

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Development and Conservation Control Committee 7<sup>th</sup> September 2005  
**AUTHOR/S:** Director of Development Services

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**S/1386/05/F – Whittlesford**  
**Change Of Use From Museum Storage to Offices at Building 288, Imperial War Museum, Duxford for Imperial War Museum**

**Recommendation: Refusal**  
**Date for Determination: 7<sup>th</sup> September 2005**

### Site and Proposal

1. The Duxford Imperial War Museum site, to the north of the A505, is located within the countryside, between two small settlements that make up the village of Heathfield. It currently comprises a group of traditional style buildings that originally formed the officer's quarters for the airfield.
2. Building 288 is a single storey, red brick and slate building that is situated to the west of the main entrance. It is currently vacant. The Officers Mess is a Grade II listed building that is situated to the north east.
3. The application, received on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2005, proposes change of use of the building from museum storage to offices. The use would cover 290 square metres of floor space and employ 10 staff for a temporary period of two years. A small parking area comprising of 10 spaces is situated to the rear of the building. No internal or external works are proposed to the proposed.

### Planning History

4. Planning permission for a temporary change of use of Building 288 from museum storage to offices was refused in October 1994 for the following reason:-  
  
*"The site lies within Special Policy Area R14 as defined in the approved South Cambridgeshire Local Plan. Policy R14 requires that the Imperial War Museum site is to be treated as a major tourist/ recreation facility. As such any proposal must, amongst other criteria, be associated with the continued use of the site as a museum of aviation and 20<sup>th</sup> century conflict.*  
  
*The use of the storage building for office / research purposes unconnected with the museum use would be contrary to the above mentioned policy, because development is restricted to that which assist's the museum function, and therefore protects the area from other development which might impede or interfere with that function."*
5. Planning permission was granted for a temporary change of use of Building 288 from museum storage to police offices in April 2002. This permission was granted under special circumstances for an essential local service whilst the new Sawston police station was being built.

## **Development Plan Policy**

6. **Policy P1/2** of the **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003** restricts development in the countryside to that which can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
7. **Policy P7/6** of the **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003** seeks to protect and enhance the quality and distinctiveness of the historic built environment.
8. **Policy P2/6** of the **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003** states that sensitive small-scale development in rural areas will be facilitated where it enables the re-use of existing buildings.
9. The **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** designates the whole of the Imperial War Museum site as a **Special Policy Area** (See inset map no. 91a Heathfield).
10. **Policy RT9** of the **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** states that the Imperial War Museum site at Duxford Airfield will be treated as a special case as a major tourist/ recreation facility. Proposals will be considered with regard to the particular needs and opportunities of the site, the criteria in Policy RT1, and specific criteria such as the continued use of the site as a museum of aviation and 20<sup>th</sup> century conflict.
11. **Policy RT1** of the **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** states that when considering applications for the development of tourist and recreation facilities, the District Council will have regard to the need for such facilities and the benefits that may accrue. Proposals will be resisted that would, amongst other criteria, generate significant motorised traffic movements or have inadequate provision for the parking and manoeuvring of vehicles.
12. **Policy EN28** of the **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** seeks to resist proposals that would damage the setting, well-being or attractiveness of a listed building or harm the visual relationship between the building and its natural or formal landscape surroundings.
13. **Policy EM10** of the **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** states that planning permission will be granted for the change of use and conversion of rural buildings to employment use providing, amongst other criteria, a safe and satisfactory vehicular access can be provided together with adequate space within the curtilage to accommodate ancillary requirements such as car parking and lorry manoeuvring without significant detriment to setting of the building or the landscape within which it is located.

## **National Planning Guidance**

14. Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (Planning and the Historic Environment) outlines the need to preserve the country's built and natural heritage. Paragraph 2.18 on changes of use of historic buildings is particularly relevant to this application. It states:-  
  
"New uses may often be the key to a building's or area's preservation, and controls over land use, density, plot ratio, daylighting and other planning matters should be exercised sympathetically where this would enable a historic building or area to be given a new lease of life. The Secretary of States is not generally in favour of tightening development controls over changes of use as a specific instrument of conservation policy. He considers that, in general, the same provisions on change of use should apply to historic buildings as to all others."

Patterns of economic activity inevitably change over time, and it would be unrealistic to seek to prevent such change by the use of planning controls”.

### **Consultation**

15. **Whittlesford Parish Council** recommends approval of the application.
16. **Duxford Parish Council** recommends approval of the application.
17. The **Conservation Manager** raises no objections to the application and states that offices are considered to be compatible use for the building. It is important to retain the building in a use to ensure it is maintained. The majority of the former RAF buildings on this side of the road (apart from the Mess) are used for storage.
18. The **Local Highways Authority** states that it is difficult to sustain a highways objection to the proposal but it is mindful that it could set an unwelcome precedent.
19. The **Chief Environmental Health Officer** considers that the application would have no significant noise or environmental pollution impacts.
20. **English Nature** has no comments.

