

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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**REPORT TO:** Planning Committee

14 January 2015

**AUTHOR/S:** Planning and New Communities Director

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<b>Application Number:</b>	S/1952/14/OL
<b>Parish(es):</b>	Sawston
<b>Proposal:</b>	Outline application (access only) for recreation development consisting of 50 no. holiday lodges, indoor tennis complex, 4 no. outdoor tennis courts, fitness centre, bowling green, brasserie, public open space with footpath and cycleway, and associated works.
<b>Site address:</b>	Sand and Gravel Quarry, Sawston Bypass
<b>Applicant(s):</b>	Russell Smith Farms
<b>Recommendation:</b>	Refuse
<b>Key material considerations:</b>	Principle of development; Green Belt; Landscape impact; Benefits of the development; Flood Risk; Transport; Ecology; and Other Considerations
<b>Committee Site Visit:</b>	Yes
<b>Departure Application:</b>	No
<b>Presenting Officer:</b>	Andrew Fillmore
<b>Application brought to Committee because:</b>	The application proposal raises considerations of wider than local significance given its scale and location in the Green Belt
<b>Date by which decision due:</b>	23 January 2015

### **Planning History**

1. None relevant.

### **Planning Policies**

2. **National Planning Policy Framework**

**3. South Cambridgeshire LDF Core Strategy DPD 2007**

ST/1 Green Belt  
ST/4 Rural Centres

**4. Local Development Framework, Development Control Policies DPD 2007**

DP/1 Sustainable Development  
DP/2 Design of New Development  
DP/3 Development Criteria  
GB/1 Development in the Green Belt  
E/10 Tourist Facilities and visitor accommodation  
NE/6 Biodiversity  
NE/15 Noise Pollution  
SF/10 – Outdoor Play Space, Informal Open Space and New Developments  
SF/11 – Open Space Standards  
TR/2 - Car and Cycle Parking Standards

**5. Supplementary Planning Document(s)**

District Design Guide SPD – adopted 2010

**6. Emerging Local Plan**

S/4 Green Belt  
S/8 Rural Centres  
CC/9 Managing flood risk  
HG/1 Design Principles  
NH/4 Biodiversity  
NH/10 Recreation in the Green Belt  
E/19 Tourists and visitor attractions  
E/20 Tourist accommodation

**Consultations**

**7. Sawston Parish Council - Recommend refusal. Reasons:**

The site lies adjacent the built up areas of Stapleford and Sawston placing it in the narrowest part of the Cambridge green belt (the distance at this part of the green belt between the fringes of the built up areas of the two villages is 1.03 miles). The proposed development lies outside the development frameworks of both villages. The application is therefore not in conformity with National Policy (NPPF Para 80), South Cambridgeshire adopted Development Control Policies DPD (2007) Policies, GB1 and ET/20 (2) and submission local plan (2014) policies S4, NH/9 and E/20.

**8. Whilst the NPPF allows some scope for the provision of 'appropriate facilities for outdoor sport (and) outdoor recreation' Para 89, such development should not compromise the openness of the green belt. This principle is reflected in Policy NH/10 of the submission local plan 2014. The wording of these policies suggest that 'appropriate facilities' refer to sports pitches plus minor ancillary development such as changing facilities, not residential overnight accommodation proposed in the existing application. Tourist facilities including overnight accommodation are separately dealt with in Policies ET/20 of the adopted Development Control**

Policies DPD (2007) and submission Local Plan (2014) Policy E/20 which restrict such development in green belt to conversions and minor extensions of existing buildings.

