

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Planning Committee 2 November 2011  
**AUTHOR/S:** Executive Director (Operational Services)/  
Corporate Manager (Planning and New Communities)

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**S/1809/11 - HARDWICK**  
**Change of Use from Motorcycle Testing to Motorcycle Testing and Car License Testing - 25, St Neots Road for Driving Standards Agency**

**Recommendation: Delegated Approval**

**Date for Determination: 6 November 2011**

**This application has been reported to the Planning Committee for determination because the potential recommendation of approval is contrary to that of the Parish Council**

**Members will visit the site on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2011**

### **Site and Proposal**

1. St Neots Road runs across the northern pinnacle of the village of Hardwick, and largely consists of a ribbon of residential dwellings, with some business units interspersed. The section of St Neots Road located immediately adjacent to the application site consists of mostly frontage dwellings and is outside of the village framework for Hardwick and within the Cambridge Green Belt.
2. The application site is a 't-shaped' parcel of land that is located behind the frontage dwellings which is accessed between the two dwellings at 17 and 25a St Neots Road. The site is currently gated at the point of access with the public highway. The entrance road into the site measures approximately 5.2m wide and is separated from the neighbouring dwellings by 2m high close board fencing. The site is currently in use by the DSA (Driving Standards Agency) for motorcycle license testing. There is a monopitch building on site with an enclosed testing area beyond. The roads and testing area are enclosed by tall post and mesh fencing, whilst a significant amount of new planting is in place.
3. The full application, validated on 12th September 2011, seeks the site to be used as a license-testing centre for cars as well as motorcycles. The application is accompanied by a Planning Supporting Statement.

### **Planning History**

4. The site has an extensive planning history stretching back to 1962. The most relevant planning history for the site is as follows:

5. **S/1463/08/F** – Refusal for the increase in opening hours for the use, varying condition 9 of the application S/1463/08/F.
6. **S/2062/07/F** – Approval by Planning Committee of a change of use of the land to a motor cycle testing centre and the erection of an associated building.
7. **S/0962/91/F** – Approval by Planning Committee for the use of the site for industrial purposes.
8. **S/0961/91/F** – Approval by Planning Committee for the use of the site as a building merchants. This use was implemented and hours of operation were not restricted, although conditions prevented the use of power operated machinery at times of the day and restricted the noise to be emitted by the use. Changes of use that would otherwise have been permitted by legislation were also controlled to require prior planning permission.
9. **S/0960/91/F** – Approval by Planning Committee of the extension of one the existing buildings on the site.
10. **S/0701/88/F** – Approval of application to remove of Condition 1 of S/1077/79/F to remove personal restriction of building material storage use.
11. **S/1077/79/F** – Approval to allow personal change of use of part of the site from agricultural engineering purposes to building material storage.

### **Policies**

12. **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 Framework, **GB/1** Development in the Green Belt, **GB/2** Mitigating the Impact of development in the Green Belt, **NE/6** Biodiversity, **NE/15** Noise Pollution & **TR/2** Car and Cycle Parking Standards.
13. **District Design Guide SPD** – adopted March 2010.
14. **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**

15. **Hardwick Parish Council** recommends refusal of the application. They note concerns regarding pre-test practicing taking place in the village, two vehicles would struggle to pass along the access, the site does not have adequate on-site parking, an increase in journeys will increase noise disturbance, dangers to cyclists along St Neots Road, and that it is dangerous for learner drivers to pull out into 40mph traffic.

16. The **Environment Agency** notes that part of the site may be unsurfaced. Given the previous builders merchant use, trapped gullies should be used for any further parking required on site.
17. Members will be updated on comments from the Local Highways Authority. The Environment Health Officer has not commented within the consultation period, but it is considered necessary to get an opinion given the likely increased noise resulting from the development.

### **Representations**

18. Letters have been received from the occupiers of five adjacent properties, including 17 and 25a St Neots Road located either side of the access. The objections noted are as follows:
  - Increases in the level of traffic in the area
  - Increased noise and disturbance from vehicle movements
  - Lack of on-site parking and the need to park in resident lay-bys
  - Highway safety concerns given the narrow access and its location, and the cycle way along St Neots Road.
  - The hours of use of the proposal.

### **Planning Comments**

19. The key considerations for the determination of this application are the impact upon the Cambridge Green Belt, impact upon the amenity of the occupiers of neighbouring properties, and highway safety and parking provision.

#### *Impact upon the Cambridge Green Belt*

20. The site currently has consent for motorcycle testing only, and the associated building has been erected on the site. The application therefore requires no physical changes to the site in its current form. Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (Green Belts) does not provide any guidance for the intensification of uses. It does state that the re-use of existing buildings should not harm the openness of the Cambridge Green Belt as the building is already in situ. Members should be aware that the existing use was considered appropriate, especially given the previous use of the site as a builders merchant. It is noted that further car parking spaces may be required (see below), but these would be on existing hardstanding areas. Given the nature of the proposal, no harm would result to the aims or the setting of the Cambridge Green Belt.