### **Representations**

21. The **Applicant** makes the following points in support of the application: -
  - a) “Building 288 has been vacant since October 2004. Prior to its occupation by Cambridgeshire Constabulary, the building stood empty for in excess of 20 years and was in a poor state of repair. Some £50,000 was spent on essential repairs prior to the use of the building as offices. The rental income has now largely paid for that initial work. However, further upgrading work is necessary, and in particular, provision needs to be made for environmental improvement measures to allow for possible use of the building as archival storage or Museum offices, as well as further repairs to the external fabric of the building.
  - a) The Museum at Duxford has a portfolio of around 100 buildings of varying type and construction mostly built between World War I and World War II. Some of the buildings are listed and others are scheduled for listing. Collectively, the buildings represent the most complete example of a wartime airfield base in the Country. Whilst some buildings are of substantial construction, many were erected hurriedly and are of a poor quality but nevertheless important. Funds for building maintenance are always stretched, therefore, additional income that could be raised by the letting of Building 288 would be welcome and enable the building to be brought into a better state of repair and provide the necessary funding for improvement works.
  - c) We are aware of Policy RT9, which relates specifically to the Imperial War Museum site and Policy RT1, which relates to recreation and tourism development. Whilst not specifically associated with the continued use of the site as a museum of 20<sup>th</sup> century conflict, it could be argued that the continued use as offices of Building 288 for a temporary period would provide essential funding for a building that does form an integral part of the Duxford site, and hence, is associated with the continued use of the site as a museum of 20<sup>th</sup> century conflict.

The proposal for continued use does not conflict with criteria (1) to (9) of RT1, excepting paragraph (3) where the building would not be allied directly to the use of the site as a whole as a museum.

- d) We believe the continued use of Building 288 as offices for a further temporary period would not cause any demonstrable harm and would be in the interests of the museum in the longer term, in so far as valuable funding would be gained for important building maintenance. As yet, the museum is unable to maintain this building to any standard in the next two financial years and as stated in 10.66 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 "Vacant, derelict buildings, which are of architectural or historic interest, represent a wasted asset. They often constitute eyesores". Therefore, the museum would like to benefit from the precedent that has been set for this building.
- e) As further substantiation of the continued support needed at the museum, I would refer you to the Government's Planning Policy Guidance 15.
- f) The occupation of the building by Cambridgeshire Constabulary did not create any difficulty or disruption to the museum or to the owners / occupiers of neighbouring land and the museum would assure the same respect from any future tenant.
- g) The museum appreciates that the last grant of planning permission was beneficial to both South Cambridgeshire District Council and the Imperial war museum. However, continued support for the museum from the Council in its rolling battle to preserve the prestigious heritage of this unique and significant site would be evident with the granting of a temporary (2 years) change of use to Building 288".

22. No **Neighbour** representations have been received.

### **Planning Comments – Key Issues**

23. The main issues to be considered during the determination of this application are: -
- a) Office Use;
  - b) Impact upon the Countryside;
  - c) Conservation and Listed Building;
  - d) Highway Safety.

### **Office Use**

24. The proposed use of the building as commercial offices for lease to a speculative third party is clearly contrary to Policy RT9 of the Local Plan that specifically designates the Duxford Imperial War Museum site as a special Policy Area and restricts the use of buildings on the site to the main use of the site as major tourist/ recreation facility and museum of aviation and 20<sup>th</sup> century conflict.
25. I acknowledge the fact that the building has been granted planning permission and used for a police office for a temporary period in recent years, but I can confirm that this was only considered acceptable under very special circumstances as it was demonstrated that there was an essential need for this facility whilst an existing police station was being rebuilt.

26. The applicant has not provided any evidence to suggest that any alternative uses related to the existing use of the site have been explored and does not have any particular business in mind for the use of the building. I do not therefore consider that the change of use of the building to offices could be supported.

#### **Impact upon the Countryside**

27. Whilst I am of the opinion that the conversion of existing buildings to employment uses within the countryside is acceptable in principle and the proposed use would not necessarily harm the character and appearance of the countryside, I cannot encourage this use bearing in mind the special need for the site to be retained in its current use.

#### **Conservation and Listed Building**

28. I agree with the Conservation Manager that the building is of some historic interest and it is important to retain the building in a use to ensure it is maintained. I do not, however, consider that the use of the building as speculative offices for third party lease is compatible with the existing use of the site and would argue that a more suitable use could be found that would preserve the functional link between this building and the rest of this unique and significant site.
29. The proposed use is not considered to damage the setting of the Officer's Mess listed building.

#### **Highway Safety**

30. The A505 is a busy, straight road links the M11 and A11 with the A1. It has a 40 mph speed limit as it passes the site. Access to Building 288 is proposed via the existing staff entrance to the museum on the south side of the A505 and through internal estate roads to the north side. An estimated vehicular flow of 20 in/out movements is predicted per day.
31. I do not consider that an increase in 20 traffic movements per day would generate significant motorised movements or cause a hazard that would seriously affect the free flow of traffic along the A505. Whilst the applicant has shown a designated parking area for 10 vehicles and the Council's parking standards require 12 parking spaces for 290 square metres of office floor space, the site provides adequate space for further parking, turning and manoeuvring.

#### **Other Matters**

32. No objections are raised to the proposed use on neighbour amenity grounds.

#### **Conclusion**

33. Whilst I acknowledge that a use needs to be found for the building to ensure its retention and there are no objections to the application from a conservation, countryside or highway point of view, I cannot support the change of use of the building to speculative offices as this would seriously undermine the aims of the Duxford Imperial War Museum special policy area that seeks all buildings on the site to be used in connection with the site as a major tourist/ recreation facility and museum of aviation and 20<sup>th</sup> century conflict.

## **Recommendation**

### 34. Refusal.

The proposed use of Building 288 at the Duxford Imperial War Museum site as offices unrelated to the museum would not relate to the existing use of the site as major tourist /recreation facility. The proposal would therefore be contrary to Policy RT9 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 that restricts development within this special policy area to that which relates to the continued use of the site as a museum of aviation and 20<sup>th</sup> century conflict.

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

- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- File References S/0917/94/F, S/0454/02/F and S/1386/05/F
- Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (Planning and the Historic Environment)

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