

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 3rd November 2004
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/1155/04/F - Gamlingay Change of Use of Land For Storage of Timber and Timber Products at Land Rear of Units 1 and 2 Station Road for Pinewood Structures Ltd

Members will visit the site on Monday 1st November 2004.

Recommendation: Refusal

Site and Proposal

1. Pinewood Structures Ltd manufacture roof and wall frames for the timber frame house building industry. This operation takes place within two large buildings that sit on the edge of the village framework to the south east of the main built up part of the village off Station Road. Immediately to the south of these lies an area of land, outside the village framework, that is used, with the benefit of planning permission, for the storage of timber products, principally manufactured roof frames. To the south of this lies the application site which is also used for the storage of manufactured products but currently without the benefit of planning permission.
2. The company also produces timber decks at another site in Green End, Gamlingay.
3. The site is approximately 7000m² and lies between 40m and 110m south of the village framework for Gamlingay. The eastern boundary is open to the countryside. There is a degree of screening on the south and west boundaries.
4. The full planning application, received on 3rd June 2004 proposes the retrospective change of use of the site for open storage.
5. A new one way access is to be formed to improve safety utilising existing points of access onto Station Road. This is within the area of land shown edged blue on the site location plan but does not form part of this application.
6. An 8m wide landscaping belt is to be planted on the southern boundary and 3m on the eastern and western boundaries.
7. The plans show a "proposed extension to form offices, canteen, toilets and washrooms" This is within the area of land shown edged blue on the site location plan but does not form part of this application.
8. 53 car parking spaces are shown with a new footpath to the north of the existing main building with bicycle racks. This is within the area of land shown edged blue on the site location plan but does not form part of this application.
9. The application was advertised as a departure from the Development Plan on 27th July 2004.

Planning History

10. Temporary planning permission was granted in January 1990 for the use of the land immediately to the south of the village framework (Area A on plan attached to appendix 1) for open storage. The use was required to cease on 31st December 1992 by condition.
11. The use of Area A continued without the benefit of planning permission for a further 9½ years.
12. In July 2002 planning permission was granted for the permanent use of 'Area A' for open storage and the temporary use of 'Area B' (retrospectively) to expire on 31st July 2003. The reason for this condition was to allow the company a reasonable period of time in which to relocate. A condition requiring the southern boundary of Area A to be landscaped when the use of Area B ceased was imposed.
13. In January 2004 planning permission was granted at the Development and Conservation Control Committee meeting in December 2003 for a further period of one year for the use of Area B for open storage until 31st July 2004. The company stated that it wished to consolidate its operations on this site having been unsuccessful in relocating and needed time to prepare a full planning application to take account of reorganisation, increased levels of efficiency, revised storage needs and its need to consider health and safety requirements such as the creation of safe walkways. The committee report is attached as appendix 2.

Planning Policy

14. **Policy P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 ("The County Structure plan") states, in part, that development will be restricted in the countryside unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
15. **Policy P2/6** of the County Structure Plan states, in part, that sensitive small-scale employment development in rural areas will be facilitated where it contributes to helping to achieve a balance of employment with the type and quantity of local housing and helping to maintain or renew the vitality of rural areas.
16. **Policy P8/5** of the County Structure Plan states, in part, that lower levels of parking provision may be required where means of travel other than the private car are available or can be provided.
17. **Policy EM7** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 ("The Local Plan") states: "Development for the expansion of existing firms within village frameworks or on suitable brownfield sites next to or very close to the village frameworks will be permitted subject to the provisions of Policy EM3 and EM6. A firm or business will be considered as "existing" if a significant element of its operations has been based in the Cambridge Area for a minimum of two years prior to the date of any planning application for development".

The provisions of Policy EM3 relate only to offices and light industrial uses.

The provisions of Policy EM6 require that: "there would be no adverse impact on residential amenity, traffic conditions, village character and other environmental factors and the development would contribute to a greater range of local employment

opportunities, especially for the semi-skilled and unskilled, or where initial development is dependent on the use of locally-based skills and expertise.”

18. Paragraph 5.39 states “Whilst the expansion of existing firms will be generally acceptable in principle, it will also be important to consider the local impact of development. Development will not be permitted where it would consolidate a non-conforming use or cause problems with traffic, noise, pollution or other damage to the environment”.
19. Paragraph 5.40 states “Where an “existing” firm is located within the village framework and any proposed extension would require development beyond this boundary, the District Council will consider the merits of each proposal having regard to all other policies in the Local Plan, including the scale of the proposal, the impact on the landscape, together with policy constraints affecting the land (e.g. Green Belt/Landscape Character Areas), and more detailed matters such as access, siting and materials”.
20. **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

21. **Gamlingay Parish Council** has made no recommendation. It states:
“The Parish Council has some considerable concerns about this Planning Application. Whilst the Council is supportive of this local firm, employing many local people, issues relating to traffic flows in the village are paramount.

