

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

6 July 2011

AUTHOR/S: Executive Director (Operational Services)/
Corporate Manager (Planning and New Communities)

S/0226/11 - TOFT

**Erection of overnight accommodation and extension to existing clubhouse -
Cambridge Meridian Golf Club, Comberton Road, Toft, Cambridge,
Cambridgeshire, CB23 2RY
for Miss V Saunders & Miss J Wisson**

Recommendation: Refusal

Date for Determination: 04 April 2011

**This application has been reported to the Planning Committee for
determination at the request of the Development Control Manager**

Members will visit the site on 6th July 2011

Site and Proposal

1. Cambridge Meridian Golf Club is located to the east side of the village of Toft. It is outside the designated Toft village framework, and is within the Cambridge Green Belt. Access is gained from the B1046, serving an informally laid out car park area parallel to the road. There is a two-storey clubhouse building at the site, with a row of dormer windows in the south elevation overlooking the course. To the west of the clubhouse are two large agricultural buildings and a barn used for storage of golf buggys. These buildings are not included within the Green Belt despite being outside the village framework. These buildings are also within the Toft Conservation Area, although the clubhouse and golf course lie outside.
2. The full application, received on 7th February 2011, seeks the erection of overnight accommodation at the golf club, and also seeks an extension to the existing clubhouse. The proposed hotel would be physically linked at ground floor level with the existing clubhouse, and would extend to the east. The hotel would provide 29 en-suite rooms, with guests using the existing clubhouse facilities for meals. The works to the existing clubhouse involve a small kitchen extension, and the addition of a conservatory element for dining. The application is accompanied by a Supporting Statement, a Tree Survey, and Arboricultural Implications Assessment, and a Planning, Design and Access Statement.

Planning History

3. Planning permission for the change of use of the land to a golf course was granted through application **S/0153/90/F**. The clubhouse was originally granted consent through application **S/0254/94/F**, and was extended to

include a changing room through application **S/0490/96/F**, and to include a dining area through application **S/0017/00/F**.

4. Planning application **S/1779/92/F** granted consent for a clubhouse and greenkeepers store. However, this application was never implemented.
5. Planning application **S/1161/09/F** granted consent for the erection of replacement buildings to provide office accommodation together with a new access and parking on the land to the west of the existing clubhouse. Conservation Area Consent for the removal of the buildings was granted through application **S/1163/09/CAC**. Works have yet to commence on this scheme.

Policies

6. **Local Development Framework Development Control Policies DPD (LDF DCP)** adopted July 2007: **DP/1** Sustainable Development, **DP/2** Design of New Development, **DP/3** Development Criteria, **DP/7** Development Frameworks, **GB/1** Development in the Green Belt, **GB/2** Mitigating the Impact of Development in the Green Belt, **GB/5** Recreation in the Green Belt, **ET/10** Tourist Facilities and Visitor Accommodation, **NE/1** Energy Efficiency, **NE/3** Renewable Energy Technologies in New Development, **NE/6** Biodiversity, **NE/12** Water Conservation, **NE/15** Noise Pollution, **CH/5** Conservation Areas, **TR/1** Planning for More Sustainable Travel & **TR/2** Car and Cycle Parking Standards.
7. **District Design Guide SPD** adopted March 2010, **Development Affecting Conservation Areas SPD** adopted January 2009, and **Biodiversity SPD** adopted July 2009.
8. **Circular 11/95 – The Use of Conditions in Planning Permissions:** Advises that conditions should be necessary, relevant to planning, relevant to the development permitted, enforceable, precise and reasonable in all other respects.

Consultations

9. **Toft Parish Council** recommends approval of the scheme, noting it will assist local business and generate employment, and it will help to protect the Green Belt.
10. The **Council's Conservation Officer** notes serious concerns relating to the bulk, form, design, proportions, character and identity of the building on the entrance to Toft village and its Conservation Area.
11. The **Council's Tree Officer** has no objection to the proposal, subject to tree protection to be installed prior to any development works. The **Council's Landscape Officer** suggests additions to the front hedge, with additional tree planting suggested around the car park.
12. **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue** requests a condition on any consent seeking adequate provision be made for fire hydrants across the site. It is

noted that access and facilities for the fire service should meet relevant Building Regulations.

13. The **Local Highways Authority** have verbally confirmed they have no concerns regarding the likely increase in use of the access from the B1046, as trips are likely to be related to the course.
14. The application has been discussed with the **Economic Development Panel** on different occasions. At the latest meeting with up-to-date information, the benefit to the community from the creation of local jobs and the benefits to existing facilities in the village were considered a benefit to the village and South Cambridgeshire District as a whole.

Representations

15. A letter of objection has been received from a Toft resident (no address provided) on grounds of encroachment on Green Belt land, visual impact and environmental detriment, and the lack of guarantee that jobs would go to local people.

Planning Comments

16. The key considerations in the determination of this application are whether the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt, whether it would cause any other harm in addition to that caused by inappropriateness, and whether there are any very special circumstances that clearly outweigh the harm caused by the development by way of inappropriateness and in any other respect.

