

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 7th September 2005

AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

**S/1365/05/F - Great Wilbraham
Change of Use to B1(c) and B8 uses of Storage Buildings
at Upper Heath Farm, Mill Road
for The Trustees of The R S Hicks Will Trust**

**Recommendation: Refusal
Date for Determination: 2nd September 2005**

Site and Proposal

1. The application site lies 2km to the south of Great Wilbraham, 500m before the A11 and set back 350m from the road. The site of 0.12 hectares contains two steel frame barns with fibre cement cladding, measuring 722 square metres, which have been used between 2001 and 2005 for storing documents. To the northeast and southeast of the buildings are areas of hardstanding that incorporate the access to the buildings and to fields beyond. The buildings are accessed via a farm track off Mill Road. This runs through the site, and to the northwest of the barns. The farm complex includes two other barns, still in agricultural use and three residential properties.
2. A flint barn, to the southwest of the buildings, has recently been converted to provide a dwelling. Its garden is approximately 16 metres deep and backs onto the barns that are the subject of this planning application. There is also a pair of semi-detached houses approximately 26 metres to the south of the barns.
3. The site lies in countryside, in an area designated as Green Belt. The surrounding landscape is one of open chalkland, with views across to the A11 and beyond.
4. This full planning application received on 8th July 2005 seeks permission to extend the use of two barns to B1(c) (light industrial) and B8 (warehousing) uses. The buildings are currently restricted in use to the storage of documents, files and ancillary office furniture. No other uses, including those falling within the B8 use class are permitted.

Planning History

5. **S/1493/96/F** gave planning permission for the change of use of the barns from agricultural to the storage of office equipment. A planning condition on this permission limited the use to the storage of documents, files and ancillary office furniture only and excluded all other uses including those falling within class B8. The purpose of this condition is to ensure that the scale of development is appropriate to the rural location with adjacent houses close by.

Planning Policy

6. **Policy P1/2 'Environmental Restrictions on Development'** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 ("Structure Plan") states development in the

countryside development in the countryside will be restricted unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location; where there is an unacceptable risk to the quality of ground or surface water and; where there could be damage, destruction or loss to areas that should be retained for their biodiversity, historic, archaeological, architectural and recreational value.

7. **Policies 9/2a** of the Structure Plan and **Policy GB2** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 ("Local Plan") identify the purpose of the Green Belt and limits change of use in rural areas to those 'appropriate to a rural area'. 'Appropriate development' includes uses of land that 'preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with Green Belt purposes'. Paragraph 3.14 of the Local Plan further clarifies the Council's policy in relation to the change of use of existing buildings:

Proposals to change the use of existing buildings are capable of being 'appropriate' development subject to criterion (6) of policy GB2. Such re-use can assist rural diversification through providing new accommodation for commercial, industrial or recreational uses, or for tourism. Such uses should not have a materially greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt, so any proposals involving the extension of buildings will be strictly controlled. In addition, the District Council will consider the impact of associated uses of surrounding land for extensive hard surfacing, car parking, boundary walling/fencing or extensive external storage, lighting, and ancillary uses upon the openness and landscape character of the Green Belt.

8. **Policy EM10 'Conversions of Rural Buildings and Future Extensions'** of the Local Plan, allows the change of use of rural buildings outside of village frameworks where the use will not materially change the existing character or impact of the building, safe and satisfactory vehicular access with car parking and turning within the site can be provided and the scale and frequency of traffic generated can be accommodated within the road system without undue adverse effects.
9. **Policy TP1 'Planning for More Sustainable Travel'** of the Local Plan seeks to promote sustainable travel and as such planning permission will only be granted where small-scale increases in travel demands will result, unless satisfactory measures to increase accessibility are included.
10. **Policy ES6 'Noise and Pollution'** of the Local Plan seeks to minimise the impact of noise from new industrial or commercial activities by appropriate conditions.