Concern was expressed about lorries parking on the main road approaching Gamlingay from Hatley, and also having to manoeuvre a sharp corner into the site. Pinewood Structures operate from three or four sites in the village and there are significant traffic movements from site to site. The Council understands that these traffic movements would continue, and the company is considering three shift 24hour pattern, with resulting increases in traffic and transport from one site to another.

The Parish Council is also concerned about the breach in the village development line or village envelope that the current temporary permission allows. This development is certainly visible on approach from Hatley and does stand out from the landscape. The Council were concerned whether screening which was planned would be sufficient to lessen the impact on the landscape.

The Parish Council strongly recommends that a traffic appraisal be undertaken concerning tractor and lorry movements within the village, as the expansion would severely affect noise and safety levels within the village itself.

The development does not relate well to the existing industrial estate and juts into the surrounding countryside, and does break recognised development limits.

The Council strongly urges the District Council to consider transport/traffic issues which result from the Planning Application and would welcome discussions with the District on how to move this forward.”

22. **The Environment Agency** has no objections subject to safeguarding conditions.
23. **The Local Highway Authority** states: "I note from the layout plan submitted that it would appear as though a 'one way' system of operation for all vehicles is proposed. This is to be welcomed, but I would be interested to know how the arrangement will be actually made to work / enforced on the site".
24. **The Chief Environmental Health Officer** concludes that there are no significant impacts from the Environmental Health standpoint.
25. **The Landscape Design Officer** states: "Whilst the layout reflects the situation on site, the planting currently would require substantial infilling / increase in depth to form an effective screen.

The site/equipment etc is visible in the wider landscape and therefore I would suggest that 3m may not be sufficient.

How big is the treatment vessel? Will there be a limit on height of storage / lorries etc in rear area as it could become very difficult to screen."

26. **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** concludes that additional water supplies for firefighting are not required.

Representations

27. None

Planning Comments – Key Issues

28. The key issues are: The impact of the site on its surroundings, the justification for a departure from policy, the balance between the benefits of local employment and the protection of the rural environment and traffic implications.

Policy context

29. Local Plan Policy only supports the expansion of existing firms within village frameworks or on suitable brownfield sites next to or very close to frameworks. This site can be described as being very close to the framework but this is not a brownfield site.

Impact on countryside

30. The site juts out into the open countryside beyond an area already outside the framework. The boundaries are open and afford views from the wider countryside of the storage of timber frames sometimes in excess of 4m high. The eastern boundary is particularly open and clear views of the site, its stored materials and significant car parking are apparent on the approach from Hatley.
31. Structural landscaping would, over time, provide an adequate screen provided the material was not stored in excess of 4m which could be conditioned. In my view however the fact that development can be screened and 'hidden' does not justify its intrusion into the countryside. Many inappropriate developments could be 'hidden' in this way. This site is part of the open countryside around Gamlingay, forms part of the setting of the village and is clearly visible on the approach from Hatley. Its openness should be protected for its own sake. I am particularly concerned because this site

'juts out' into the countryside and is not a continuation of land around the main building.

Historical Context

32. This application follows two previous approvals for the temporary use of additional land outside the village framework. Discussions with the applicants led to informal officer advice that officers may support an application as a departure from the Development Plan provided that the additional area were reduced by 50%, a 10m landscaping belt be planted and the excessive car parking would be reduced and controlled by means of a Green Travel Plan (particularly as most of the workforce live locally) making the operation more sustainable. The applicants agreed that it would be possible to use space more efficiently, partly by designing an in-out access to improve loading and unloading but it would also have to address the health and safety requirements of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The applicants were sure that with reorganisation, both practically on the ground (a lot of space was being used inefficiently) and in terms of the company's manufacturing techniques that it would not need as much space as it was using at that time i.e. both 'Areas A and B'. They were not able, however, to cope without some space additional to 'Area A'.
33. 'Area B' is approximately 7800m² - 50% is therefore 3900m². The application site is a different area of land but is approximately 7000m², approximately 3000m² more than was previously discussed.
34. Attached as appendix 3 is the applicant's statement of case. It is clear from this that the company now wishes to expand in order to keep its market share – "Our present intention is to capitalise on the present business success by increasing output whilst maintaining present overheads". This was not the case at the time the previous advice was given. It will be noted that more offices are proposed to be built (not part of this application) and a 33% increase in staff is proposed from 150 to 200.
35. It would seem that it is this expansion of the company that necessitates the additional land and not a consolidation as previously discussed. The additional area of land is well in excess of what was being considered a year ago, and this amount of land would seem to be required because of the expansion. The applicants letter states: "We could marginally reduce the area of land in question however I would not wish to do so, bearing in mind that it is essential to maintain sufficient land for future storage needs and have regard to movements in the housing market." I note that the land is required for *future* needs.

Allocated site

36. The adjacent site is allocated for industrial development. The applicants state it is not available for Pinewood due to the intentions of the site owners and excessive costs. It states that it does not need industrial land which carries a high value as it has all the manufacturing space it needs within the buildings. It needs outside storage space which carries a lesser land value.

