

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

S/1971/04/F - Pampisford
Extension and Conversion of Barn into Dwelling - Mill Farm House, Mill Farm Lane for Mrs S Lee

Recommendation: Refusal
Date for Determination: 17th November 2004

Departure Application

Site and Proposal

1. The application site is located in the Green Belt to the south-west of the villages of Sawston and Pampisford and on the west side of the Sawston bypass. It is occupied by a large brick and slate barn that is attached to and forms part of the curtilage of a substantial red brick dwelling, Mill Farm House. Between the barn and the farmhouse is a single storey element that is occupied as an annexe to the main dwelling. To the west of the site is a dwelling whilst to the north-west are a range of barns for which consent has been granted for conversion to a veterinary examination room/assistant's accommodation. Further to the west are Pampisford Mill and a barn used for commercial purposes.
2. This full application, submitted on 22nd September 2004 proposes to extend and convert the barn to create a 2 bedroom dwelling. A number of windows and openings would be added at ground and first floor level and also inserted into the roofspace in order to enable accommodation to be provided at first floor level. Access would be via Mill Farm Lane to an existing gateway into Mill Farm. It would then go through part of the existing annexe to a parking area at the rear of the barn.

Planning History

3. **S/1034/91/F** - Permission granted for extension and garage subject to a Section 106 Agreement to link the occupancy of the development to that of the main dwelling.
4. **S/1682/85/F** - Permission granted for flat annexe

Planning Policy

5. The site is within the countryside and Green Belt.
6. 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.
7. **Policy P9/2a** of the Structure Plan states that development within the Green Belt will be limited to that required for agriculture and forestry, outdoor sport, cemeteries or other uses appropriate to a rural area.

8. Local Plan 2004 **Policy SE8** states that residential development outside village frameworks will not be permitted.
9. Paragraph 17 of Planning Policy Statement 7 'Sustainable Development in Rural Area' (2004) states that "The Government's policy is to support the re-use of appropriately located and suitably constructed existing buildings in the countryside where this would meet sustainable development objectives. Re-use for economic development purposes will usually be preferable, but residential conversions may be more appropriate in some locations, and for some types of building. Planning authorities should therefore set out in LDDs (Local Development Documents) their policy criteria for permitting the conversion and re-use of buildings in the countryside for economic, residential and any other purposes, including mixed uses.

These criteria should take account of:

- The potential impact on the countryside and landscapes and wildlife;
 - Specific local, economic and social needs and opportunities;
 - Settlement patterns and accessibility to service centres, markets and housing;
 - The suitability of different types of buildings, and of different scales, of re-use;
 - The need to preserve, or the desirability of preserving, buildings of historic or architectural importance or interest, or which otherwise contribute to local character.
10. Local Plan 2004 **Policy GB2** states that that 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 (in part) the re-use of buildings provided that:
 - The development does not result in a materially greater impact on the openness and purpose of the Green Belt;
 - Strict control is exercised over any proposed extensions and associated uses of surrounding land;
 - The buildings are of permanent and substantial construction and capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction; and
 - The form, bulk and general design of the buildings are in keeping with their surroundings.

Consultations

11. **Pampisford Parish Council** recommends approval.
12. **The Conservation Manager** states that the barn, which appears to date from the 19th century is, in itself, of little historic interest. However, it has some group value when seen in association with Mill Farm House and the adjacent Mill. The group of buildings are clearly visible in the landscape and can be seen from the A505 to the south, the A1301 to the east and the railway line to the west. The barn makes a significant contribution to the group of buildings and should therefore be retained. The barn has been well maintained but to ensure its retention over the longer term, it may be necessary to find an appropriate new use. Whilst the details of the alterations do much to retain a barn-like aesthetic, more could have been done to retain some of the existing features and more of the historic fabric of the building, namely:
 - The application does not propose to use two existing openings in the east elevation, rather it seeks to introduce new windows elsewhere;

- The proposals include the provision of two new fireplaces but neither use the original fireplace or flue;
 - The diamond shaped arrangement of perforated bricks on the north elevation should be retained;
 - The roof pitch of the single storey block on the south side should be retained at its current angle;
 - The new garden room on the south side will have an awkward relationship to the retained brick garden wall on the west.
13. **The Chief Environmental Health Officer** recommends conditions are attached to any approval relating to the times during the construction period when power operated machinery shall not be operated.
14. **The Environment Agency** states that the application does not consider sufficiently issues of foul water drainage. As such, a condition requiring details to be submitted should be attached to any planning permission.

