

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee
AUTHOR/S: Planning and New Communities Director

6 March 2013

S/2603/12/FL - MELDRETH
**Erection of playbarn & education centre at Bury Lane Fruit Farm, Bury Lane,
Meldreth
for E W Pepper Ltd**

Recommendation: Refusal

Date for Determination: 11 March 2013

**This Application has been reported to the Planning Committee for
determination at the request of the Local Member**

To be presented to the Committee by Paul Derry

Site and Proposal

1. The application site is located outside of the designated Meldreth or Melbourn village frameworks. Bury Lane Fruit Farm consists of a large building used for the sale of various plants and vegetables grown on site, and has expanded into a larger shop with cafeteria. It also has a large external area for the sale of plants, with a retail barn beyond this. The site has its own direct access from the A10. The villages of Melbourn and Meldreth are approximately 1km away, whilst Royston is approximately 2km. The Royston-Cambridge railway line runs along an embankment beyond the rear northwest boundary.
2. The full application, validated on 14 January 2013, seeks the erection of a playbarn and education centre. This would be located adjacent to the existing retail building towards the rear of the site. It would measure 24m by 20m, with a height of 7.3m and 4.7m to the roof ridge and eaves respectively. The application is accompanied by a Planning Statement incorporating Design and Access. The building is the same dimensions as the previous application S/1984/12/FL, although it now includes the education centre element.

Site History

3. A previous scheme for a playbarn (**S/1984/12/FL**) was withdrawn. The site has a complex and long planning history. The applicant makes reference to application **S/1922/09/F** for alterations and extensions to the roof to form an enclosure over the existing covered area. This was refused by the Council on sustainability grounds but allowed on appeal.

Planning Policy

4. **Local Development Framework Development Control Policies (LDF DCP) 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/10** Foul Drainage – Alternative Drainage Systems, **NE/15** Noise Pollution, **TR/1** Planning for More Sustainable Travel & **TR/2** Car and Cycle Parking Standards.

5. District Design Guide SPD – adopted March 2010

6. **National Planning Policy Framework:** Advises that planning conditions should only be imposed where they are necessary, relevant to planning and to the development to be permitted, enforceable, precise and reasonable in all other aspects. The document seeks to promote sustainable forms of development. Paragraph 28 states planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development

Consultation by South Cambridgeshire District Council as Local Planning Authority

7. **Meldreth Parish Council** recommends approval and notes they are happy to see the increase in employment prospects this will bring and the improved education opportunities. It was also felt that the application would not cause any major traffic disruptions.
8. The application was discussed at the Council's **Economic Development Panel**. The creation of jobs was supported, although this was to be balanced against the sustainability of the site.
9. Members should be aware that consultations to **Melbourn Parish Council** and the Local Members were not complete at the time of writing this report, and an update of comments will be provided. The consultation period expires on 4 March 2013.
10. The **Local Highways Authority** notes no significant adverse effect upon the public highway should result from the proposal.
11. **Cllr Soond**, Local Member for Meldreth, notes his unwavering support for the proposal. The site is considered well served by the A10 and footpaths to Meldreth (and its railway station), Melbourn, with a potential future expansion of the Cambridge to Royston cycle path. The education centre would strengthen existing ties between the applicant and local schools. The development would not be detrimental to the surrounding countryside and would benefit the local economy through job creation.

Representations by Members of the Public

12. None were received.

Planning Comments

13. The key issues in the determination of this application are the principle of the development in the countryside, and the impact upon the surrounding countryside.

