

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation
Control Committee
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

1st December 2004

**S/1698/04/F - Steeple Morden
Erection of 37 Dwellings to Include 21 Live/Work Units, Ashwell and Morden Station
Yard, Odsey, for T M S Management Ltd**

Recommendation: Refusal

Departure Application

Site and Proposal

1. Ashwell and Morden Station Yard is located north of the A505 and east of Station Road, in the hamlet of Odsey. It has been used for a number of years as a crane and plant hire depot by Chamberlain Plant Hire. The site contains the former goods shed building and is bounded by the railway line to the south. To the north the site is bounded by an embankment with agricultural land beyond. There is a public right of way along the northern boundary just beyond the embankment. To the west is car parking to Ashwell and Morden Station and to the east disused land, beyond which is the Omya UK chalk quarry.
2. Access to the site is via the Station approach road to the west. Visibility to the south at the junction of the road with Station Road is severely restricted by the bridge over the railway line.
3. The north west corner of the site comprises the eastern end of a copse of trees, which is subject to a Tree Preservation Order. There is a telecommunications mast in the north east corner of the site.
4. This full application, registered on 13th August 2004, proposes the erection of 37 dwellings, including 21 live/work units. These units comprise a two-storey extension to either side of the existing goods shed, each measuring 36m x 10.4m to the west and 24m x 10.4m to the east, and 6.6m high. There will be a new building measuring 58m x 19m to the north of the goods shed. This building will have a ridge height of 9m.
5. Extracts from a supporting statement submitted by the applicant, setting out the aims of the Zed factory housing, as a fully sustainable development, are attached as Appendix 1. A full copy of the supporting statement, including photographs and plans that are not reproduced in the Agenda, can be viewed as part of the background papers and will be displayed at the meeting.
6. The red-edged application site does not currently extend to the public highway and revised plans have been requested from the applicant, along with revised ownership certificates if necessary.

Planning History

7. In 2002 consent was refused for the erection of 6 dwellings on the site on the grounds that the site was outside the village framework (**Ref S/1489/02/F**).
8. Previously there have been a number of applications associated with the use of the goods yard.

Planning Policy

9. **Policy P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 ("The County Structure Plan") restricts development in the countryside unless it can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular location.
10. **Policy P1/3** of the County Structure Plan promotes sustainable design in built development.
11. **Policy P2/6** of the County Structure Plan states that sensitive small-scale employment in rural areas will be facilitated where, amongst other criteria, it provides opportunities for home working, or making good use of new information and communication technology, or where it helps to maintain or renew the vitality of rural areas.
12. **Policy P5/5** of the County Structure Plan states that small-scale housing developments will be permitted in villages only where appropriate, taking into account the need for affordable rural housing, the character of the village and its setting and, the level of jobs, services, infrastructure and passenger transport provision in the immediate area.
13. **Policy P7/4** of the County Structure Plan states that development must relate sensitively to the local environment and contribute to the sense of place, identity and diversity of the district landscape character areas.
14. **Policy SE4** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 ("The Local Plan") identifies Steeple Morden as a group village where residential development and redevelopment up to a maximum scheme size of 8 dwellings is permitted within a village framework. Exceptionally up to 15 dwellings may be permitted if this would make the best use of a brownfield site. The hamlet of Odsey does not have a village framework.
15. **Policy SE8** of the Local Plan states that residential development outside village frameworks will not be permitted.
16. **Policy HG10** of the Local Plan requires residential developments to contain a mix of units providing a range of types, sizes and affordability, making the best use of a site and promoting a sense of community which reflects local needs. The design and layout of schemes should be informed by the wider character and context of the local townscape and landscape. Scheme should also achieve high quality design and distinctiveness, avoiding inflexible standards and promoting energy efficiency.
17. **Policy HG22** of the Local Plan states that the District Council will look favourably upon residential schemes, which include measures to conserve energy, subject to other policies and proposals in the Local Plan.
18. **Policy EM9** of the Local Plan states that the District Council will support proposals for teleworking schemes, which bring home and workplace physically together on sites within village frameworks and by conversion or adaptation of rural buildings outside

village frameworks, provided that there would be no adverse impact on residential amenity, traffic, character and the environment generally.

19. **Policy TP1** of the Local Plan states that the District Council will seek, through its decisions on planning applications, to promote more sustainable transport choices, to improve access to major trip generators by non-car modes, and to reduce the need to travel, especially by car.
20. **Policy CS10** of the Local Plan states that where planning permission is granted for 4 or more dwellings the District Council will seek a financial contribution to improvement of education facilities where capacity at local schools would be exceeded during the 5 years following the date of the application.
21. **Policy CS13** of the Local Plan states that in considering planning applications for housing, the Council will seek to ensure that appropriate consideration has been given to all aspects of design and layout, to minimise the opportunities for crime and the circumstances where the fear of crime would be increased.
22. **Policy EN1** of the Local Plan states that the District Council will not grant planning permission for development which would have an adverse effect on the character and local distinctiveness of landscape character areas.
23. **Policy EN5** of the Local Plan requires trees, hedges and woodland to be retained wherever possible in proposals for new development
24. **Policy EN44** of the Local Plan states that the District Council will support and encourage proposals for the use of renewable energy resources, water efficiency and for developments using energy conservation technologies subject to other policies in the Plan.
25. **Policy ES1** of the Local Plan sets out the Districts Council's policy when considering proposals for redevelopment of potentially contaminated land.
26. **Policy ES8** of the Local Plan states that the District Council will seek, by means of appropriate planning conditions, to minimise the impact on noise from railways on noise-sensitive development.

