

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Development and Conservation Control Committee      2<sup>nd</sup> February 2005  
**AUTHOR/S:** Director of Development Services

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**S/0265/04/F - Little Abington**  
**Erection of 60 Bedroom Hotel Building Incorporating Business Centre,**  
**Alterations and Extensions to Existing Café at the Comfort Café**  
**For Mr and Mrs Hannan**

**Recommendation: Refusal**  
**Date of determination: 13<sup>th</sup> May 2004**

Members will visit the site on Monday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2005.

Departure Application

### Site and Proposal

1. The site, which extends to approximately 0.85 hectares, is currently occupied by the two-storey buff brick and large flat tile Comfort Café building with single storey flat roof elements at either end, a corrugated sheeting monopitch roof pallet store and adjacent fenced compound, a tarmac parking area and gravelled area. A two-storey Travelodge, restaurant and petrol filling station are situated to the north.
2. This full application, registered on the 12<sup>th</sup> February 2004, proposes the erection of an L-shaped 60 bedroom hotel building also incorporating a business 'touch-down' centre and extensions and alterations to the existing café including pitched roofs over the existing flat roof elements. The length of the wings of the hotel building are 48 metres and 41 metres approximately respectively. The building would be 5 metres to eaves and 8 metres to ridge. The proposed hotel and business centre would be linked to the café building by a first floor link. Additional supporting statements were submitted by letter dated 19<sup>th</sup> August 2004.

### Planning History

3. The site has an extensive planning history. The following applications are of most relevance.
4. A full application for a 60 bedroom hotel building incorporating a small business centre, alterations and extensions to the existing café was refused in July 2003 (**S/2261/02/F**) for the following reasons:
  1. The site of the proposed travel lodge is located within the countryside in which approved Country Structure Plan Policy SP12/1 restricts development to that which is essential to the effective operation of local agriculture, horticulture, forestry, permitted mineral extraction, outdoor recreation or public utility services. The proposed travel lodge would not comply with this Policy which is aimed at protecting the rural character of the countryside.
  2. Exceptionally, Policy T7 of the Approved South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 1993 states that the District Council may permit accommodation on trunk and

primary roads where there is a proven need, no alternative sites exist and the development does not materially detract from the visual quality of the countryside. The proposed travel lodge would not comply with this policy by reason of:

- (a) No proven need has been demonstrated in the application;
  - (b) Alternative accommodation exists at this location to the north east of the site; and
  - (c) The extent, height, position of the building, the elevation of the site above the open land to the south and the limited space available for landscaping on the site would cumulatively result in a prominent building which would detract from the visual quality of the surrounding countryside.
3. The site is located within an Area of Best Landscape which Policies SP12/2 of the approved Structure Plan and C1 of the approved Local Plan seek to protect from development which would adversely affect their character. In addition Policy EN1 of Local Plan No. 2: Proposed modification 2002 states that planning permission will not be granted for development which would have an adverse effect on the character and local distinctiveness of Landscape Character Areas; for the reasons identified in Reason 2(c) above, the proposed travel lodge would not protect the character of such areas and would therefore be contrary to the above mentioned policies.
  4. Approved Structure Plan Policy SP7/20 expects Local Plans to identify suitable sites for roadside service areas. Local Plan No. 2: Proposed Modification 2002 does not identify suitable locations, the one location initially identified in the Deposit 1999 Plan having been completed alongside the A14 Trunk Road.
  5. Permission was granted for extensions to café and change of use of store to chapel (**S/1788/99/F**).
  6. Permission was granted for use of land and building for pallet storage and repair extensions and change of use of store to chapel (**S/1787/99/F**).
  7. An application for extensions to the café, conservatory garden service point, garden store, bedroom accommodation and drive through takeaway was withdrawn (**S/1904/98/F**).
  8. An application for extensions to the café, a garden service/waiter station and a garden store was refused and subsequently dismissed at appeal on the grounds that it would have involved a further protrusion into the countryside and would have visually detracted from the Area of Best Landscape (**S/0163/98/F**).
  9. An application for extensions to the café, a garden service/waiter station and a garden store was refused (**S/0649/97/F**).
- Planning Policy**
10. The site is within the countryside and the East Anglian Chalk Landscape Character Area as defined in the Local Plan 2004.

