

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee

13th May 2005

AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/0497/05/F - Thriplow

Erection of Buildings for an Autoclave, Offices and Visitor Facilities at Cambridge Pet Crematorium, A505 for Vetspeed Ltd

Recommendation: No Objections County Matter

Site and Proposal

1. The Cambridge Pet Crematorium lies on a 2.48 hectare (6.13 acre) site on the south east side of the A505 in an isolated position south-west of Duxford Airfield. It comprises four incinerators housed within a buff brick and brown metal clad industrial style building that lies close to the road. Adjoined to the east side of the main building is a two storey office extension constructed in the early 1990's. Directly to the rear of the building is a concrete apron, enclosed to the rear (south) and east. This is occupied by a number of temporary structures. To the south of this courtyard is a grassed field where there are several existing filled waste pits which have been capped with topsoil and with an ornamental surround and flower beds.
2. This full county matter application, submitted on 14th March 2005, seeks to significantly extend the existing building to the rear in order to provide an autoclave, offices and visitor facilities. This additional accommodation would be predominantly contained within the courtyard area. The proposed extension would be no higher than the existing building and would have a total ridge height of 9 metres. The extension would comprise buff brick walls and the roof would be clad in profile steel sheeting painted brown to match the existing building.
3. A statement submitted as part of the application states that, in recent years, the technology associated with the disposal and management of clinical waste has developed rapidly as operators seek more environmentally friendly alternatives to incineration. The development of the large scale autoclave, at an economic price, is regarded internationally as the best available technology for the treatment of clinical waste. To accommodate this technology, Vetspeed does not need the use of cold and dry warehouses which formed part of a previously approved but unimplemented extension. The current proposal involves the erection of a building, which is virtually identical in size and position to that for which permission has previously been granted. The proposal to install an autoclave will enable Vetspeed to continue to handle the existing veterinary clinical waste volumes which amount to approximately 3000 tonnes per annum. Around 90% of the current veterinary clinical waste received at the site will be diverted away from incineration for treatment in the autoclave.
4. An application to allow non-veterinary clinical waste to be handled on the site has also been submitted to the County Council by Vetspeed. (Ref: S/0496/05/CM). This Authority's Environmental Health Officer requested that an assessment of Nitrogen Dioxide emissions be carried out and, in light of this advice, I have sent a holding objection to the County Council.

Planning History

5. There have been numerous planning applications relating to this site. Of direct relevance to the current proposal, planning consent was granted in 1999 for the erection of storage, office and mess buildings, a covered waste transfer area, storage plant and garden machinery store. This development has not commenced. (Ref: S/0434/99/F). This consent was subject to a number of conditions including the requirement for the phased removal of existing temporary structures from the site and the provision and implementation of a landscaping scheme.

Planning Policy

6. **Policy P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 states that development will be restricted in the countryside unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
7. **Policy EN3** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 requires that materials and landscaping for new development in the countryside are appropriate to the particular landscape character area.
8. **The County Council** will also consider the application against policies in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste Local Plan 2003.
9. **Policy P7/11** of the Structure Plan indicates that new proposals for waste management facilities will be favourably considered where they achieve the best practicable environmental option, taking into account a number of policy criteria.

Consultations

10. This application is a 'County Matter' application and the County Council is therefore the determining Authority and has carried out the necessary consultations direct. Responses that this Authority has received are set out below:
11. **The Chief Environmental Health Officer** has raised potential concerns with regards to the old landfill situated near to the site and has recommended that the following condition be attached to any consent granted:

"Prior to the commencement of any development, an investigation to establish the nature and extent of any contamination of the site and any remedial works necessary to deal with contamination, including an assessment for the potential mitigation of landfill gas, shall be undertaken and submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Any necessary remedial work shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details before the development commences. The investigation shall initially consist of a desktop study, which shall include details of the site history, development of a site conceptual model and a preliminary qualitative risk assessment. If any likelihood of contamination is indicated by the initial study, then a further detailed site assessment shall be carried out which shall include intrusive investigations and which shall fully characterise the nature, extent and severity of contamination. Recommendations for a remediation strategy and post-remediation validation testing shall also be included."
12. **The Local Highways Authority** raises no objections stating that the likely daily increase in traffic movement as a result of collections from the proposed autoclave is extremely modest.

