

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 13th May 2005
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/0438/05/F - Shepreth
Use of Part of New Building for Furniture Retail and Storage for Selling Furniture.Co.Uk

Recommendation: Refusal
Determination Date: 29th April 2005

Site and Proposal

1. The site, formerly a petrol filling station, lies within the open countryside, off the A10. It forms two recently erected single storey buildings granted permission for B1/B8 use. Adjacent is a retail unit of approximately 160m² floor area, currently occupied by the applicants and used for the sale of furniture.
2. The full application, received 4th March 2005, proposes the use of part of the larger of the two buildings for the sale of furniture and it is intended to replace the use of the existing building.
3. 350m² of retail floorspace and 90m² of storage space is proposed with two staff employed.

Planning History

4. In August 2002 planning permission was granted in Outline for the redevelopment of the site for two B1/B8 units and in July 2004 reserved matters were granted.

Planning Policy

5. **Policy SH2 – Applications for new retail development** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 (“The Local Plan”)

This policy states that planning permission will not be granted for retail development unless the applicant has successfully demonstrated that (in part):-

The impact of the development would not have an adverse effect on the vitality and viability of other town centres, district centres and local centres defined in development plans and on the rural economy, including village shops;

The store would be conveniently accessible by a wide range of modes of transport other than the car, including frequent public transport from a wide catchment area, and effective measures would be taken to enhance such accessibility, including that for pedestrians and cyclists;

The delivery and servicing arrangements would be compatible with local environmental conditions and would not cause local traffic difficulties.

In addition, in the case of proposals to develop sites in edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations (or to extend existing stores in such locations) developers will be required to demonstrate a positive need for additional floorspace *before* any of the above tests are applied.

6. **Retailing in the countryside**

Paragraph 6.26 of the Local Plan states:

“The District Council is concerned about sporadic development for retail uses in the open countryside ...sales could have an adverse effect on the economic viability of existing shopping facilities in nearby villages...”

7. **Policy TP1 of the Local Plan states (in part):**

“The Council will seek, through its decisions on planning applications, to promote more sustainable transport choices, to improve access to major trip generators by non-car modes, and to reduce the need to travel, especially by car.

To give effect to these aims, planning permission will not be granted for developments likely to give rise to more than a small-scale 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 mode(s)”.

8. **Planning Policy Guidance Note 6 – Town Centres and Retail Developments
Paragraph 4.9 states (in part):**

“The Government is seeking, through the location of development, to influence overall levels of car travel. PPG13 seeks to reduce the need to travel, reduce reliance on the car and facilitate multi-purpose trips. Linked trips are more likely to happen on trips made to existing centres. For retail developments, local planning authorities should assess the likely proportion of customers who would arrive by car and the catchment area which the development seeks to serve. Particular consideration should be given to retail proposals which seek to attract car-borne trade from a wide catchment area.

9. **Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 - Transport
Paragraph 35 states (in part):**

“Policies for retail and leisure should seek to promote the vitality and viability of existing town centres, which should be the preferred locations for new retail and leisure developments.

10. **Planning Policy Statement 7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas
Paragraph 17 states (in part):**

“The Government’s policy is to support the re-use of appropriately located and suitably constructed existing buildings in the countryside where this would meet sustainable development objectives”.

11. **Policy P3/4 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
states:**

“Local planning authorities will support the vitality of rural communities by encouraging the retention and expansion of village shopping facilities, on a scale appropriate to their location and serving a local function, and key community services”.

Consultation

12. **Shepreth Parish Council
Recommends approval**

Representations

13. None

Planning Comments – Key Issues

14. The key issues are whether the use of part of this building for the sale and storage of furniture is sustainable and/or would threaten the viability and vitality of village shops.
15. The proposal involves an increase in floor area of some 175% over the existing furniture shop. The proposed split between retail space (350m²) and storage (90m²) indicates that the predominant part of the use will be retail. It is unknown what the split ratio is as existing but with 160m² in total it is clear that the proposed retail area will be greatly increased and retail sales from the site will, if the company were to be successful, be similarly greatly increased.

Sustainability

16. The site is not readily accessible by public transport. I am not aware of any bus stop near the site and it is not readily accessible on foot or by bicycle. Most customers will therefore arrive by car. The nature of the goods sold is such that some customers will be able to take small items away, necessitating the use of the car, but that, in my opinion, most items would need to be delivered. In this case the nature of the goods sold would not preclude the use of public transport or access on foot or bicycle. I consider that this site is not in a sustainable location for retail sales at the scale proposed.
17. Coupled with the inevitable arrival by car is the concern that in this isolated location special journeys are required that cannot be combined with other needs to travel. Were this site within Cambridge or within a village there is a greater probability that journeys would be combined. This is contrary to the Government objective of encouraging linked trips (see PPG6 above). The specialist nature of the goods is also likely to attract visitors from a wider catchment area.

Vitality and viability of local shops

18. I do not consider that this proposal will threaten any specific local shops. However, there is no reason why furniture should not be sold from a village location. The Local Plan states that the District Council is concerned about sporadic development for retail uses in the open countryside.
19. Taken cumulatively this proposal will contribute to the increasing pressures upon local village shops and services particularly as countryside shops can benefit from lower overheads which can undermine the viability of village shops. In my view retail sales outside of village frameworks should be limited to the type of goods that cannot reasonably be expected to be sold within villages or urban centres – the most common being garden centres. Policy SH12 of the Local Plan (Garden Centres) precludes the sale of inappropriate goods to ensure that either individually or cumulatively the viability and vitality of village centres is protected. The District Council has consistently opposed the sale of goods, including furniture, from these outlets.

Conclusion

20. I consider the intensification of sales of furniture from this site will attract a large number of customers by car, making a special journey, perhaps from a wide catchment area. This is unsustainable and contrary to both national and local policies.

21. The use will, as part of a cumulative impact, adversely affect the viability and vitality of village shops.
22. The proposal fails the tests in Policy SH2 of the Local Plan, notwithstanding the fact that the developer has not demonstrated a positive need for additional floorspace required by this policy.

Recommendation

Refusal

23. The proposed increase in retail sales will result in a scale of development that is unacceptable in this rural location. It will attract and encourage a significant increase in single-purpose car journeys from a wide catchment area. It will further contribute to a cumulative adverse impact on the vitality and viability of village shops and no justification for the increased floor area has been given. As such the proposal is contrary to Policies TP1 and SH2 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.

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

- Planning Files reference S/0829/02/O, S/0568/04/RM and S/0438/05/F,
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004,
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003,
- Planning Policy Guidance Notes Nos. 6 and 13 and Planning Policy Statement No. 7.

Contact Officer: Paul Sexton – Area Planning Officer
Telephone: (01954) 713255