9. Whilst these policy objections may be set aside in very special circumstances, no such project have been identified. These centre on a) lack of clarity as to whether there would be a sufficient capacity in the lake for it to serve its primary purpose of agricultural reservoir whilst providing a sufficient year round expanse of water for sporting purposes. B) The applicants admission that no business plan had been produced to test the commercial viability of the proposal.
10. Issues surrounding access from the A1301 have not adequately been addressed.
11. **Stapleford Parish Council** – Refuse. It is in the Green Belt which should only be built in exceptional circumstances.
12. **Little Shelford Parish Council** – Recommend refusal. The Parish Council refuse this application as they do not agree with building developments in the Green Belt.
13. **Environmental Health (Contamination)** – There is no requirement for a condition relating to contamination.
14. **Ecology Officer** - The after use of the quarry presents an interesting opportunity to create a diverse range of beneficial habitats. Currently the majority of the site is relatively bare, open ground as a result of the mineral extraction. With the developed areas now largely confined to the east and northern shoreline this allows space for grassland creation, tree and shrub planting together with the inclusion of bays which will add further habitat diversity to the shoreline. The extent of such details can be worked through at the detailed design stage as full landscape details are worked up. A management plan is needed to be secured for the duration of the sites maintenance.  
  
No harm will arise to the two nearby protected sites (Dernford Fen SSSI and Dernford Grassland CWS), subject to conditions.
15. **Highways Authority** – No objection. Adequate visibility splays are required. Request the footpath be widened from 2.5m to 3.5m.
16. **Landscape officer** – Notwithstanding the Green Belt issues, this remains development of a significant scale, set in a sensitive location. The proposed development could possibly be accommodated within the site if a high quality, well designed and extensive landscape setting is provided. To be a success, the landscape scheme would need to enhance and protect both the approach and setting of Stapleford and the rural river valley landscape character, enhance biodiversity and ecological opportunities of the site, and provide a first class public open space for local people.
17. **Environment Agency** – No objection, subject to conditions requiring the development be carried out in accordance with the approved FRA, provision of floodplain compensatory storage and provision of a scheme for the provision and implementation of pollution control to the water environment.
18. **Natural England** – No objection. The application is in close proximity to Dernford Fen SSSI and subject to being carried out in accordance with the details

submitted the development will not damage or destroy the interest features for which the site has been notified.

19. **County Council Minerals Planning** – No objections from the point of view of protecting future mineral reserves. The applicant should be required to explain how the proposal is consistent with the minerals consent, where conditions require the reservoir to be used for the storage of water for agriculture irrigation only (there is reference to the reservoir being used for sailing) and provision of a detailed restoration scheme and 5 year management aftercare programme.

20. **Highways Agency** – Offers no objection

21. **Police Architectural Liaison Officer** – In principle no objection. Detailed plans are required before I am able to comment further.

22. **Anglian Water** – There is sufficient foul drainage capacity for these flows.

### **Representations**

23. 20 representations have been received supporting the development citing the following benefits;

- Proposal is well landscaped and would enhance the environment including Green Belt
- Development would benefit the local community
- Site is not currently attractive or scenic
- Additional tennis courts are much needed
- Employment could be provided to local people
- Business opportunities will be brought to the local area
- Development would provide public access to the Green Belt
- There is no waterpark/leisure facility in the area

24. 16 representations have been received opposing the development for the following reasons;

- Would harm the Green Belt, which is at its narrowest in this location
- Increased traffic would be dangerous and adversely impact on wildlife
- Light and noise pollution
- Would set a precedent for further development
- Would result in the provision of executive homes in the countryside

25. Three representations suggest the public access to the scheme should be multiuser including access and suitable surfaces for horse riders.

### **Planning Comments**

26. The application site comprises a parcel of land to the west of the A1301 (from where access is provided) approximately midway between the villages of Sawston to the south and Great and Little Shelford to the north. The River Cam runs to the west of the site, which benefits from county matters consent (Ref S/1669/02/CM) for '*extraction and processing of sand and gravel together with importation of engineering clay and construction of temporary access, in connection with the construction of an agricultural reservoir*'. This mineral extraction process is nearing completion. Condition 4 of the consent restricts use of the reservoir to the storage of water for agricultural irrigation purposes. A further condition requires a detailed restoration and management scheme for the quarry.

