

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

4 April 2012

AUTHOR/S: Corporate Manager (Planning and New Communities)

S/1383/11 - CALDECOTE

**Change of Use to Touring Caravan Park, 20 Spaces at Land Adjacent to Casa de Fosea, St Neots Road, Highfields Caldecote for Mr Nelson O'Connor
Recommendation: Delegated Approval**

Date for Determination: 14th November 2011

Notes:

This Application has been reported to the Planning Committee for determination, as the Officer recommendation is contrary to the response of Caldecote Parish Council.

Site and Proposal

1. The 1.52ha site is located to the north east of Caldecote outside of the village boundaries and close to Parish boundaries of neighbouring Hardwick. Currently the land is unkempt countryside with minimal vegetation internally. It is bound on all boundaries by hedges and trees. To the north, which runs parallel with St Neots Road is a varied and unmanaged mixture of coppiced ash trees and field hedge, to the west the boundary comprises a thick but broken line of conifer trees and neighbours Casa de Fosea a single residential unit. To the east the site is bounded by an unmanaged native predominately hawthorn hedge beyond which a track separates this area from the rest of the dwellings along St Neots Road and finally to the south is an intermittent hedgerow beyond which a mixed woodland area screens views to Caldecote. There is a small pond, not in the ownership of the applicant; this is surrounded by what appears to be dumped soil and other plant debris. Access on to the site is currently at the most northeastern corner of the plot.
2. The proposed scheme is to change the use of the land to a touring caravan park with space for up to 20 plots. A new access road will be located along the northern boundary on to St Neots Road. An internal road will allow access to 20 individual plots, each with space for a caravan and pulling vehicle. A small informal play area is proposed in the southeast corner of the plot. A services building is proposed to be centrally located in the plot. This will comprise a single storey building with male and female washing facilities, a laundry area, staff toilet, office, store and refuse area. Additional planting is also proposed around and within the site as part of the scheme.
3. The full planning application date 30 June 2011 was submitted with a landscaping, ecology and Highway report. Protected newts species are known to have been located on site.

Planning History

4. S/1708/09/F – Erection of 4 bungalows with double garages – Refused and dismissed at appeal.
S/0265/83/D – Erection of Bungalow – Refused
S/1112/81/F – Erection of House and Outbuildings – Refused.

Planning Policy

5. South Cambridgeshire LDF Core Strategy DPD, 2007:
ST/6: Group Village
6. South Cambridgeshire LDF Development Control Policies DPD, 2007:
DP/1: Sustainable Development
DP/2: Design of New Development
DP/3: Development Criteria
DP/7: Development Frameworks
NE/1: Energy Efficiency
NE/6: Biodiversity
NE/15: Noise Pollution
TR/1: Planning for More Sustainable Travel
TR/2: Car and Cycle Parking Standards
7. South Cambridgeshire LDF Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD):
Open Space in New Developments – Adopted January 2009
Biodiversity – Adopted July 2009
Landscape in New Developments – Adopted March 2010
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.
9. Circular 05/2005 (Planning Obligations) - Advises that planning obligations must be relevant to planning, necessary, directly related to the proposed development, fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind and reasonable in all other respect.

Consultations

10. **Caldecote Parish Council** – Recommends refusal for the following reasons
11. The site has been the subject of a previous application (S/1708/09/F). Although the previous application was for permanent dwellings, it is believed that reasons 1 and 3 of the original refusal are valid in this instance, namely that it is contrary to the aims of Policy DP/7 of the adopted South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework which restricts development in such locations to that required for agriculture, horticulture, forestry, outdoor recreation and other uses that need to be located in the countryside. The site would also not minimise the need for travel or reduce car dependency (Policy DP/1) and would in fact increase traffic movement in the area. Mitigation and compensation measures for the habitat for GCN are also believed to be insufficient and it is unclear whether the mitigation is located within the boundaries of the site.
12. Touring caravans can be up to 7 metres in length. The plans allow for 20 pitches on the site with hard standing of 7 x 7 allowing for 1 caravan and 1 car per plot. The density of the pitches is too high, with no amenity space and inadequate space for awnings. The density of the pitches means that the internal roads servicing the site are too narrow (some are 5 metres in width) and provide inadequate turning and reversing space.

