

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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**REPORT TO:** Development and Conservation Control Committee

6<sup>th</sup> July 2005

**AUTHOR/S:** Director of Development Services

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**S/1416/04/F - Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth  
Use of Land for Car Parking in Association with Park and Ride Facility to Include  
Portable Building and Lighting, Land at Old North Road,  
for Charter Travel**

**Recommendation: Refusal  
Determination Date: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2004**

### **Departure Application**

#### **Site and Proposal**

1. The site lies in the open countryside to the south of Bassingbourn and is accessed directly off the A1198.
2. Immediately to the north lies the old Sunday Market site, no longer in use. This site has two accesses at its northern extremity and its southern. The southern access would provide the access to the application site.
3. The land lies a little lower than the level of the road and has planted mounds on its southern and western boundaries. To the east lies an area of trees and a pond. To the north the land is open to the old Sunday Market site.
4. The full planning application, submitted 7<sup>th</sup> July 2004, proposes the use of the land for car parking in association with a park and ride facility to include a portable building and lighting. It is proposed to alleviate parking problems at Royston Railway Station by providing parking on this site and bussing commuters to and from the station.
5. The initial submission showed 132 car parking spaces including 5 disabled spaces, a tarmac finish and a single 8m high lighting tower.
6. A revised plan was submitted showing 115 spaces including 5 disabled, a gravel finish and 4 smaller lighting columns (height unknown).
7. A flood risk assessment was requested early on in the application process but to date no such assessment has been submitted.

#### **Planning History**

8. In July 1994 planning permission was granted for "Temporary Construction Site Office and Associated Buildings".
9. In April 1996 planning permission was granted for the use of the site, together with the land to the north for the "Use as Market on Bank Holidays".
10. In April 2002 planning permission was granted for "Temporary Site Offices and Associated Storage of Pipes and Equipment".

## Planning Policy

11. **Policy P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 (the Structure Plan) - Environmental Restrictions on Development states (in part) that development in the countryside will be restricted unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
12. **Policy P1/3** of the Structure Plan - Sustainable design in built development states (in part) that a high standard of design and sustainability for all new development will be required which minimises the need to travel and reduces car dependency.
13. **Policy P9/9** of the Structure Plan - Cambridge Sub-Region Transport Strategy outlines the transport strategy for the Cambridge Sub-Region.
14. **Policy TP1** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 - Planning for More Sustainable Travel states (in part) that the Council will seek 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.

## Consultation

15. **Bassingbourn Parish Council** (original scheme)

The Parish Council makes no recommendation. It states: "Existing screening to be retained. Sufficient access with improvement of sight lines"

16. **Principal Planning Policy Officer** (Transport)

"The development of a substantial car park in the countryside would not be consistent with policy. Structure Plan Policy P1/2 restricts development in countryside "unless the proposal can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.". (local farming, mineral extraction or public utility services).

This proposal seeks to provide car parking to assist train journeys from Royston to London. Policy TP1 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 seeks to promote more sustainable transport choices. However, it is my view that this proposal would not meet that objective as it would encourage long distance commuting, albeit by train. (note this is referred to in para 7.33).

The improvement in bus-based travel on the corridors between Cambridge and the Market Towns, as set out in Structure Plan Policy P9/9, should in the first instance encourage more sustainable travel **within** the Cambridge Sub-Region, and this should apply to new Park and Ride sites.

Although this facility as proposed would assist existing commuter journeys and make them more sustainable, there is a very real opportunity for it to encourage additional car-journeys, including the increase in traffic through villages to access the site. I therefore cannot support this proposal."

17. **Landscape Design Officer** (original scheme)

"1. Appears to be several bunds to site which would require reprofiling and planting.

2. Preferable to avoid any further bunding.
3. Unclear impact of visibility splays to frontage.
4. Car parking should be pulled clear of existing vegetation.
5. Concerned how easy it will be to reduce impact of lighting to wider landscape - very long views partly to Royston. 8m columns would have serious impact visually.
6. I assume there will be no junction requirements.”

18. **Local Highways Authority** (original scheme)

“There are somewhat conflicting elements contained within this application.

The response to question 8 of the application [what is the estimated vehicular traffic flow to and from the site during a normal working day?] is 50. Fifty what? Fifty vehicles per day or fifty vehicle **movements** per day?

This contradicts the plan submitted which illustrates the provision of some 132 spaces on the site.

In order that I may assess this proposal, I need to be advised the total number of vehicle movements that are anticipated. This includes the vehicles of drivers utilising the park and ride and the buses going to and from the station.”