27. The application site is located in an area of open countryside which is designated Green Belt.
28. The application seeks outline permission (with access to be approved at this stage) for 50 no. holiday lodges, along with an indoor tennis complex, 4 no. outdoor tennis courts, fitness centre, bowling green, brasserie, public open space with footpath and cycleway, and associated works.

### **Green Belt**

29. The NPPF advises the Government attaches great weight to the importance of the Green Belt which has the fundamental objective of preventing urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence.
30. Some types of development are permitted by the NPPF in the Green Belt including *'appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, (and) outdoor recreation as long as this preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it'*.
31. The erection of some 50 holiday lodges and a new indoor tennis complex and fitness centre in particular will have an impact on the existing openness of the site. The development as a whole will also involve encroachment into the countryside and have some impact on the open gap between Sawston and the Shelfords to the north.
32. The proposal is therefore deemed to amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The NPPF is clear in advising inappropriate development is harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

### **Principle of development**

33. Adopted Development Control policy ET/10 relates to the provision of new tourist and visitor accommodation and allows such development outside village frameworks only where the proposal relates to change of use/conversion, appropriate replacement of buildings or appropriately modest extensions to existing facilities. The development does not comply with these criteria and is thus contrary to policy ET/10.
34. Policy E/20 of the emerging Local Plan takes a less restrictive approach, allowing small scale new tourist accommodation in the countryside where appropriate to local circumstances. Nine representations have been received to this emerging policy, with two supportive of the change and seven opposing on grounds more reference should be made to encourage horse riding in the countryside. Limited weight can be given to this policy in the decision making process as the Local Plan is still subject to examination.
35. Nationally the NPPF supports sustainable rural tourism that benefits business, communities and visitors, where this respects the character of the countryside and where these facilities are in appropriate locations and where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres.
36. The proposal is for a substantial development of 50 holiday lodges and recreational facilities including indoor tennis complex, outdoor tennis courts,

fitness centre and bowling green. It is located close (but not adjacent) to the Rural Centres of Sawston and Great Shelford, where a range of services and facilities along with good public transport can be found. Nonetheless, it is considered to be of excessive scale for the location and is therefore contrary to the existing and emerging Local Plan as well as the NPPF.

37. The principle of development in providing this type of new tourist accommodation is therefore not supported.

### **Landscape**

38. The application is in outline form with permission only sought for the means of access and therefore few detailed plans accompany the application. The indicative plan demonstrates how the development could be achieved including where additional landscaping would screen the site. The council's landscape officer advises that notwithstanding the Green Belt issues, the proposed development could possibly be accommodated within the site if a high quality, well designed and extensive landscape setting is provided. As such it is considered that subject to details of layout, appearance and in particular landscaping, which would be assessed at Reserved Matters stage, it is possible to design a scheme which does not materially harm the existing landscape character.

### **Flood Risk**

39. Concerns raised by the Environment Agency relating to flood risk have been addressed during the course of the application and subject to conditions no flood risk harm is identified.

### **Transport**

40. The Highways Authority does not object to the scheme and the access off the A1301. The proposed visibility splays of 4.5m x 135m (north-west direction) and 4.5m x 160m (south-easterly direction) are appropriate. The agency goes on to recommend the width of the footpath/cycleway be widened from 2.5m to 3.5m. This can be controlled through condition. Details of the proposed access are therefore acceptable if the application was to be approved

### **Ecology**

41. The application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement, accepting the scheme is 'EIA development'. This statement notes Dernford Farm Grassland Meadow County Wildlife Site lies circa 125m to the south of the site, with Denford Fen SSSI approximately 300m to the south west. In respect of the impact on ecology the report concludes that provided the recommendations are followed the proposal would significantly enhance the bio-diversity resource of the area with the longer term residual effect of the proposals a 'minor positive'.
42. The Council's ecologist accepts the development has the potential to create a wide range of habitats, however it is necessary to secure an appropriate management plan to ensure the objectives of each habitat type are achieved. Such a scheme could be controlled through condition.