Representations

13. Councillor Quinlan has objected to the application stating:

“As you know the European Waste Incineration Directive comes into force in December 2005 and applies much stricter emission limits. Dioxin emissions for example are ten times lower than now. The installation of the extra filtration systems need to meet these standards are understood to cost around £3/4m. and the object of the application is to augment the profit stream to fund this work.....

This particular location is in any case not really suitable because its proximity to Duxford Airfield means that it is not possible to increase the height of the existing chimneys. Thus the existing chimneys cannot be made high enough to ensure proper dispersion and dilution of the effluvia plume. This is demonstrated by the regular grounding of the plume and is the reason for the dioxin “hotspot” recorded on the field immediately to the north of the A505 in a HSE study.

I would ask that the Council takes advice from an appropriately qualified environmental scientist about the application. I would specifically ask that the history of dioxin emissions from the existing plant and its current dioxin emissions be reviewed. As I understand there to be no “safe” level of dioxin emissions the precautionary principle be applied and no further intensification whatsoever of the use be permitted. I strongly believe the current application should be refused.”

“Although statutory responsibility rests with another body I think the planning implications of extending the plant or intensifying the use are such that we need to be satisfied that public health is not adversely affected by the grant of planning permission always adhering to the precautionary principle.”

14. Objections have also been raised by two local residents. Firstly, the owners of Duxford Grange in Grange Road, Duxford state that there is an unacceptable level of dioxins in the field opposite the crematorium and express much concern about the impact of the crematorium upon their health. They are very concerned that Vetspeed is not only wanting to increase their volume of business but also wanting to diversify and import, store and handle human waste. The chimneys are not the legally required height for safe dispersion (their height is restricted due to the proximity of the site to the Duxford Airfield) and dilution of the plumes and, to enable the business to expand, seems irresponsible to local residents, especially when the European Waste Incineration Directive will be forcing stricter emission limits in December.
15. An email has been received from a Thriplow resident who raises the same health concerns as expressed in the preceding paragraph and requests that the health of local residents be considered when looking at the proposal.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

16. The key issues in relation to this application are:
- a. The visual impact of the development;
 - b. The impact of the development upon the local residents’ health.
17. Planning permission has previously been granted for an extension that is virtually identical in scale, size and position to the present scheme. As such, I have no objections to the proposal subject to all conditions of the previous consent, including

the need for the provision and implementation of a landscaping scheme, being reapplied.

18. The principal concerns raised in respect of this application relate to dioxin and amino acid emissions from the site and the impacts this has upon the health of the local community. In particular, Councillor Quinlan has stressed that no intensification of the use should be permitted until an assessment of pollution emissions and the suitability of the site for the intensified use has been carried out and analysed by this Authority's Environmental Health Department.
19. The possible presence of dioxins arising from the existing use is, understandably, of huge concern. However, this issue is being considered under alternative legislation by the Environment Agency and should not therefore form part of this Authority's consideration of the application. As explained earlier, an application to handle non veterinary clinical waste at the site has also been submitted. The Environment Agency, who was consulted by the County Council in respect of this application, advised that the environmental impact of the proposal would be determined once the application to operate the process under the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) had been entered. Vetspeed submitted its IPPC permit application to the Environment Agency (the Strategic Permitting Group in Bedford) at the end of March and this Authority's Environmental Health Department will be formally consulted as part of this process. As part of its consideration of the application, the Environment Agency will be looking at the environmental impact of the whole site as an installation, rather than just the non-veterinary clinical waste process, and the issues of dioxin and amino acid emissions are priority issues in its consideration of the case.
20. The current planning permission and site licences allow the site to dispose of a total of 96,500 tonnes per annum. Although the current proposal seeks to add a significant extension to the existing building, there would be no increase or intensification of the existing permitted use and the entire site would still operate within this limit. Essentially the only difference between the current application and that previously approved relates to the siting of an autoclave within the building. The autoclave is a piece of equipment designed to sterilise waste and to provide a safer, lower emission means of disposal than incineration.

Recommendation

21. That this Authority write to the County Council registering no objections to the application but forwarding on the concerns raised by Councillor Quinlan and local residents relating to the adverse health impacts of the development. Any approval should be subject to the same conditions of the previously approved application on the site and to the requirement for a contamination investigation condition as recommended by the Environmental Health Officer.

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

- Application refs: S/0497/05/F; S/0496/05/F; S/0434/99/F

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