11. Structure Plan 2003 **Policy P1/2** states that development in the countryside will be resisted unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location. **Policy P4/1** sets out criteria for assessing new or improved tourism, recreation and leisure development.
12. Local Plan 2004 **Policy EN1** states that planning permission will not be permitted for development which would have an adverse effect on the character and local distinctiveness of a Landscape Character Area.
13. Local Plan 2004 **Policy RT11** states that development to provide overnight visitor accommodation and restaurants will not be permitted outside the framework of settlements except in the cases of modest extensions to existing facilities or the change of use/conversion of existing buildings not requiring large extensions.
14. Local Plan 2004 **Policy EN15** states that the Council will protect, preserve and enhance known and suspected sites and features of archaeological importance, and their settings, by: requiring, in all cases involving proposed works at sites of known or potential archaeological interest, that an appropriate level of assessment and/or evaluation is carried out by a suitably qualified person so that the archaeological implications of any proposed development can be established; and refusing planning permission for development which would result in damage to sites and features of national archaeological importance, and their settings. It also states that: where planning permission is granted for development on sites of archaeological interest, in-situ preservation of remains will be preferred; and, in all cases where this is not merited or is not feasible, the Council will require that satisfactory provision is made for a programme of excavation and recording of remains by a suitable person or body prior to the commencement of any approved development

### **Consultation**

15. **Little Abington Parish Council** makes no recommendation in response to the supporting statements but states that "From our knowledge of the touchdown facility we are not convinced that the 200m<sup>2</sup> 'Conference Area' would be required and, were it to be so, the possible increase in traffic on to the A1307 could be detrimental". In response to the original application the Parish recommended refusal, commenting:
  1. "The scale of the development could have been beneficially reduced had the almost 200m<sup>2</sup> conference room accommodation been omitted. The actual purpose of this was of some concern since there is no demonstration of a need for conference accommodation in this location.
  2. Strongly felt that **dense** planting to the eastern boundary should accompany any scheme on this site to completely obscure views from the village of Little Abington.
  3. Notwithstanding that the development is un-aligned with the current structure plan/local plan it was felt that bedroom/hotel accommodation on this site could be considered as a possibility in principal, in this case on a site specific basis.
  4. Note the Parish Council is anxious that the site should **not** return to its previous use as lorry park and pallet store".
16. **Chief Environmental Health Officer** has no objections.

17. **Highways Agency** states that, as the proposal would not adversely affect the A11, it does not wish to comment on the application.
18. **County Archaeology** objects to the application stating that an archaeological evaluation is required and would allow full consideration of the nature, extent, quality and survival of archaeological remains, including the barrow known to be located within the development area and thereby allow an informed judgement to be made as to whether any planning consent will need to include provisions for the recording, and more importantly, the preservation of important archaeological remains *in situ*.
19. **Environment Agency** has no objections but recommends conditions relating to surface and foul water disposal are attached to any approval. It also makes advisory comments.
20. **Anglian Water** has no objections but recommends conditions relating to surface and foul water disposal are attached to any approval.
21. **Cambs Fire & Rescue Service** states that additional water supplies for firefighting are not required.
22. **Cambridge Water Company** was consulted but has not commented.
23. **Local Highway Authority** was consulted. At the time this report was compiled, no comments had been received.

#### **Representations - Agent**

24. In support of the application, the agent makes the following case:
  - The service area is a significant roadside rest facility and currently consists of the Comfort Café, which has earned official brown and white tourist signs, a petrol station, a Little Chef Restaurant and a Travelodge;
  - The building would replace the existing pallet store and lorry parking area. The designated use of the site is far more detrimental to the countryside than the proposal and the scheme would enhance the area;
  - The facility is specifically designed to cater for 54 seater coach parties/large groups. There is a definite lack of suitable accommodation and services of this type in the Cambs and East Anglian areas;
  - This brownfield site is ideally located in relation to the nearby tourist facilities;
  - The planned expansion of the café makes provision for additional seating, new toilets and baby changing areas and would include a fast turn coffee shop and tourist information and pitched roofs over the approved flat roofs;
  - Proposal would provide facilities for Granta Park;
  - Tourism in the District will not develop without appropriate accommodation;
  - A facility for business etc. meetings away from town centres would ease traffic congestion;
  - Meeting rooms would also be used by coach parties in the evenings as part of educational tours;
  - The information gathered strongly indicates that there is a demand for this type of sustainable development;
  - There is a lack of off-road coach parking in Cambridge;
  - Tariffs would be low due to the site's out of town location, which is important to group travel operators;

- The touch-down facility is an innovative concept and relates directly to 'new ways of working' for mobile/car-based workers. It would provide printing, photocopying, internet access, video conferencing etc. facilities. It would also provide space for meetings and interviews for such people;
- The proposal would provide employment; and
- The proposal is supported by a number of interested parties, including firms who would welcome the touch-down facility, local tourist attractions, the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK, Cambridge Tourist Information Centre and the East of England Tourist Board. Letters from some of the groups have been submitted as part of and in support of the application.

