

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation
Control Committee

3rd November 2004

AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/1716/04/F - Comberton

Conversion and Extension of Barn to Form Dwelling following Demolition of Existing Dwelling; West field Farm, Royston Lane for Mr and Mrs J Fenttiman

Recommendation: Approval

Departure Application

Site and Proposal

1. The site lies in the Green Belt and countryside to the south of Comberton, off Royston Lane. The Lord's Bridge Radio Telescope is located a short distance to the south. The farm complex comprising house, barns and outbuildings, is set back some 200 metres from the road. The agent states that the site has not been operational as a County farm for about two years. The new owners do not intend to carry out farming from the site.
2. This full planning application, received 16th August 2004, has been the subject of prior discussion with officers. The proposal is to demolish the existing farmhouse and some outbuildings, and to convert and extend the main barn to provide a replacement dwelling. The design of the conversion is contemporary, using timber cladding and glass screening, with grey zinc roofing. The grounds are to include a swimming pool and tennis court. An existing steel-framed building is to be reclad and retained for garaging.

Planning History

3. The existing house was built as an agricultural dwelling in 1962 – C/0782/62. The terms of the consent did not clearly restrict the occupancy of the dwelling to an agricultural worker. This position was resolved in 2000, when a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use was issued to confirm that the dwelling could be occupied without an agricultural occupancy restriction – S/0357/00/LDC.
4. There have been a number of applications relating to the agricultural use of the site, the last being in 2002. Application reference S/0942/01/F for approved extensions to the dwelling.

Planning Policy

5. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003: **P1/2** (Environmental Restrictions on Development) - development will be restricted in the countryside unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
6. **P9/2a** (Green Belt) - Within the Green Belt, new development, including change of use, will be limited to that required for agriculture and forestry, outdoor sport, cemeteries, or other uses appropriate to a rural area.

7. South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004: **HG15** (Replacement Dwellings in the Countryside). These will be permitted where 1) the replacement dwelling is in scale and character with the dwelling it is intended to replace, and 2) the replacement dwelling would not materially increase the impact of the site on the surrounding countryside.
8. The supporting text states that the replacement should be of a similar size and height to the existing, and allowance will be made for GDPO rights to extend the original house, if these have not been taken up.
9. **Policy GB2** (Green Belt General Principles) -Planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development in the Green Belt unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. Development is defined as 'inappropriate' unless it comprises (inter alia):
 - Replacement of existing dwellings in accordance with Policy HG15 and provided there is no adverse impact on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - The reuse of buildings provided that (a) the development does not result in a materially greater impact on the openness and purpose of the Green Belt; (b) strict control is exercised over any proposed extensions and associated uses of surrounding land; (c) the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction; and (d) the form, bulk and general design of the buildings are in keeping with their surroundings.
10. Any such development must be located and designed so that it does not have an adverse effect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt.
11. Recent Governmental advice contained in Planning Policy Statement 7 (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas) states that there is support for the re-use of appropriately located and suitably constructed existing buildings in the countryside where this would meet sustainable development objectives. Conversion to residential rather than an economic use may be supported where local circumstances render this appropriate.

Consultation

12. **Comberton Parish Council** – recommends approval. The Council comments that the barn should be limited to single occupation and that appropriate landscaping should be undertaken to minimise the impact of the development on the landscape. The Council recommends that measures to reduce light pollution are taken and the use of solar panels is considered.
13. **Ecology Officer**- has seen evidence of nesting owls and possibly bats. He recommends a condition to require provision of suitable nesting boxes within the site.
14. **Environment Agency**- advises that the site is on the edge of Flood Risk Zone 2 (low/medium risk), and that the provision of soakaways may be acceptable in this location. The EA recommends the use of a suitable drainage condition to allow for further investigation.
15. **University of Cambridge** – no comment to make in respect of the possible impact upon the Lord's Bridge Radio Astronomy facility.

Representations

16. None received.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

17. The proposal has been brought to Members' attention as it represents a departure from the normal policy of restraint when considering barn conversions to residential in the countryside. In this case, the main issues for consideration are whether there would be additional harm to the appearance of the Green Belt and countryside as result of the development, whether the building is suitable for conversion and whether the proposal is sympathetic to the appearance of the building.

Harm to the appearance of the Green Belt countryside

18. The proposal will result in the removal of the prominent 2-storey house that is located at the front of the cluster of farm buildings, together with other modern farm buildings. The resultant development, even with the proposed extension, will appear less intrusive in the countryside. The rural character and openness of the Green Belt will be preserved, in compliance with Policy GB2.

Suitability for conversion

19. The existing barn is timber-framed and clad in weatherboarding. The barn is of a traditional appearance and I consider that it is suitable for retention and capable of conversion without harm to its traditional features.

Sympathetic conversion

20. The proposal uses an imaginative contemporary approach to preserve the appearance of the barn whilst providing a good standard of accommodation. The proposed extension is to be clad in similar external materials and is of a high quality of design.

21. I consider that there are reasonable grounds for granting planning permission for this development as an exception to the normal policy of restraint in the Green Belt and countryside, for the reasons given above. The comments of the Parish Council have been brought to the attention of the agent, who has indicated his willingness to comply with the points made.

22. Given that the proposal accords with the relevant criteria of Policy GB2 of the Local Plan and it does not adversely impact on the openness of the Green Belt, I do not consider that there is a need to refer the application to the Secretary of State.

Recommendation

Approval

1. Standard Condition A – Time limited permission (Reason A);
2. Sc5a – Details of materials for external walls and roofs (Rc5a);
3. Sc51 – Landscaping (Rc51);
4. Sc52 – Implementation of landscaping (Rc52);
5. Details of provision of nesting boxes for birds and bats (Rc: In the interests of nature conservation);

6. Sc5f – Details of materials to be used for hard surfaced areas within the site including roads, driveways and car parking areas (Reason – To ensure an appropriate visual appearance of the site);
7. The residential conversion and extension hereby permitted shall not be occupied other than as a single private residential unit and shall not be subdivided or used for guest accommodation or letting rooms without the further grant of express planning permission;
8. SC11- Demolition of existing dwelling (RC 11(b));
9. SC21 – Withdrawal of permitted development rights: Part 1 all classes RC 21(a) and to retain the openness of the Green Belt.
10. Surface water drainage details.

Informatives

Reasons for Approval

1. The development is considered generally to accord with the Development Plan and particularly the following policies:
 - **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003:**
 - **P1/2** - (Environmental Restrictions on Development);
 - **P9/2a** - (Green Belt)

 - **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004: HG15** (Replacement Dwellings in the Countryside); **GB2** (Green Belt General Principles)
2. The development is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the following material planning considerations which have been raised during the consultation exercise:
 - Visual impact on the countryside and openness of the Green Belt;
 - Suitability of the existing buildings for conversion;
 - Design and appearance of the development

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003, South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004; File refs S/1716/04/F, S/0357/00/LDC; C/0782/62.

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