new buildings are not required for agriculture or countryside activities.
35. However, Officers have, in informal discussions with the applicant, encouraged the principle of replacing the modern agricultural buildings with single storey "courtyard" office buildings and the erection of a single storey nursery building on the grounds of enhancement of the setting of Mill Farm, apart from other Listed Buildings, and evidence dated 20th October 2003 submitted under application ref. S/0787/03/F of need for a children's day nursery in Swavesey.
36. Notwithstanding that support in principle, the applications do not satisfactorily address:
- a) Details of design and elevational treatment of the Listed Barns (which might also reduce floorspace);
 - b) Access in relation to the public highway, the Listed Barns and inadequate space for landscaping on the north boundary; or
 - c) The scale, layout and design of new build.
37. I consider that the first is capable of resolution.
38. The second appears to be only capable of resolution so far as achieving a safe access to Middlewatch is concerned, subject to submission of an accurate dimension drawing. The width and position of that access road in relation to the setting of the Listed Barns and need for landscaping is dictated by the limitations of the site and the scale of development proposed. There is no alternative position of this access within the extent of the application site.

39. The scale of the new build and parking at the rear of the site is of concern not only in relation to the setting of the Listed Buildings but also in assimilating the development within the countryside. Whilst it is intended to plant native hedges to the perimeter boundaries and to provide a 4.5 m wide native planting belt along the east boundary, there is very little open space or planting provided within the site. Moreover new buildings will be very close to the north and south site boundaries.
40. Maximum car parking of 53 spaces is required for 1,258 sq metres of office floorspace. It is not clear, however, what provision is required for the nursery, given the absence of information on staff numbers. However, given the proposed capacity of the nursery I consider that the proposed provision of 3 wide drop-off spaces is inadequate. Parents are likely to park on Middlewatch, although the Local Highway Authority has not objected on this ground.

Recommendation

41. That the applications be refused for the following reasons
 1. The scale and position of the proposed new build, together with the necessary car parking and position and width of the parking and access road, would represent an overdevelopment of the site which would adversely affect the setting of Listed Buildings and create a harsh built edge with scope for little landscaping on the boundaries to the countryside; consequently the proposal would be contrary to Policies P7/6 of the Structure Plan 2003 and EN28 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.
 2. Alterations proposed to the Listed barns including the extent of glazing and the loss of timber frame elements and historic fabric in Building B would adversely affect the character and appearance of these buildings, consequently the proposal would be contrary to Policies P7/6 of the Structure Plan 2003 and EN26 and EN27 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.

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

Structure Plan 2003
South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
Planning Applications, ref S/1453/04/F and S/0787/03/F

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