

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

S/0011/05/F - Babraham Conversion of 2 Houses into 4 Flats for The Babraham Institute

Recommendation: Approval
Date for Determination: 1st March 2005

Departure Application

Site and Proposal

1. Nos. 33 and 34 The Close form a pair of semi-detached houses that are situated at the end of a group of semi-detached properties at The Close. To the southwest and northeast of the site are amenity grass areas. Neighbouring properties to the northeast, Nos. 32, 32A and 31 and 31A are 4 flats previously converted from 2 semi-detached houses. To the west of The Close is The Babraham Institute.
2. The application, received on 4th January 2005, proposes the conversion of 2 semi-detached houses into 4 flats with the addition of two staircases at the side elevations and 4 off-street parking spaces and 2 drop kerbs within the residential curtilage.

Planning History

3. S/1035/91/F - Planning permission was granted in 1991 for conversion of semi-detached pair of houses into 4 self-contained flats at Nos. 31 and 32 The Close
4. S/0149/92/F - Planning permission was granted in 1992 for conversion of semi-detached pair of houses into 4 self-contained flats at Nos. 33 and 34 The Close

Planning Policy

5. The existing dwellings and the curtilage are within the countryside and the Green Belt, and adjacent to the Babraham Conservation Area.
6. **Policy P1/2** of the **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure 2003** states that development in the countryside will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
7. **Policy P9/2a** of the **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure 2003** states that new development within the Green Belt will be limited to uses appropriate to a rural area.
8. **Policy SE8** of the **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** states that residential development outside village frameworks will not be permitted.
9. **Policy GB2** of the **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** defines development which is not inappropriate in the Green Belt and states that planning permission will

not be granted for inappropriate development in the Green belt unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated.

10. **Policy HG13** of the **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** states in part that extensions to dwellings in the countryside will only be permitted where:
1. The proposed development would not create a separate dwelling or be capable of separation from the existing dwelling;
 2. The extension does not exceed the height of the original dwelling;
 3. The extension does not lead to a 50% increase or more in volume or gross internal gross floor area of the original dwelling; and
 4. The proposed extension is in scale and character with the existing dwelling and would not materially change the impact of the dwelling on its surrounding.

The aim of this policy is to minimise the impact of development upon the landscape and to prevent the gradual reduction in the stock of small and medium sized dwellings in the countryside.

11. **Policy EN30** of the **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** states that proposals will be expected to preserve or enhance the special character and appearance of the Conservation Areas.
12. **Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (Green Belts)** outlines the presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Paragraph 3.4 implies that extensions that result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building are classed as inappropriate and by definition, harmful to the Green Belt.

Consultation

13. **Babraham Parish Council** approves the application
14. **Conservation Manager** raises no objection

Representations

15. Supporting information submitted by the applicant:
- Nos. 33 and 34 are not up to the Babraham Institute's current letting standard and No. 33 has had to stand unlet for nearly 2 years;
 - The 'family' houses at The Babraham Institute are usually all let and there is a waiting list for flats. Flats are attractive to more junior and lower-paid staff;
 - The accommodation in the Institute is useful for recruiting and retaining staff. The properties on The Close are for the use of staff or students at the Institute and it contributes to Green Transport objectives to allow staff to walk to work. Sub-letting is not permitted and there is no intention to sell any of the properties on The Close;
 - The proposal would supplement the existing accommodation for rent with a greater capacity for staff and their spouses/partners both work at the Institute especially benefiting lower-paid staff.

Planning Comments - Key Issues

16. The key issues in relation to this application are:
 - Impact upon character and appearance of the countryside and the Green Belt;
 - Whether the proposal, which is sited outside the village framework, would protect the countryside from gradual encroachment on the edges of the village and to help guard against an incremental growth in the number of dwellings in unsustainable location; and
 - Whether there are any material considerations which outweigh the presumption against residential development in the countryside
17. National and development plan policies confirm that development in the Green Belt is not necessarily inappropriate as long as the development would not materially increase the impact of the site on the surrounding countryside and there are very special circumstances can be demonstrated. In view of the applicant's supporting information that the proposed flats are exclusively for the use of staff and students working at the adjacent Babraham Institute, the impact upon the countryside and the Green Belt, and the issue on sustainability are considered below.
18. I have no objection in principle to the external alterations at the rear and to the front, and extensions to the original dwellings with the additions of the staircases at the side elevations. I do not consider that the proposal will have an adverse impact upon the openness of the Green Belt given that the alterations are in scale and character with the existing dwellings and would not materially change the impact of the dwellings upon the countryside and the Green Belt. The proposal generally meets the aim of Policy HG13 of the Local Plan 2004 to minimise the impact of development upon the landscape and to prevent the gradual reduction in the stock of small and medium sized dwellings in the countryside.
19. Policy P1/2 of the Structure Plan 2003 and SE8 of the Local Plan 2004 require residential development to be sited within village frameworks in order to protect the countryside from gradual encroachment on the edges of villages and to help guard against incremental growth in unsustainable locations.
20. It is confirmed by the agent that the flats will be used to accommodate staff and student at the Babarham Institute. It is considered that the proposal to convert 2 houses into 4 flats could reduce the need to travel, particularly by car; therefore, it would not materially increase the impact of the site on the surrounding countryside. The proposal contributes to sustainability in this rural location with little public transport.
21. Given that it is confirmed by the applicant that the future occupiers of the proposed flats will be the staff and students at the Institute and I consider that it is a special circumstance in this instance to outweigh the presumption against inappropriate development in the countryside and the Green Belt. I support the proposal as a Departure from the Development Plan and my recommendation is one of approval.
22. The development would not significantly prejudice the implementation of the development plan's policies and proposals. If Members are minded to support the application, it would not therefore be necessary to refer it to the Secretary of State.

Recommendation

23. Approval subject to conditions:

1. Standard Condition A - Time limited permission (Reason A)
2. Prior to the occupation of the flats, hereby permitted, the parking shall be provided in accordance with layout shown within the 1: 200 scale site plan and thereafter maintained (Reason - In the interest of highway safety)

Reasons for Approval

1. Although the development is not in accordance with South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 Policy SE8, it is considered to be acceptable as a departure from the development plan having regard to representation received in respect of the special circumstances that the future occupiers of the proposed flats will be the staff and students at the Institute, it is at in this instance to outweigh the presumption against inappropriateness in the countryside.
2. The approved development is considered generally to accord with the Development Plan and particularly the following policies:
 - **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003:**
Policy P1/2 (Environmental Restrictions on Development in Countryside);
Policy 9/2a (Green Belt)
 - **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004:**
Policy GB2 (General Principles in the Green Belt);
Policy HG13 (Extensions to Dwellings in the Countryside);
Policy EN30 (Development in/adjacent Conservation Areas)

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

- PPG2 –Green Belt
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- File references S/1035/91/F, S/0149/92/F and S/0011/05/F

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