Consultation

27. **Steeple Morden Parish Council** recommends refusal. Its comments are attached as Appendix 2.
28. The **Chief Environmental Health Officer** recommends conditions be attached to any consent restricting the hours of operation during the period of construction, and requiring an investigation of the site to be undertaken prior to development commencing to establish the nature and extent of any contamination of the site and put forward remedial works to deal with it. Comments are put forward regarding the use of driven pile foundations and burning of waste.
29. The **County Archaeology Office** recommends that the site be subject to a programme of archaeological investigation to be secured by condition.
30. The **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** requests a condition securing the provision of fire hydrants.

31. The **Trees and Landscapes Officer** objects to the application as the proposed car parking and part of the footprint appears to encroach into the copse area that is subject to a Tree Preservation Order. The impact on this area will be quite substantial, bearing in mind that the levels would also be changed dramatically.
32. The **Architectural Liaison Officer, Cambridgeshire Constabulary** is concerned at several aspects of the layout.
33. The **Strategic Development Officer** comments that the proposed development is closely based upon the existing Beddington Zero Emission Development (BedZed) regarded by many as a 'cutting edge' example of a truly sustainable housing development.
34. The need to encourage such developments is particularly important given the world's rapidly increasing demand for non-renewable fossil fuels and the associated threat of human-induced climate change. Moreover, there is a strong link between people, buildings and climate. Globally, buildings are responsible for 50% of all human-induced CO₂ and greenhouse (GHG) emissions and, more worryingly, buildings are using more and more energy resulting in even more GHG emissions. This 'vicious circle' needs to be broken through a series of measures including the construction of new housing developments that are highly energy efficient and utilise renewable energy. It is evident the proposed development meets these objectives and satisfies a wide range of important sustainability criteria most notably:
 - the utilisation of a brownfield site
 - the local sourcing of labour and sustainable building materials
 - high levels of energy and resource efficiency including rainwater harvesting
 - the on-site generation of 100% carbon neutral renewable energy in the form of a communal biomass boiler using locally sourced wood
 - waste minimisation and recycling measures
 - green roofs to help protect and sustain local biodiversity
 - the installation of energy efficiency appliances
 - the sourcing of locally produced food
 - the provision of on-site work and telecommuting facilities thus reducing the need for people to travel
 - the provision of electric and fuel efficient vehicles for commuting purposes
 - immediate proximity to a rail station with links to Cambridge and London
 - the provision of affordable housing both in terms of initial and lifetime energy and heating costs
35. The proposed development would also strengthen the Council's efforts to persuade other developers and house-builders to incorporate the same procurement, design and construction methods in the large-scale developments planned for the district. It would help demonstrate the Council's corporate commitment towards sustainable development and the promotion of quality village life. It would also complement the Council's efforts to reduce CO₂ and GHG emissions across the district. This is important given the Council has signed the Nottingham Declaration for Climate Change and it is involved in the European Climate Menu Programme. The Council is committed to meeting the Kyoto Targets for CO₂ and GHG emissions.
36. The **Environment Agency** requests conditions in respect of schemes for ground contamination investigation, assessment and remediation, along with schemes for foul and surface water drainage. In addition the Agency provides various informatives.

37. **Network Rail** comments that it has no objection to the application but points out that there are restrictive covenants on the site intended as a precaution to ensure that the stability and safe operation of the railway is not jeopardised and will require the applicant to submit to it a site-specific method statement and risk assessment prior to commencing works. It will also require details of any significant alterations to existing ground levels next to the railway boundary. It points out that the site access from Station Road is not in the applicant's ownership although a right of way exists. Provision must be made for maintaining vehicular access through the site to the land to the north-east and this must be kept free from obstruction at all times, including the construction period. Any external illumination must not cast glare onto the railway or otherwise interfere with train crews' sighting of railway signals.
38. The **Chief Financial Planning Officer, Cambridgeshire County Council** is concerned that the capacity at Bassingbourn Village College is fully committed to meet the needs arising from existing houses and asks that a sum of £70,000 is sought from the developer as contribution to cover the cost of the additional 7 places needed.
39. The comments of the **Local Highway Authority** will be reported verbally.