Consultations

11. **Great Wilbraham Parish Council** recommends approval commenting that it '...understands that the farm does not wish to use the barns for anything that will be intrusive or unpleasant to near neighbours and so are happy to approve the change of use. Additional conditions could be put on if required by SCDC'.
12. The **Local Highway Authority** does not object to the principle of the uses proposed, however access to Mill Road will need to be improved to cater for the possible/likely vehicular traffic. It has specified improvements including a minimum access width of 7.3m for a minimum distance of 25.0m back from the channel line of Mill Road; kerb radii of 15.0m; and vehicular visibility splays of 4.5m x 215.0m. A plan of these improvements and visibility splays is to be obtained from the agent.
13. The **Environment Agency** has no objection to the proposal but recommends conditions relating to foul water drainage, surface water drainage and pollution control.

14. The **Chief Environmental Health Officer** is concerned that problems could arise from noise and has requested conditions be added if permission is granted to limit noise disturbance to adjacent dwellings.

Representations

15. No representations have been received.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

16. The key issues relating to this application are the impact upon highway safety, residential amenity and the surrounding landscape, which is designated as Green Belt.

Residential Amenity

17. The proposed unrestricted B1(c) and B8 uses will, almost certainly, result in significant additional traffic movements, including larger types of commercial vehicles. The intensified use of the access is likely to result in noise disturbance to neighbouring residential properties over and above what might reasonably be expected while living within a farm complex. Disturbance will be more intrusive due to the peaceful location. The applicant's desire to restrict future users to those they consider will not affect the nearby residents does not provide the necessary assurances that residential amenity will be protected in the long-term and is not a material planning consideration in determining this application.

Green Belt

18. The site includes areas of existing hardstanding to the northeast and southeast of the buildings. The proposed uses are likely to generate significantly higher levels of vehicles visiting the site that will require parking and turning areas. No details have been provided with the application as to how appropriate car parking and turning can be provided within the immediate vicinity of the buildings. It is likely however that without requiring further hard paving such requirements could not be achieved, particularly if used for an unrestricted B1(c) use. The extension of hardstandings in association with the use of the buildings would have a materially greater impact on the openness and landscape character of the Green Belt than the existing lawful use or an agricultural use especially as the site is prominent from the A11. Other intrusions such as lighting or outside storage have also not addressed.

Highway Safety

19. The road off which the site is served is a rural country road that leads from Great Wilbraham to the A11 trunk road. It is well used and is subject to the national speed limit. The existing access is inadequate to serve the buildings if the uses proposed are approved. The agent has stated that it is not possible to provide an upgraded access without removing mature hedgerows. The access provision is therefore unsatisfactory both in terms of highway safety and harm to the rural landscape.

Recommendation

20. It is recommended that the application be refused on the following grounds:
1. The road off which the site is served is a rural country road that leads from Great Wilbraham to the A11 trunk road. It is well used and is subject to the

national speed limit. The existing access is inadequate to serve the buildings if the uses proposed are permitted. The application fails to provide necessary visibility splays, kerb radii and access width and as such will be detrimental to highway safety.

2. Notwithstanding the reason above, if the access were to be improved, it would result in the loss of mature hedges and will be detrimental to the visual amenity and rural character of the countryside and, as such, is contrary to Green Belt policies EM10 and GB2 of the South Cambridgeshire Local plan, adopted 2004 and P2/9a of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan, adopted 2003.
3. The site is within an open chalkland landscape and the Green Belt. It is clearly visible within that landscape from the A11 and surrounding countryside. The application fails to provide details of how car parking and turning will be provided within the existing site without having a materially greater impact on the openness and landscape character of the area and, as such, is contrary to policies EM10 and GB2 of the South Cambridgeshire Local plan, adopted 2004 and P2/9a of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan, adopted 2003.
4. The buildings are sited within a farm complex. There are three adjacent residential dwellings within the built area of the farm. The existing use has been limited to the storage of office equipment in order to limit any harm caused on the amenities of these residential properties. While PPS7 supports the re-use of rural buildings, the proposed unrestricted B1(c) and B8 uses will result in significant additional traffic movements, including larger types of commercial vehicles. The intensified use of the access will result in noise disturbance to neighbouring residential properties over and above what might reasonably be expected while living within a rural environment. The proposed uses are contrary to policy ES6 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2004.

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

- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
- Planning file Ref. S/1365/05/F

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