

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 5th January 2004
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/2062/04/F - Toft
Erection of Class B1 Offices; Bennell Farm, West Street, Comberton
(in the Parish of Toft)
for RWS Arnold

Recommendation: Refusal
Date for Determination: 2nd December 2004

Site and Proposal

1. The site forms part of an enclosure used for grazing adjacent to existing farm buildings some of which have been converted to Class B1 use. A farm storage building adjacent the proposed building is of recent construction. The land is located some 270 metres from West Street, and is accessed via a private driveway. There is a small copse to the south of the site which provides visual screening from West Street.
2. This full application received 7th October 2004 proposes the erection of a detached single storey building to be used as Class B1 offices. The building has dimensions L18.2m x D5.5m x H5.0m, providing a floor area of 100 sq m. The design shows a building resembling a converted traditional farm building, with brick plinth, timber cladding and traditional pitched roof. Precise details of external materials are reserved for subsequent agreement. The applicant has an office on the site employing 5 persons. If the development were to be implemented, a total of 7 persons would be employed. Existing parking provision on the site is proposed to be used to cater for the additional two vehicles per day which the applicant estimates would be generated by the development.

Planning History

3. **S/0592/04/F** - planning permission for the erection of a larger building (128sq.m) for the same purpose on this site was refused by Members at the meeting of the D&CCC on 2nd June 2004. The reasons for refusal referred to inappropriate development outside the village framework and in the Cambridge Green Belt. An appeal against refusal has been lodged, to be considered at a Hearing on 9th November 2005.
4. Since 1993 planning permissions have been granted to convert the former farm buildings to Class B1/B2/B8 (office/light industrial & research; general industrial; storage), although they are predominately used for B1 office/research uses. One building is retained for private stabling.

Planning Policy

5. **Policy GB2** (Green Belt) of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 - planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development in the Green Belt

unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. The policy contains definitions of appropriate development, and requires it being located and designed so that it does not have an adverse effect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt.

6. **Policy EM7** (Expansion of Existing Firms at Villages) of the Local Plan - expansion of existing firms within village frameworks or on suitable brownfield sites next to or very close to the village framework will be permitted subject to the provisions of **Policy EM3** and **EM6**. As the application site includes a significant area of land that has not previously been developed this policy does not apply to the application in my opinion.
7. **P1/2** (Environmental Restrictions on Development) of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 ("The County Structure Plan") - development will be restricted in the countryside unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
8. **Policy P2/6** (Rural Economy) of the County Structure Plan - sensitive small-scale development in rural areas will be facilitated where it contributes, *inter alia*, to supporting new and existing businesses; to farm or rural diversification where appropriate to the rural area; to the re-use of existing buildings; towards helping to maintain or renew the vitality of rural areas.
9. **P9/2a** (Green Belt) of the County Structure Plan - 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.
10. **Planning Policy Statement 7** (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas)(August 2004) - new building in the open countryside away from existing settlements should be strictly controlled (para 1).
11. **Planning Policy Guidance 2** (Green Belts)(1995) - the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless it is for the purposes of agriculture/forestry, or essential for outdoor sport/recreation (para 3.4). The visual amenity of the Green Belt should not be injured by proposals for development within the GB by reason of their siting, materials or design (para 3.15).

Consultations

12. **Comberton Parish Council** - recommends approval of the application.
13. **Toft Parish Council** - Comments awaited.
14. **Environment Agency** - the site is within an area of limited drainage capacity and environmental concern. The EA recommends that a condition be attached to require the submission and approval of details of surface water drainage before development commences.

Representations

15. The applicant's agent has submitted comments in support of the application which are reproduced at **Appendix 1**.

Planning Comments - Key Issues

16. The main issues are whether the development is inappropriate in the Green Belt, whether there would be harm to the character and appearance of the countryside, and whether there are very special circumstances to outweigh the policy of restraint in the Green Belt and countryside.

Inappropriate development

17. The erection of a new office building inside the Green Belt is inappropriate development as defined in PPG2, paragraph 3.4. This is supported in development plan policies. Such development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt. The use is not one that is essential in the rural location and so fails to comply with **Policy P1/2**.

Character and appearance of the countryside

18. The new building would be visible when approaching the site on the private driveway. It will encroach onto an area of grazing land and would represent an enlargement of the group of buildings adjacent to it. The openness of the countryside in this part of the site would be lost.

Very special circumstances

19. In the letter at Appendix 1, the agent has explained that the office is required to provide additional accommodation for an existing tenant. He draws attention to the reduction in size of the proposal since the previous refusal, and the siting on part of an existing car park that can be considered as brownfield land. In my opinion none of these amounts to a very special reason to outweigh the policy of restraint over new building in the Green Belt and countryside, and the harm that would be caused to the visual amenity of the area.

Conclusion

20. In my opinion, the revised proposal remains unacceptable for similar reasons as the previous refusal S/0592/04/F.

Recommendation

Refuse

1. The site is located within the Cambridge Green Belt. The proposal to erect a 100 square metre office building is “inappropriate development” and no “very special circumstances” have been advanced to overcome the presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The proposal is therefore contrary to **Policy P9/2a** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and **Policy GB2** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 which seek to maintain the setting of Cambridge and to preserve the rural character and openness of the Green Belt.
2. The site is within the countryside, outside the village frameworks of Comberton and Toft as defined in the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004, and the proposal would be contrary to **Policy P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 which restricts development in the countryside to that which is essential to a rural location.

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 file Ref. S/2062/04/F, S/0592/04/F

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