Representations

15. No representations have been received from local residents.

Representations by the applicant and the applicant's agent

16. The following points have been raised in representations submitted by the applicant and her agent:
- The location, arrangement and proximity of the barn to residential buildings at Mill Farm do not make this a suitable site for any commercial operation;
 - The barn has historical interest in its own right and in the group setting;
 - The barn is currently used only for domestic storage;
 - Very little external change to the building is planned so it would visually remain as part of the group of buildings;
 - The proposal would maintain the character of the site and make best use of this attractive group of rural buildings;
 - There would be no impact on neighbouring properties;
 - The application is in accordance with all objectives of government advice and with Policy GB2 of the Local Plan;
 - This is a similar scenario to recently approved applications at Greenhedge Farm (S/1734/04/F and S/1735/04/F). In addition, the adjacent farm buildings are currently being converted into a dwelling;
 - The applicant's husband died in 2002 and her children have left home. She lives alone in the large farmhouse and has sole responsibility for her in-laws who live in the attached annexe;
 - The applicant wishes to convert the barn for her own use and to retain the in-laws current living arrangements, thereby ensuring minimum disruption to their independent living. It is intended that the large house would be sold separately leaving the barn and annexe as a combined property;

Planning Comments - Key Issues

17. The key issues in relation to this application are:

- a) The principle of converting the building to a dwelling and whether there are any material considerations which outweigh the presumption against residential development in the countryside; and
 - b) The effect of the proposal on the visual amenities of the countryside.
18. Policy SE8 of the Local Plan states that residential development in the countryside (which applies to both new development and the conversion of existing buildings) will not be permitted. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy, in principle.
19. This Authority has previously granted consent for the residential use of traditional barns where the benefits of finding an appropriate use for a historic/vernacular building outweighs the harm of allowing a dwelling away from settlements and local facilities. The Conservation Manager was therefore asked to comment on the quality of the barn and whether it is considered to be of sufficient historic importance to warrant its retention. He has advised that the barn, in itself, is of little historic interest but that it makes a significant contribution to the group of buildings and should therefore be retained. He also states that it may be necessary to find an appropriate new use for the barn to ensure its retention in the longer term.
20. I am satisfied that the building would not lend itself to employment use given its proximity to residential properties and the consequent noise and disturbance that would be suffered by the occupiers of adjoining dwellings, most notably Mill Farm House itself. The suitability of using the building for holiday-let accommodation has not been explored as part of this application. Whilst it is accepted that the existing building does need to be retained, Officers consider that the most appropriate use for the barn is as existing, ie - as an ancillary building to the main dwelling. There is no evidence to suggest that the barn cannot continue to be used for this purpose. Indeed, given that the Conservation Manager has identified that the importance of the building lies in its group rather than individual value, this strengthens the argument that Mill Farm House, the annexe and the barn should remain as one unit.
21. I do sympathise with the applicant's personal circumstances and her need to remain close to her in-laws. I have considered whether a personal condition would be appropriate in this instance. However, such a condition could not prevent the sale of the main house and the subsequent subdivision of the site into two planning units.
22. With regards to the visual impact of the barn, the Conservation Manager considers the barn to be structurally sound and capable of conversion. However, the alterations proposed do make the barn appear overly domestic thereby detracting from its existing character.
23. The applicants have referred to barns at Greenhedge Farm in Stapleford which Members may recall were given consent for conversion to two dwellings at Committee in November 2004. Consent was only granted for these dwellings as there was an extant permission on the site dating from early 2004 prior to the adoption of the current Local Plan. At the time applications were being considered against Draft Deposit policies as well as policies within the 1993 adopted Local Plan. In the latter, tentative support was given to the residential conversion of traditional vernacular buildings.

Recommendation

24. Refusal:

1. The site is in the countryside and Green Belt as defined in the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004. The barn makes a significant visual contribution to the group of buildings at Mill Farm and should therefore be retained. However, insufficient evidence has been submitted to explain why the barn cannot continue in use as an ancillary outbuilding to Mill Farm House and why an alternative use is required to ensure its long-term retention. There are no material considerations in this instance to justify setting aside Policy SE8 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan which states that residential development will not be permitted outside village frameworks, and, as it has not been demonstrated why the development is essential in this particular rural location, the proposal is also contrary to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 Policies P1/2 and P9/2a.

2. Notwithstanding the above, the alterations proposed to the barn would result in the structure appearing overly domestic thereby detracting from its rural character, the character of the group of buildings at Mill Farm and the impact of the site upon its surroundings. The development would therefore be contrary to the aims of Planning Policy Statement 7 (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas) which requires development in rural areas to avoid any undue harm to the character of the area.

Background Papers: The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Planning Policy Statement 7

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004

File references S/1971/04/F, S/1034/91/F and S/1682/85/F

Contact Officer: Lorraine Casey - Senior Planning Assistant
Telephone: (01954) 713251