### **Other considerations**

- 43. No adverse concerns are raised with regard to contamination.
- 44. Anglian Water advice the Cambridge Water recycling centre has sufficient capacity to cope with foul drainage from the development.
- 45. No adverse comments are raised with regards to Crime and Disorder.
- 46. Concerns relating to light pollution could be dealt with by condition.
- 47. County Council Minerals and Waste highlight the potential conflict of this development with conditions appended to the mineral extraction consent, which require the reservoir to be used solely for the storage of water for agriculture irrigation and provision of a detailed restoration scheme. This application does not propose any activities on the water, with the mineral restoration scheme potentially compatible with the development.
- 48. Given the sites relationship to neighbouring residents no material harm is identified through overlooking, loss of outlook, overbearing or noise disturbance.

### **Very Special Circumstances**

- 49. The application will widen public access to Green Belt countryside through the provision of footpaths and a cycle way (an indicative plan indicates how this can be achieved) as encouraged in the NPPF. Furthermore holiday makers staying in the lodges will benefit from easy access to the countryside and therefore likely make use of this opportunity. Emerging Local Plan policy NH/10 Recreation in the Green Belt (to which 7 representations have been received, four in support and three opposing), takes a similar stance seeking to support increased opportunities for access to the open countryside where this provides opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation appropriate to the Green Belt.
- 50. However the development is primarily a 'destination' attraction with visitors likely to be drawn to the site to make use of the facilities (pool, gymnasium, bowling green, tennis courts and brasserie) on offer rather than access the countryside. This is evidenced in the representations received, with those in favour of the scheme overwhelmingly referring to the benefits of the development through providing additional leisure facilities.
- 51. The development will benefit the economy. In the short term this includes jobs arising from construction, with long term work opportunities created in the running of the numerous facilities (accommodation, tennis courts, brassiere, landscape maintenance, etc) proposed. No details accompany the application as to the likely number of jobs created but it is expected that given the scale and nature of the development a notable but not significant economic benefit would arise from the scheme.
- 52. The Council's ecology officer advises that subject to appropriate landscaping the development has the potential to improve biodiversity. Details of these improvements do not accompany the application and therefore little weight can be attributed this benefit, although officers are of the view enhancements to biodiversity can be secured through condition.

## Conclusions

53. The NPPF confirms that very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
54. Officers are of the opinion that little or no evidence has been provided justifying why the development (or the benefits arising from it) should be considered a 'very special circumstance'. Officers are of the view that whilst the development has some positive aspects as highlighted above, these do not clearly outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness and the other harm, namely the objections in principle to a development of this scale in this location. For these reasons the application should be refused.

## Recommendation

55. Refusal for the following reasons –

- (i) The proposal represents inappropriate development by definition which is harmful to the Green Belt contrary to the requirements of Chapter 9 (Protecting Green Belt Land) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Policy ST/1 of the adopted Core Strategy DPD and Policy S/4 of the emerging Local Plan.
- (ii) The application proposes new holiday accommodation and associated recreation facilities in the countryside contrary to the requirements of policy ET/10 of the adopted LDF Development Control Policies DPD. Given the scale of development and location of the site the scheme is not considered to represent 'small scale development appropriate to local circumstances' contrary to the requirements of policy E/20 of the emerging Local Plan and paragraph 28 of the NPPF.
- 56. (iii) The application fails to demonstrate the 'very special circumstances' needed to clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and the other identified harm.

## Background Papers

Where [the Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection: -

- (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- (b) on the Council's website; and
- (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

The following list contains links to the documents on the Council's website or elsewhere at which copies can be inspected.

- Nation Planning Policy Framework  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>
- Local Development Framework, Development Control Policies, Adopted July 2007  
<http://www.scambs.gov.uk/content/local-development-framework>



- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, Proposed Submission July 2013  
<http://www.scambs.gov.uk/localplan>

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