Local employer

37. The company has produced a list of employees' postcodes. This shows that approximately 35% of the workforce are from the Gamlingay area, 14% from the Potton area, 7% from the Sandy area, 19% from the Biggleswade area and 25% from elsewhere.

Justification

38. In my opinion this company has outgrown this site. It has already expanded from 6 employees in 1981 to the present workforce of around 150 and into the countryside

onto land that falls outside the village envelope (Area A). Now it says it needs more land to expand further and it is understood that it is considering a 24-hour working pattern to further increase output.

39. Central to this application is the balance between the desirability of protecting the countryside and respecting development plan policies that require development to be within the framework with the desirability of assisting this company to remain an important local employer. In my opinion this departure can only be justified if to refuse this proposal will inevitably result in the demise of the company which by its nature draws its workers from the locality.
40. The company says that it needs to expand and on the central point of expansion I cannot recommend that Members support this application. Development Plan policy does not support expansion here and I could only recommend this proposal as a departure if it were essential to the survival of this company particularly as The County Structure Plan and The Local Plan do broadly support local firms and the local economy.
41. I am not convinced by the applicant's letter that a refusal would result in the demise of the company. I have seen no financial accounts, no market figures and nothing other than the assertion in the letter that the company needs to maintain its market share that would convince me that this company could not operate on a reduced scale. Indeed the letter simply states that the contraction of the business is not "an acceptable option to the Directors". In discussions with the Managing Director it was stated that the company would have to fall from the 'premier league' to a lower division. In my view this would be the most desirable outcome as it would maintain the site as a valued local employer and would not result in further incursion into open countryside. I do not therefore consider that the company's need to maintain its competitiveness in the market place is sufficient justification to overturn the strong policy objections to development in the countryside outside of village frameworks.

Relocation

42. In July 2002 temporary permission was granted in order to allow this company to relocate as it was generally accepted that it had outgrown this site. It is understood that a site was found in Sandy but the company was unsuccessful in acquiring it.
43. The company decided it wanted to stay on this site and consolidate its operation. It is now asserted that relocation "cannot be considered for financial reasons". The letter also states that relocation to the north east would be considered as a last option.

'Planning gain' and traffic implications

44. In addition to the balance between protection of the countryside and the local importance of this company, Members need to consider the following:
45. The company operates on two sites in the village. The Green End site is a somewhat separate operation as it is not involved in the production of roof and wall frames. The Parish Council has raised as its principle concern traffic flows from the site through the village. It is understood that at various times Pinewood Structures has operated from as many as four sites within the village and it is the movement of material from site to site that has resulted in the largest number of vehicle movements.
46. The applicants have agreed to enter into a S106 agreement that would ensure that all matters relating to the manufacture of timber wall and roof frames would take place at the Station Road site and on no other. This should reduce the number of vehicles that are moving through the village.

47. The applicants have also agreed to enter into a S106 agreement that would ensure a Green Travel Plan was adopted to help make the development more sustainable by limiting travel to work vehicle movements and providing facilities to assist in encouraging alternative travel to work methods. The 53 car parking spaces shown is not in my view excessive for a company of 150 employees expecting to expand to 200.

Landscaping

48. The landscaping shown on the submitted plans is insufficient. The applicants have agreed to increase this but no revised plan has been submitted. A 10m structural belt of landscaping would be required.

Health and Safety

49. It is not clear how much space the requirements of the HSE has required. Safe walkways etc are not shown on the submitted plans. It was asserted in the previous application that this would be significant and would reduce the available storage space, contributing to the need for the additional land.

Site layout

50. This application is for the use of the land shown edged red on the site location plan for open storage only. The submitted plans show a complete reworking of the site. Most of these internal site layout revisions do not require specific planning permission such as the access revisions and others such as the new office building clearly do and will presumably be the subject of future submissions.

Conclusion

51. Members will have to balance the issues of the company's needs and the benefit of this to local people and the local economy with the protection of the countryside and policies that require development to be within village frameworks. It is my view that this balance tips away from the company as I am not satisfied that the information put forward provides an adequate justification and I am not convinced that the benefit from additional landscaping and the S106 matters are sufficient to outweigh the harm to the countryside.

Recommendation

1. Refusal for the following reasons:

The site lies in a prominent position within the open countryside outside of any development framework boundary defined in the Development Plan. The open storage of material will be detrimental to the visual quality of the countryside and has not been demonstrated to be essential in this rural location. The landscape is essentially open in character. The development would jut out into this open landscape and would have an adverse effect on the character and local distinctiveness of the area. As such the proposal is contrary to Policy P1/2 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and Policies EM7 and EN1 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.

2. Authority to take enforcement action to effect removal of all stored material from outside 'Area A' and to restore the land to its former condition. A compliance period of 12 months is suggested having regard to the need to find alternative accommodation.

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 application files reference S/0476/02/F, S/1873/03/F and S/1155/04/F

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