13. There is no provision for additional parking (for visitors, service providers, etc) with the exception of a small parking bay by the toilet/office. There is also the assumption that each caravan pitch will have only one car.
14. The materials for the internal roadways have not been specified. If the roads are gravel then there will be a significant noise impact. There are also concerns of noise and disturbance to neighbouring properties in general.
15. Surface water drainage is a concern. The site is regularly waterlogged and the information as to disposal of water is not supported by a survey, which shows that the land will drain into the ditch fronting the property. Inadequate surface water drainage would affect the working of septic tanks and if connection to the main sewer is intended then there are capacity issues with the local pumping station.
16. There are no restrictions as to the opening hours for the site on the application and there is a concern that the site may attract permanent residents. There is no indication that membership of an accredited association or club will be required for site operation.
17. Should permission be granted, conditions should be applied on the following during construction
 - No work should be carried out before 8am and should finish by 6pm (1pm Saturdays).
 - No work on Sundays or bank holidays
 - Any spoil removed should not be used to raise ground levels and create neighbouring flood problems.
 - Parking and compounds should be provided on site if possible to ensure that disturbance to nearby properties is kept to a minimum
 - Roads used by any site traffic should be kept free of mud and if necessary regularly swept. Wheel washing facilities should be used.
 - Planting plans should be agreed before any construction is started to ensure existing planting is preserved if possible.
 - Water harvester should be included.
18. **The Ecology Officer** – As you know, last week I was objecting to the proposed means of clearing great crested newts from this site and the loss of habitat. This objection rested on the fact that I believed there would be many more newts on the site than the applicant's ecologist did. I asked for a site visit to assess the current condition of the site and to look for great crested newts. I undertook a detailed hand search of every available feature within the proposed development area. I lead the search, and personally undertook all hand searching. The applicant's ecologists simply followed me. To my surprise I found no newts. However, 5 smooth newts and 1 great crested newt were found in the area proposed to be retained as newt habitat.
19. In 2010 when I first inspected the site I was finding newts across a wide part of the development area. At that point in time the area had just had its scrub cleared. We reported the damage of great crested newt habitat to the Police, and the CPS decided not to take any action over the matter. Since then the site has been largely left alone (I found materials that I had previously searched and found newts in). It is my view that excessive rabbit grazing combined with drying of the land following the scrub clearance has resulted in the development area becoming largely unsuitable habitat for newts to spend time in (it is likely that they still travel across it). As I do not

believe the site to be of value to great crested newts at this moment in time I cannot insist that the applicant's ecologist secure a license to remove any great crested newts, nor to object on the basis that the development area is removing habitat.

20. I have been able to secure commitment to the provision of a new pond and additional refuge piles within the area of land retained as terrestrial great crested newt habitat. The applicant is to submit an amended landscape plan showing the long grass margins around the development area and the location of the pond and refuge piles. I view this as biodiversity gain given that the current pond is suffering from non-native invasive pond plants with poor terrestrial around it now.
21. As such I now remove my objection to this development with regard to its impact upon the local great crested newt population. We should not progress any approval until we are in receipt of the new information that I have requested.
22. **The Environmental Health Officer – Contaminated Land** – No objections
23. **The Local Highways Authority** – No objections in principle subject to the applicant providing plans to show that suitable inter vehicle visibility splays are achievable along St Neots Road before the application is determined. It also requires conditions to address the movements and control of muck away lorries, contractor parking for both phases all such parking should be within the site and not on the street, movement and control of all deliveries and the control of dust, mud and debris. Additionally it requires control of water drainage, bound material for the hard standings and an informative regarding works in a highway.
24. **Landscape Officer** – With reference to the landscape plan, Lesley Dickinson Ltd Drawing no. LD11 432 A: The amendments to the landscape strategy are welcome. As the individual plots are not to be physically separated I should like to see a number of individual hazels planted as specimens or in small groups along the St. Neots Road side in the grass area within the site. These should remain unpruned to form their natural size and shape. This will provide a further layer of informal screening at an intermediate height, between the managed front hedge and the taller trees within that hedge. I have no objection to hazel being used elsewhere in the site in place of the fruit trees if desired. Landscape conditions should be applied, including a management plan covering the establishment of this planting and the maintenance operations required to ensure that the landscape features are secured into the future. Boundary treatment should be conditioned to secure the post and rail fencing at the front of the site.
25. **Tree Officer** – Boundary treatment is important to the screen the site, this should be conditioned – No objections.

Representations

26. There have been three representations received regarding the proposed development. The following concerns have been raised:
 - What controls can be put in place to ensure this development is not permanent?
 - 3 Bungalows on this site would be more acceptable.
 - This could lead to a travellers settlement
 - Promotes use of the private car
 - Detracts from rural character
 - Density of caravans is too high

- The site is wholly unsuitable for permanent or semi permanent units
- The village as a whole should be notified about new settlements like this.
- Great Crested Newts are on the site.

Planning Comments

27. The main areas of concern regarding this application are the principle of development, the impact it will have on the character of the area, impact on residential amenity, highway safety, and ecology and landscape issues.

Principle of the development

28. LDF Policy DP/7 specifically refers to development outside urban and village frameworks. It states that only development for agriculture; horticulture, forestry, outdoor recreation and other uses, which need to be located in the countryside, will be permitted. In this instance the proposed touring caravan application is considered as outdoor recreation. It is a use more likely to be located in the countryside or on the edge of village boundaries than inside a built up/urban area. It is considered that the proposed development is acceptable in this instance.
29. Additionally ET/10 Tourist Facilities and Visitor accommodation promotes the tourism industry in the District and actively supports change of use as part of the policy wording. Overnight visitor accommodation is supported outside of the village boundaries and considered as a vital part of the rural economy providing the countryside is protected from inappropriate development. Policy wording also goes on to state that development permitted under these policies must be carefully controlled to ensure housing policies restricting development in the countryside are not compromised. It is not unusual for a condition to be put in place to ensure stays are short term only and officers are of the view that this can be achieved here also.