Inappropriateness

17. The site is located within the Cambridge Green Belt, and therefore guidance within Planning Policy Guidance 2: Green Belts (PPG2) is essential for the determination of the scheme. Paragraph 3.4 of PPG2 lists forms of development that are considered appropriate by definition. One of these is "essential facilities for outdoor sports and outdoor recreation" with examples of small changing rooms provided. The proposed development is not considered to fall into this or any other of these categories, and therefore the proposed overnight accommodation is inappropriate by definition. Similarly, the proposed kitchen extension and conservatory are inappropriate by definition.
18. PPG 2 notes "Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt", and continues "very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development will not exist unless the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations".

Other Harm

19. Policy ET/10 of the LDF DCP 2007 states that overnight visitor and holiday accommodation outside of development frameworks will only be permitted by change of use/conversion or through either appropriate replacement of

buildings or modest extensions to existing facilities. Given the scale of the proposal, it is not considered a “modest” extension, and therefore the proposal would also be contrary to this policy. Should the application be supported, it would represent a Departure from Policy ET/10. Given that the proposal would also be a Departure to Green Belt policy, any approval may need to be referred to the Secretary of State. Members will be updated if that is considered the case in this instance.

20. The building itself would be linked at ground floor level to the existing clubhouse, with a covered way and reception at ground floor level. This then extends to a section of two-storey development that measures 27.5m in length with a height of between 8.3m and 9m dependant upon the levels. The two-storey element would be between 17.5 and 15.2m in width, necessitating the need for a double-pitched roof with valley in between. The eastern element of the proposal returns to single storey, with gables to the rear and both sides. The building as a whole extends approximately 50m in length.
21. The building would be located almost parallel with the B1046, and set approximately 44m from the road at its closest point. There is a parking area to the front, which is shown on the plan to be more formally laid out than existing. There is a small hedge along Comberton Road, with some planting along the boundary. The development would however be easily visible from Comberton Road, and particularly when entering the village from the east. This would not be easily mitigated by additional hedge and tree planting as proposed.
22. The design creates a long building with a variety of gables and elements. Little effort has been taken to respect the rural setting of the building. The two-storey element has been designed to appear like a barn. However, the need for a double-pitched roof and the design of the single storey elements does not represent a traditional barn style of design. The use of the building does present the need for openings to each room, which means a higher number of openings than what would be expected in such a building. The south elevation shows a more urban form with a number of Juliette balconies facing the course. The proposal also seeks use of matching bricks and concrete tiles, which again would not be respectful of the countryside location.
23. The Toft Conservation Area begins to the west of the existing clubhouse and includes the existing agricultural buildings. This effectively signals the start of the village. By proposing a hotel of such size and bulk parallel with the road, it will dominate the entrance to the village and as a result would not respect the setting of the Conservation Area.
24. The comments of the Trees Officer and Landscape Officer are noted. Any approval on the site will require adequate protection of existing planting, and a scheme of new planting to soften any development. The ability to create more screening does not outweigh concerns regarding the scale, mass, form, siting and design of the building discussed above.
25. The application also seeks an extension to the clubhouse itself. This includes an extended kitchen area and new conservatory overlooking the adjacent lake. At the siting of the proposed kitchen element, there is a fenced enclosure with two store units. Whilst the proposal would be significantly taller, it would “tidy up” this area, and the hip would reduce the bulk of development. The conservatory is of simple design and would blend in with

the existing building. Whilst this aspect of the development is within the Green Belt, the scale and in particular the location of the extensions are not considered to harm the openness of the Cambridge Green Belt. There are no objections to these aspects in their own right.

26. The comments from the Local Highways Authority are noted. The current access has been designed to cater for traffic accessing the course. Whilst levels of use would rise from staff and non-golf guests, the access is considered to be adequate to cope with this capacity. A planning condition regarding fire hydrants can also be added as recommended by the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue team.
27. The applicant notes Policies NE/3 and NE/12 of the LDF DCP 2007 in the Planning, Design and Access Statement. However, no details are proposed to reach the aims of these policies given the scheme is a major development. Any approved scheme would require conditions to ensure provision of renewable energy technologies and water conservation measures.

Conclusion of Other Harm

28. Officers are of the opinion that the proposed overnight accommodation is both inappropriate in principle having regard to Green Belt and tourism policy, and in terms of its impact on the surrounding area.