19. **Chief Environmental Health Officer**

Concern expressed that the proposed illumination could be a problem and suggest a condition to be attached to any planning permission in order to minimise the effects of the development to nearby residents or occupiers: - ‘Details of any external lighting including flood lighting shall be submitted to and approved by the local Planning Authority before construction commences.’”

20. **Environment Agency**

Objects.

“Insufficient information has been submitted in respect of surface and foul water drainage and pollution control to allow the Agency to fully assess the impact of the proposed development.”

The Agency also requests a Flood Risk Assessment as the application site is identified as being in an area at risk of flooding.

Further advice is given on Foul Water Drainage and Pollution Control.

21. **Landscape Design Officer** (amended scheme)

“Unclear if mound to south (bottom of plan) is being retained - this would need regraded/top soiled/and more space allowed to achieve effective screening.

Given long distance views and possible lighting greater space needed to boundaries but it would be difficult to screen effectively in the short term.

Also difficult to fully assess where existing hedge and tree belts are in relation to car parks and roads and site boundaries.”

22. **North Hertfordshire District Council**

No objections.

The Council's letter dated 7<sup>th</sup> September 2004 and accompanying report to the Royston and District Committee are attached as **Appendix 1**.

23. **Local Highways Authority** (revised comments following traffic flow figures)

"The number falls below that which would necessitate the provision of a right turn facility. However, I am concerned about the level of turning movements that this proposal will generate along this section of the A1198 where, although subject to a 40mph speed restriction, vehicle speed is high.

As expressed during the pre-application correspondence (2 April 2004), I strongly recommend that if this use is to proceed, the northern most access must be utilized. The southern access would have to be permanently and effectively closed.

If the applicant is able to relocate the site to the north, the northern access would require improvement to provide...An amended layout plan to be obtained from the applicant/agent indicating the improvements to the access. A copy to be forwarded to me when available. The visibility splays certainly have a direct effect on the frontage hedge enclosure."

24. **Bassingbourn Parish Council** (amended scheme)

"The lack of sufficient car parking space at both Ashwell and Royston is a well known and insoluble fact and it is difficult to understand why a scheme which would encourage commuters from the South Cambridgeshire villages to use public transport should have been subject to so many obstacles. If this Park and Ride proposal were permitted, with a sufficient number of parking spaces to make it commercially viable, it would also have the effect of freeing up space at Ashwell Station for commuters from that immediate area, thereby encouraging them to use public transport...One reason given against the proposal was that it would be a visual eyesore, when in fact the site originally proposed is well screened by the existing banking and trees, making this objections invalid..."

25. **Policy Manager, Planning Division, Cambridgeshire County Council**

No objections.

**Representations**

26. One letter of objection has been received from the occupiers of 92 Old North Road:

"I live opposite this land...I am confident that this would further increase the weight and flow of traffic directly outside my home, making an already hazardous road and manoeuvres even more dangerous. It can take several minutes to pull out of my road and pulling correctly into my drive way on a return journey home can also take a while (to avoid reversing out onto a main road).

...I also have safety concerns as I have a 2 year old child and further traffic on the road will only make living on it even more hazardous when pulling in and out of our home.

I also have concerns about the view from my home..."

27. Further representations received from the applicant regarding traffic flows:

Bus journeys

One bus every 10 minutes to Rail Station. It is anticipated there will be 19 bus journeys in the morning and 10 in the afternoon. The anticipated number of car journeys would be 89 in the morning and 89 in the afternoon reaching a potential maximum of 119 in both cases. The daily use will be between 6.15am and 7.50am and 4.40pm and 8.30pm, 5 days a week.

28. Applicant's further representations in relation to justification:

"As you may be aware North Herts Council granted full Planning permission on a site in Royston - York Way/Beverley Close, but soon after this they sold the site in house. I offered to purchase the site, but the council would not commit themselves to a sale, so I had to then find a new site, which would still offer the same service as the previous proposal, which was a 10 minute shuttle service to the station. I enquired with NHDC, for any other land around, but there wasn't any.

Support for the scheme

Enclosed are letters from two M.Ps, who have given their support for the scheme, they are Oliver Heald and Andrew Lansley, also our local councillor Linda Oliver has given her support.

W.A.G.N

Hugh Jennings - Retail Manager Great Northern - has openly encouraged the scheme, by offering to promote the parking facilities at all stations from Royston to Kings Cross, he has also offered the facility of a free phone number for passengers using the proposed car park to use for enquiries and also he has asked me to sell train tickets on site as well..."