Impact on the character of the area

30. The proposed development benefitted from pre-application advice where the main area of concern was with regard to the wider impact of the development on the surrounding area and its rural character. The proposal for 20 touring caravan plots was considered to be quite high in number. It was suggested by the applicant that the viability of the development would be lessened if the number were decreased. Viability was not a consideration at this point but linked more to the impact the density would have on its surroundings and the character of the area.
31. However, it has been demonstrated through ongoing negotiation with the landscape and ecology officers that there is adequate scope to improve boundary treatment, to replace diseased and damaged trees on the boundary edges and to retain and enhance a good level of screening on all of the application boundaries. This will go some way in retaining the rural nature of the site but will also enhance the biodiversity. The landscaping plan has been adapted through negotiation with the Landscape/Ecology consultants to include a specific area for play and an enhanced newt mitigation area. The front boundary is to be planted with new trees and native hedging. It is considered that this will greatly improve what is currently an unused and poorly maintained piece of land. It is also noted that during certain times of the year the numbers of visitors to a site such as this will decrease.
32. It is considered that the proposal will have minimal impact on the character of the wider rural area and that appropriate and controlled management of the site will enhance it visually over time.

Residential amenity issues

33. The development will bring with it an intensification of use. From a site with nothing on it, it will change to a site with comings and goings, people activity and other such associated noise and disturbances. There are two immediate neighbours, those at Casa de Foseta to the west and Nimitabel to the east. Whilst noise has not been raised as an objection from any of the residents it is a material consideration that needs to be adequately addressed. At the time of writing the report no comments had been received from the Environmental Health Manager with regard to a viewpoint on noise and site management/licensing implications. Members will be updated accordingly.

Highway safety

34. The comments of the Local Highway Authority are noted and the details regarding the required visibility splays have been requested. It is likely that the splays can be adequately achieved due to the ownership of the land and the straightness of the road. Members will be updated accordingly.

Ecology and landscape issues

35. With the Landscape details amended in accordance with the recent discussions with the Landscape officer these are considered to be acceptable. A landscape management plan is still required and can be conditioned accordingly, if not received and agreed before determination.
36. The Council's Ecology Officer has raised concern about the protection of newts on the site, but following a site visit where findings were limited, it was agreed that some changes to the site could help aid the retention of newts on site, more specifically in the area where newt mitigation is proposed. In response to this, it is proposed that another pond, in the applicants ownership, is included as part of the development with the inclusion of additional refugia as well as enhanced foraging habitat as part of a wider site management strategy.
37. It is confirmed by the applicants' ecology consultants that the access road will be porous and the remainder of the site will be grass. In addition to the proposed newt area local newt populations will still have access to the remainder of the site. The east and west boundaries are proposed as close-boarded but will have a 25mm gap retained between the bottom of the gravel board and the ground surface to allow movement for amphibians and small mammals. Existing boundaries will be strengthened and no curbs, gully pots or other drainage that could potentially trap newts is being proposed. Boundary treatment can be appropriately conditioned.
38. It is claimed that the development will have very little impact on the existing habitat and more than compensated by the provision of a dedicated newt area, improved terrestrial habitat across the site, including enhanced wildlife corridors and appropriate site management.

Other Matters

39. Permanence of caravans – The site proposes a touring caravan site that can hold up to 20 touring units – equating to one caravan and one towing vehicle. The facilities building is proposed to be available to users of those staying on site and the office open between the hours of 9-5 daily and on Bank Holidays. It does not refer to the

provision of static caravans, the storage of caravans, tents or for the use of the travelling community. As a tourist facility it can and will be conditioned accordingly to ensure the appropriate use of the site. The permanence of living accommodation on the site would not be in accordance with the requirements of the LDFDCP 2007 and would not be supported by officers.

Conclusion

40. With appropriately worded conditions, an agreed landscaping and ecology scheme and a robust site management plan to ensure the protection of the wider countryside and neighbouring residents the proposed use is in accordance with the abovementioned policies and can be recommended for approval.

Recommendation

41. Approval: Subject to the following conditions, which will be included in full in the update report
- Time Limit – 3 years
 - Approved Plans
 - Materials for the surfaces of the internal roads
 - Materials for the facilities building
 - The facilities building shall at no time be used as overnight accommodation
 - Surface water/foul water details
 - Touring caravans, motor homes and trailer tents only - No static caravans or mobile homes to be stationed on the land
 - Restrict no. of touring units or tents to no more than 20 at any one time
 - No storage of caravans on site
 - No outside storage
 - Prior to development a scheme to be submitted for external lighting to be submitted and agreed
 - Prior to development a scheme for the management of visitors to the site to be submitted and agreed.
 - Prior to development scheme for the management of the ecology to be submitted and agreed
 - Prior to development scheme for Landscaping to be submitted and agreed
 - Landscaping implementation
 - No arrivals or departures of caravans or trailer tents outside the hours of 08:00 hrs to 19:00hrs.
 - All LHA conditions as requested

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

South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework (LDF) 2007

Circular 05/2005 – Planning Obligations

Circular 11/95 – The Use of Conditions in Planning Permissions

Planning application references: S/1383/11

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