Representations

40. 10 letters have been received, including one from Omya UK Ltd, the operator of the quarry to the north east, objecting to the application on the following grounds:
41. The site is outside the village framework.
42. Access to Station Road and the A505 is extremely hazardous which in itself makes the application unsustainable. The Station bridge has been identified as one of the worst in the area and this application would make it even more dangerous.
43. Adverse impact on a small community which has been overlooked by the developers.
44. Designed in a style typical of modern urban developments, not in keeping with existing buildings and unpleasant to the eye. If any development has to take place it should be sympathetic to its surroundings.
45. Odsey is a small hamlet, which receives a large influx of cars from people in surrounding villages who commute to Cambridge or London. Parking is already a tremendous problem. The area for development has long been promised as a car park to solve this problem and if the site is to be used other than as a crane depot it should be used as a car park for the Station.
46. Designed with no clear understanding of the surrounding area and therefore contradicts the notion of being zero impact.
47. The development would be more workable in an urban setting where such a self-contained approach also has the advantage of a wide range of amenities and services nearby. Odsey has none of this. Whilst the offer of small shop seems nice it would not be sustainable within the small population base of Odsey.
48. The letter from Omya UK Ltd points out that chalk is quarried at Station Quarry, and taken north by conveyor belt about 1.5km northwards for processing at Plantation Quarry. Station Quarry and the conveyor are as close as 90m to the proposed

development. Omya also has a right of access through the station yard, which is used to receive and dispatch heavy quarry machinery etc for renewal and replacement. There are concerns on three grounds:

49. Noise – The planning permission for the quarry imposes a very strict noise limit, which is to be measured at No4 Railway Cottages, which is some 190m further away from the quarry than the new development. This could result in severe operational difficulties.
50. Public Safety – while Omya takes every precaution against trespass, introducing 37 new houses beside the quarry would seriously increase the risk of trespass and require a higher level of security, at greater cost and possible landscape impact.
51. Access for Plant and Machinery – the development as shown would appear to render it impossible for low loaders and heavy plant to access the quarry. Whilst it is recognised that this is ultimately a civil matter Omya would be required to protect right of access which would mean that the development could not be built in the layout applied for or possibly at all.
52. 3 letters have been received in support of the application:
 53. Proposal is one of the most innovative and visionary housing developments
 54. Could provide significant benefits to Odsey although there is some concern regarding traffic and it is suggested that the site should have a separate entrance
 55. Applicants have a proven track record of delivery on target with sustainable objectives and have made a case for the development which cannot be faulted.
 56. An industrial use, if permitted, might be less sustainable. If it became a car park it would result in run-off and generate more journeys by car, even if made by commuters to the station. If housing for agricultural workers (which might be difficult to justify) would housing be as energy efficient?

Planning Comments – Key Issues

57. The key issues to be considered with this application are whether there is sufficient justification to warrant a departure from development plan policies to allow this housing development in the countryside, and whether there are any site specific constraints which need to be addressed.
58. There is a strong presumption against new development in the countryside unless it can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location. Although the site represents brownfield land planning consent has previously been refused for its redevelopment for housing purposes as a matter of principle. It is clear that the proposed scheme is unacceptable in principle in this location in addition to which the scale of development, 37 dwelling units, is totally out of scale with the area in which it is located and would more than double the existing number of dwellings in the hamlet of Odsey.
59. Notwithstanding the objection in principle to residential development in this location I am of the view the scale of the proposed building will represent a dominant feature, out of character with other buildings in the area.

60. Although the formal comments of the Local Highway Authority have not yet been received I am concerned at the lack of visibility to the south at the junction of the Station approach road with Station Road. There would appear to be limited opportunity to improve the existing situation.
61. Members will note the concerns of the Trees and Landscapes Officer and Architectural Liaison Officer and Omya UK in respect of the current layout. Given the objection in principle to the development of this site in the manner proposed I have not sought to enter into negotiations with the applicant to resolve these matters at this stage.
62. The comments of the Strategic Development Officer are noted and I agree with the points of principle that he raises. However, whilst there are Development Plan policies which support and encourage this type of development it is stressed that this is subject to other policies of the Plan. Although Policy EM9 supports proposals for teleworking schemes which bring home and workplace physically together it states that this should either be on sites within village frameworks or by adaptation and conversion of rural buildings outside village frameworks, provided that there would be no adverse impact on residential amenity, traffic, character and the environment generally. This proposal does not comply with these criteria.
63. In this instance I do not consider that the concept of the development proposed, as a sustainable development, and the various arguments advanced in support of scheme by the applicant, can outweigh the substantial policy objection to residential development on this site. I am disappointed that, knowing the significant policy constraints in advance, that the applicant has chosen this particular site to submit its first application in the District as the scheme represents an exciting concept but one which I have no alternative but to recommend for refusal in this particular location.

Recommendation

64. That the application be refused for the following reasons:
 1. The proposal involves the erection of 37 dwellings in the countryside contrary to the aims of Policy P1/2 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and Policy SE8 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 which restrict development outside village frameworks to that which is essential in a particular rural location. The applicant has not demonstrated that the development proposed is essential.
 2. The proposed development is unacceptable as it is out of scale with the character of the existing hamlet of Odsey and will have an adverse visual impact in the landscape, contrary to the aims of Policy EN1 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.
 3. The development as proposed is unacceptable in that it would result in the loss of part of an existing copse of trees which is subject to a Tree Preservation Order, the loss of which would detract from the visual quality of the area, contrary to the aims of Policy EN5 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004

+ any reasons of the Local Highway Authority.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Application file Ref S/1698/04/F

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003

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