#### *Impact upon the Amenity of the Occupiers of Neighbouring Properties*

21. The proposal would incorporate both motorcycle and car license testing on site. The applicant has confirmed that the car testing would be in addition to the motorcycle testing rather than incorporated within contrary to the information within the supporting statement. The current number of movements to the site are three staff arriving and leaving (6 movements) and seven tests a day for three instructors (84 movements given arrival, departure on test, arrival from test, and departure from site). This total 90 trips. The proposal seeks a further three members of staff undertaking seven car license tests a day. The proposal would result in 180 trips a day to the site. It

is noted the applicant states 174 trips, but this figure appears to result from an error.

22. The applicant has confirmed in their e-mail of 14th October 2011 that use of the site would be restricted to "normal" working hours (08.30-17.00 Monday to Saturday), and the need for car testing at the site is given demand exceeding capacity at the Cowley Road, Cambridge centre, and the closure of the Chesterton Road centre. The 180 trips per day would only occur if demand cannot be catered for elsewhere. No cars would use the testing track at the rear of the site.
23. Both nos. 17 and 25a are located by the access track to the site, and their objections are noted. These properties are those most affected by the proposal. Whilst the site does back on to other gardens, these are long giving good separation between private areas and the site. Also, planting from the landscape scheme of S/2062/07/F is beginning to establish to create a further barrier. With regard to the frontage properties, these are bungalows, although 17 St Neots Road does have first floor accommodation in the roof. The shared boundaries between both properties and the access are 1.8m high panel fences. The access itself is blocked paved, which does allow relatively quiet running compared to other surfaces.
24. Occupiers of these two dwellings would certainly be aware of the increased traffic entering and exiting the site, especially from the rear garden areas. Members should however be aware of the previous use of the site as a builder's merchant. A Transport Statement was submitted with application S/2062/07/F to show the amount of trips this use created. On Tuesday 20th February 2007, traffic into the site was monitored between the "peak" times of 07.00-10.00 and 16.00-19.00. It found that 96 movements occurred in this time, of which 34 were from Heavy Goods Vehicles. It is unfortunate that these figures do not note the intervening four hours between 10.00 and 16.00. Members should be aware that whilst this information is useful in analysing the potential impact, it would hold little weight in the decision making process.
25. Given no HGV's would visit the site, and approximately half of trips would be from motorcycles, it is unlikely that there would be any serious increase in noise and disturbance from the previous use. Members will be updated on comments from the Environmental Health Officer on this matter.
26. Should further on-site parking come forward, there may be a need for further landscaping in order to screen off this area, which will also reduce the impact upon occupiers of the neighbouring properties.

#### *Highway Safety and Parking Provision*

27. The access to the site has a width of 5m. Having parked in the front of it, there appears adequate room for two vehicles to safely pass. There should therefore be no need for vehicles to wait on St Neots Road to enter the site. The existing gates are also set into the site and would not impact upon the passing of vehicles. There is excellent visibility in both directions given the width of the grass verge. It is noted that St Neots Road does have a 40mph speed limit. However, the relevant vehicle-to-vehicle visibility splay can easily be achieved.

28. The excellent visibility also includes the cycle lane. There is local concern regarding the potential impact upon cyclist safety. However, the entrance allows clear views of cyclists and there should be no increase in harm to such cyclists. The Local Highways Authority has verbally confirmed that there would be no impact upon highway safety, and Members will be updated if formal comments are received.
29. There is also local concern that vehicles will practice within the village prior to arriving at the test centre. Unfortunately, there can be no controls of this through the planning process as any condition is unlikely to meet the tests set out in Circular 11/95. However, in reality the amount of vehicles who may do this is unlikely to cause any serious impact upon residents within the village.
30. With regards to parking provision, there are only five car parking spaces on site, plus adequate designated motorcycle spaces. Given the introduction of three staff directly related to car testing, and the potential for three tests to be carried out at one time, it is suggested that a maximum nine spaces should be provided on site. The application does not include any new parking areas, but the applicant is aware of the shortfall and Members will be updated regarding any new spaces. As submitted, it is considered there is a shortfall of on-site parking. There is local concern regarding the potential parking of cars in the lay-bys by the entrance. Given the nature of the use, this is unlikely to happen. However, vehicles arriving early could wait in such locations. This would be a short-term disruption to residents and should be avoided if possible.

#### **Decision/Recommendation**

31. Delegated approval, subject to comments from the Local Highways Authority and the Environmental Health Officer, and receipt of further details regarding further onsite car parking.
32. If approved, conditions would be required regarding time implementation of the consent, approved plans, a maximum combined 42 tests per day for motorcycles and cars, retention of parking areas, and restrictive conditions preventing the use to be carried out at any other time than 08.30-17.00 Monday-Saturday, and preventing cars from using the test track at the rear of the site. A landscaping condition may also be applicable.

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

- South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Development Control Policies 2007.
- Local Development Framework District Design Guide SPD.
- Circular 11/95 – The Use of Conditions in Planning Permissions
- Planning Files S/1809/11, S/1463/08/F, S/2062/07/F, S/0962/91/F, S/0961/91/F, S/0960/91/F, S/0701/88/F & S/1077/79/F.

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