**Planning Comments - Key Issues**

29. The proposal involves the formation of a car park in the open countryside, contrary to policies aimed at protecting the countryside for its own sake. The site has reasonable screening but a car park for 115 cars including lighting will have a significant visual impact on the surrounding countryside. The amended scheme has addressed some of these issues but is still felt to be too visually harmful.
30. The applicant has been invited to put forward a case to justify the proposal as a departure from Development Plan policies. He has provided evidence of the parking problems at Royston Station and has shown the broad support of many parties such as WAGN, North Herts District Council and Members of Parliament to a Park and Ride scheme. (Several MPs letters have been submitted that are dated prior to the submission of the application - none of these specifically refer to the application site or this proposal although Mr Andrew Lansley CBE MP does say, in his letter of 18<sup>th</sup> February 2004 "My support for your scheme will obviously be subject to the proposed site in Kneesworth, as it may be open land; could you let me have more details?"

31. At a relatively early stage officers felt that the proposal could not be justified on this green field site due to the visual impact this would have on the surrounding countryside and sustainability issues. The proposal was felt to be unsustainable at the level proposed for the reasons set out in the comments of the Principal Planning Policy Officer (Transport) quoted above, essentially that it will increase vehicular movements through the villages and encourage long distance commuting.
32. For several months there have been discussions between planning officers, the applicant and the land owner together with District Councillors and Andrew Lansley CBE MP regarding the possible use of the old Sunday Market Place (land immediately to the north) where there is currently an existing hardstanding and a good screen to the road. The suggestion was to amend the proposal to this alternative location with approximately half the number of vehicle movements and utilising the north access for a temporary period. (Land to the north of the Sunday Market site was also briefly considered and discounted).
33. Officers felt they would be able to support a proposal using part of the existing Sunday Market site at the reduced level. This, or any permission, would only be considered on a temporary basis as in the future the parking facilities at Royston Station may be improved. The applicant was advised that if the facilities at Royston Station were not upgraded and the parking problems persisted he may be successful in a later application to renew any permission granted.
34. After much discussion the land owner agreed to allow the applicant the use of a small area of the Sunday Market site but only on the condition that a road surfacing company, currently operating from opposite the site, would relocate to the Sunday Market site (or at least use it for the parking of its large vehicles) in order that he would be able to gain the maximum potential from his land.
35. During consideration of this approach it was discovered that the company opposite was operating without the benefit of planning permission and there was little merit in its relocation in any case (this company has since applied for retrospective planning permission on its existing site). As such talks have stalled, this application now needs to be determined as submitted.
36. It is my view that there would be some benefit in a proposal that would help alleviate the parking problems at Royston Station. However, the proposal as submitted would be visually detrimental to the surrounding countryside, would be unsustainable as at the scale proposed would actually increase the number of car journeys and encourage long distance commuting and would use the less preferred southern access where vehicle speeds are higher and where highway safety would be compromised. I also note the concerns of one local resident with regard to additional vehicle movements.
37. In addition to the above the matter of a flood risk assessment has not been submitted although the use of a permeable surface material may be sufficient to overcome any concerns.
38. I have suggested to the applicant that he continue to negotiate with the land owner and consider submitting a further application in the future if he can find a way forward.
39. If Members are minded to approve and to recommend the application be referred to the Secretary of State as a Departure from the Development Plan, I consider that only a temporary permission could be justified. The proposal is intended to address a very specific problem which may later be resolved - this proposal would then no longer be

justified. In my view however, to grant a temporary permission on the application site makes it difficult to consider conditions to ensure additional planting and the future removal of any new hard standing or other surface material. Such requirements may be too onerous for a temporary permission. A flood risk assessment would also need to be submitted and considered before any consent could be issued.

### **Recommendation**

40. Refusal for the following reasons:

1. The site lies in the open countryside. It is a green parcel of land surrounded on all sides by open countryside. The formation of a substantial car park including lighting will have a detrimental impact on the visual quality of the surroundings contrary to the aim of protecting the countryside for its own sake. It has not been adequately demonstrated that this proposed use is essential in this particular rural location. As such the proposal is contrary to Policy P1/2 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003.
2. The proposed use, at the scale proposed, would not promote more sustainable transport choices as it will encourage long distance commuting and encourage additional car-journeys including the increase in traffic through villages to access the site. As such the proposal is contrary to Policies P1/3 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and Policy TP1 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.
3. Notwithstanding the above the application fails to adequately consider access improvements, visibility splays, lighting detail and flood risk.

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

- Planning File reference S/1416/04/F
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003

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