The Principle of the Development in the Countryside

14. The site is located outside of the village frameworks of either Meldreth and Melbourn, and therefore is in the countryside in planning policy terms. The site has been subject to a number of incremental extensions to both the main building and to its associated land. For example, the main building has recently been extended through various applications, the latest of which granted an extension to the cafeteria, and there is an extant consent for a large glasshouse on the land to the rear of the buildings.
15. The proposal seeks the erection of a building for two uses, those being a playbarn and an education centre. From the floor plan provided, the main use of the building would be the playbarn element. The play area shown would occupy a space of 23m by 13m, with seating to allow viewing at ground and first floor level. The applicant notes the facility can accommodate up to 80 children at one time, with private entertainment areas for parties. The applicant also notes the idea behind the playbarn is to provide an area of play whilst customers can enjoy the retail and cafeteria facilities on site. Members should note it has not been demonstrated that the development is necessary for the future economic viable of the site.
16. Given the location of the site, the existing use does depend upon use of the car. Whilst there are footpath links to the site, the location on the A10 does not promote sustainable transport methods, especially from Melbourn given the need to cross the A10. There is no bus service to the site or the immediate surroundings. In allowing the appeal for application S/2603/12/FL, the Planning Inspector confirms this view when he notes the site is poorly accessible by non-car modes. He adds that a material increase in car borne customer levels would be in conflict with the principles of sustainability.
17. There are serious concerns regarding the compatibility with the existing retail use on the site. There would be instances where people visit both the retail element of the site and the playbarn. However, the size of the play area and its capacity of 80 children clearly indicates that the building is likely to be a destination in its own right rather than a use ancillary to the fruit farm. The location of the site encourages car use and it is for this reason that the development is considered to be unsustainable. A use of this nature should be located within villages in order to encourage sustainable methods of travel.
18. The application includes an education centre, unlike the previously withdrawn scheme. The applicant notes that Bury Lane seeks to continue its work with local schools and organisations. A number of schools (17 names provided) and local Guides/Scouts have already visited the site for their work regarding healthy eating, field to plate processes, how to grow crops, strawberry picking and educating about free range chickens.
19. The layout plan shows two function rooms, one on each level, measuring 5.5m by 6.5m. The capacity of these rooms would be limited. No information is provided as to where the previous school meetings took place. However, the space provided would not allow a full school class at the same time. The education element to the building is therefore only a minor ancillary use of the space. Whilst the education facility is to be encouraged on the site, it would appear to be unnecessary in a building of this size with such a large play area. There is ample space on the site for a smaller education facility. The

education element is not therefore considered to outweigh the harm caused by the playbarn through its unsustainable location.

20. The applicant does note that they are happy to “have a condition imposed whereby they have to ensure that the education facilities are used at least 20 times per year and keep a record of which school or youth organisation attended”. If Members were to approve the application, then legal advice would be sought as to the wording of such a condition, or whether it would need to be achieved through a legal agreement. Members should be aware that a Legal Agreement may delay the determination period of 11th March 2013.

Impact upon the Surrounding Countryside

21. The building would sit close to the existing barn. The hedge across the frontage would restrict views from passing traffic on the A10. The key view of the building would be when travelling towards Cambridge on the A10, where the site is easily visible from raised land to the south given the recent pollarding of the trees along the south boundary. Although easily visible, the building is unlikely to cause any serious harm to the countryside given the existing buildings in the vicinity and its grouping with these buildings. There are also prominent public views from the railway line, although these would not cause any serious harm.

Recommendation

22. Refuse, for the following reason.

The application site is located outside of the designated village frameworks of both Meldreth and Melbourn and is accessed directly from the A10. The proposal seeks the erection of a playbarn with education facilities. The site as a whole is a fruit farm, with a large retail element. The nature of the playbarn use is not considered to be ancillary to the existing use, and would therefore generate a significant number of journeys in its own right. This is emphasised by its capacity of 80 children. Whilst there are footpaths to the site, its location would encourage journeys by motor vehicle. Given the size and capacity of the playbarn, the development would represent an unsustainable form of development in this countryside location. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy DP/1 of the Local Development Framework Development Control Policies 2007, which states development will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that it is consistent with the principles of sustainable development, as appropriate to its location, scale and form, and it should minimise the need to travel and reduce car dependency; and Policy TR/1 of the LDF DCP which states planning permission will not be granted for developments likely to give rise to a material increase in travel demands unless the site has (or will attain) a sufficient standard of accessibility to offer an appropriate choice of travel by public transport or other non-car travel modes.

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.
- National Planning Policy Framework.
- Planning File refs: S/2603/12/FL, S/1984/12/FL and S/1922/09/F.

Contact Officer: Paul Derry - Senior Planning Officer
01954 713159