### **Representations - Neighbours**

25. The owners of the Temple Conference Centre strongly object on the following grounds: they are building up their business; need has already been met; they are running at a little under 50% capacity; a new conference facility would detract from local need; the proposed development would be sited in open landscape; they are arranging for plans to be drawn up to build accommodation for their overnight delegates within their grounds; and a single storey motel type development with no conference facilities would make a lesser impact on the area.

### **Planning Comments - Key Issues**

26. The key issues in relation to this application are:
- The visual impact of the development;
  - Highways matters;
  - Archaeology; and
  - Whether there is a demonstrable unmet need for the proposed hotel and business centre and, if so, whether this need outweighs the presumption against non-essential development in the countryside, overnight visitor accommodation of the scale proposed in the countryside and any identified harm that it would cause to matters of acknowledged importance.
27. The floor area of the café was approximately doubled under planning permission S/1788/99/F. An earlier application for an extension similar in size to the one now proposed had previously been refused and subsequently dismissed at appeal under reference S/0163/98/F on the grounds that it would have involved a further protrusion into the countryside and would have visually detracted from the Area of Best Landscape. The previous application for a hotel on the site was also refused on the grounds that it would detract from the visual quality of the surrounding countryside (S/2261/02/F). Although well located to other roadside facilities, by virtue of its size, the proposed hotel and business centre building, extensions to the café and attendant lighting would have a significant detrimental impact on the visual amenities of the countryside.
28. Subject to no adverse comments being received from the Local Highway Authority, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of highway matters.
29. The agent has been asked to undertake an archaeological investigation of the site prior to the application being determined. Such an investigation would allow a full consideration of the nature, extent, quality and survival of archaeological remains, including the barrow known to be located within the development area, to be made. In turn, this would enable an informed judgement to be made as to whether any

planning consent will need to include provisions for the recording, and more importantly, the preservation of important archaeological remains in situ. No such investigation has been submitted.

30. The proposed hotel and business centre element of the scheme is contrary to Local Plan Policy RT11 and, unless it can be demonstrated that this part of the proposal is essential in this particular rural location, also Structure Plan Policy P1/2. If there was a proven, essential, unmet need for a roadside hotel and business centre in this part of the District, I consider that this would probably be the most appropriate location for such a facility. I accept that the proposed facility would be of benefit to road users, and particularly the target coach parties for the hotel and car-based business people for the touch-down centre. However, I do not consider that the benefit constitutes an overriding, unmet, essential need which would justify setting aside development plan policies and the concerns identified above. It is perhaps worthy of note that, whilst generally supporting the proposal, the East of England Tourist Board concludes that there is a possibility that a development of this scale could disperse visitors away from the existing accommodation providers within the vicinity.

### **Recommendation**

31. Refusal (as amended by additional information date stamped 1.9.04)
1. The application site is within the countryside as defined in the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004. The proposed hotel and business centre element of the scheme is contrary to: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 Policy P1/2 which states that development in the countryside will be resisted unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location; and South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 Policy RT11 which states that development to provide overnight visitor accommodation will not be permitted outside the framework of settlements except in the cases of modest extensions to existing facilities or the change of use/conversion of existing buildings not requiring large extensions. There are no material considerations which indicate that the proposal should be approved as a departure from the development plan.
  2. The proposal involves the erection of an 8 metre high 60 bedroom hotel and business centre, extensions to the café building, a first floor link between these two buildings and associated parking. Although well located to other roadside facilities, by virtue of its size, even with additional landscaping, the proposed development would seriously detract from the visual amenities of the countryside. The proposal is therefore contrary to South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 Policy EN1 which states that planning permission will not be permitted for development which would have an adverse effect on the character and local distinctiveness of the East Anglian Chalk Landscape Character Area.
  3. In the absence of an archaeological evaluation of the site, a full consideration of the nature, extent, quality and survival of archaeological remains, including the barrow known to be located within the development area cannot be made. An informed judgement cannot therefore be made as to whether any planning consent will need to include provisions for the recording, and more importantly, the preservation of important archaeological remains in situ. The proposal is therefore contrary to South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 Policy EN15 which requires an appropriate level of assessment and/or evaluation to be carried out by a suitably qualified person so that the

archaeological implications of any proposed development can be established in all cases involving proposed works at sites of known or potential archaeological interest.

**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/0265/04/F, S/2261/02/F, S/1788/99/F, S/1787/99/F, S/1904/98/F, S/0163/98/F and S/0649/97/F.

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