Very Special Circumstances

29. The original application as submitted and details within a letter dated 19th May 2011 carried little justification for the proposal. Further information has been provided received on 10th June 2011 that goes into greater depth.
30. The applicants supporting letter provides information as to why they consider the development is necessary. Below is a summary of the points raised:
 - a) The purpose of the Green Belt in this location is to stop Toft merging with Comberton, and there is a clear buffer between the two.
 - b) The proposal meets the aims of the Green Belt as it provides opportunities for access to overnight accommodation in the country promoting sport and recreation near the city.
 - c) The increase in Cambridgeshire golf course numbers from 10 in 1990 to 31 in 2011 means there are not enough players for each course. The majority have to rely on additional facilities to survive, such as the fitness suite and hotel at Abbotsley, the lodges and bowling alley at Pidley, and the fitness centre, swimming pool and caravan park at Bourn.
 - d) The inability to provide a 9-hole course from the existing layout. Gog Magog course can do this given the location of their clubhouse in the centre of the course.
 - e) Financial inequality caused by the taxation at Cambridge Meridian in relation to other clubs exempt from VAT.
 - f) Without further development, the golf course is likely to be lost to the community as it is not financially sustainable.
 - g) The granting of a hotel elsewhere on University land sets a precedent for the proposal.
 - h) Creation of jobs during construction and the running of the hotel.

- i) The fact that the daily manager of the site does not receive a salary, and injections of money into the business from the Abbotsley course or from the owners occurs.
31. Of particular merit are points f) and h) above. Despite the lack of financial information provided, the concerns about the future of the site are understood. It is an employer within a village setting, and closure and return to countryside would not be a welcome scenario. The creation of additional jobs, albeit a number part time and in lower paid roles, would again be of benefit. Whilst there is no guarantee they would be taken by local people, any potential employee is likely to be relatively local.
32. As a whole, whilst some of the evidence provided and summarised above is not considered to provide adequate justification, the need to expand the business to make it financially sustainable and the creation of jobs are considered, as a matter of principle, capable of clearly outweighing the harm to the Green Belt.
33. Officers however remain extremely concerned regarding the size of the scheme, particularly the need to provide 29 bedrooms at the site. The applicant has stated this is due to viability, where economies of scale make it more difficult to operate a smaller unit. However, no further justification has been provided to support this and therefore an extension of this scale and form. Whilst the principle of development may be acceptable, there remain concerns regarding the required number of rooms, and therefore the principle for a 29-bed hotel has not been established. A reason for refusal will be added to clarify this issue.
34. Of the other points raised by the applicants, a number are not considered relevant. No precedent has been set with regard to other hotels in the area. With reference to point a), the scheme would undermine the aims of the Green Belt rather than support it. Comparison with other courses again does not set any precedents given the differing locations and constraints of each course.

Decision/Recommendation

35. Refusal, for the following reasons
1. The application seeks the erection of a building to be used for overnight accommodation within the Cambridge Green Belt. It is considered inappropriate by definition in line with Planning Policy Guidance 2 (Green Belts). The application is therefore contrary to Policy GB/1 of the Local Development Framework Development Control Policies (LDF DCP) 2007, which states there is a general presumption against inappropriate development in the Cambridge Green Belt.
 2. The application site is also located outside of the designated Toft village framework, and is adjacent to the Toft Conservation Area. The proposal would create a development measuring approximately 50m in length, including a two-storey element of 27.5m running parallel with the B1046 that has a double-pitched roof with a valley in between. The two-storey elements would range between 8.3m-9m in height dependent upon the levels of the site. There would be clear views of the development from the B1046,

especially when approaching the village from the east. The bulk and scale, the proportions of the building, and the overall design are not considered to respect the rural setting of the building, and it would be significantly out of context with its location. It would have a clear impact upon the openness of the Green Belt and would neither preserve nor enhance the setting of Toft Conservation Area. The application is therefore contrary to Policy GB/2 of the (LDF DCP) 2007, which states any development considered appropriate within the Green Belt must be located and designed so that it does not have an adverse effect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt; Policy DP/2 1a and 1f of the LDF DCP 2007 which states all new development must be of high quality design, and as appropriate to the scale and nature of the development, should preserve or enhance the character of the local area, and should be compatible with its location and appropriate in terms of (amongst others) scale, mass, form, siting, design, proportion in relation to the surrounding area; Policy DP/3 of the LDF DCP 2007 which states planning permission will not be granted where the proposed development would have an unacceptable adverse impact on village character and on the countryside; and Policy CH/5 of the LDF DCP 2007 which states planning applications for development proposals affecting Conservation Areas will be determined in accordance with legislative provisions and national policy.

3. The application seeks 29 bedrooms to be provided as part of the scheme. In light of the constraints of the Cambridge Green Belt and concerns regarding the bulk and design discussed above, the applicant has failed to satisfactorily demonstrate why the hotel would require so many rooms, and why a lower number could not be sustainable for the future of the site. The applicant has therefore failed to demonstrate very special circumstances to clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt resulting from the development of this size and form.

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

- **Local Development Framework Development Control Policies 2007.**
- **District Design Guide SPD** adopted March 2010, **Development Affecting Conservation Areas SPD** adopted January 2009, and **Biodiversity SPD** adopted July 2009.
- **Circular 11/95 – The Use of Conditions in Planning Permissions.**
- **Planning File ref: S/0226/11, S/1163/09/CAC, S/1161/09/F, S/1779/92/F, S/0017/00/F, S/0490/96/F, S/0254/94/F and S/0153/90/F.**

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