

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

---

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

---

**S/1306/05/F - Bassingbourn  
Village Monument, Bassingbourn Village Green  
for Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth Parish Council**

**Recommendation: Approval**  
**Date for Determination: 26<sup>th</sup> August 2005**

### **Conservation Area**

#### **Site and Proposal**

1. Bassingbourn Village Green lies on the north side of the High Street. It has a low hedge and fence to its frontage with pedestrian access and features a centrally planted tree. The village sign is sited to the west.
2. The full application, received on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2005 proposes the erection of a monument to the coprolite mining industry. It consists of a brick base 1.8m square and 0.9m high with an explanatory plaque, set in a flint panel, topped by bronze spheres representing the coprolites. The overall height is 1.7m. The monument would be sited in the south-west corner of the Green on the High Street frontage.

#### **Planning History**

3. There is no planning history.

#### **Planning Policy**

4. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003:

**Policy P1/3** - Sustainable Design in Built Development

**Policy P7/6** - Historic Built Environment

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004:

**Policy EN30** states proposals will be expected to preserve or enhance the special character and appearance of Conservation Areas.

#### **Consultations**

5. **Bassingbourn Parish Council** approves the application.
6. **The Conservation Manager** comments:

“A pre-application meeting was held with representatives of the Parish Council and the designer of the sculpture. No issue is raised with the principle of the sculpture, but there is concern that it is an “idea” that has then been turned into a finished proposal without having had an artist or professional designer involved.

This has resulted in a rather heavy and inelegant plinth that also has little relationship to the village green, so will appear as an item sitting in the space rather than an integral part of the green.

The suggestion was made, supported by a sketch, that a circular plan form to the plinth might be appropriate, and that the plinth might be lowered and enlarged to form a circular seat around the sculpture, with the explanatory lettering around the base of the sculpture, so that people reading the lettering would walk around the sculpture and view it from all sides. It is understood that the Parish Council was concerned that my proposals would significantly add to their costs, although the Arts Development Officer thought that he might be able to attract additional funding to the project to help with this. However, this might take a little time and the Parish is keen to move the project forward.

The Conservation Section does not wish to oppose the project, but remains of the opinion that the proposal would benefit significantly from involving a professional artist/designer, such that it becomes an integral part of the village green.”

7. **The Arts Development Officer** comments:

“The proposed works are part-funded by the South Cambridgeshire District Council Art in Villages Scheme, piloted in 2001, of which Bassingbourn Parish Council was one of the first applicants. The monument is the result of a great deal of local consultation. As the siting of the work falls within a conservation area it will need to meet the recommendations of the appropriate design guide.”

**Representations**

8. A letter supporting the application has been received.
9. 8 letters have been received objecting to the application on the following grounds:
  1. Disgust at the subject matter of the sculpture - it will be an embarrassment and make the village a laughing stock. It will devalue nearby property.
  2. The £5,000 raised by the Parish Council could be spent on more worthwhile projects such as improving and extending footpaths in the village or renovating the cemetery chapels. The sculpture is not needed, and the cost is exorbitant.
  3. A work of art for the village should result from a transparent competition among competing local artists. The proposal has no artistic merit.
  4. The Parish Council has ignored concerns of residents. Publicity was via the school news letter which has limited circulation. Only 103 votes were cast in favour of the sculpture.
  5. The sculpture will be out of place and detract from the beauty of the High Street.
  6. Its location will be a traffic hazard.
  7. Magnet for vandalism and therefore continuing cost.

8. One resident disputes the representation of coprolites as fossilized dinosaurs dung and quotes from an interesting article in the Royston Crow c. 1909:

“In the valley of the River Cam, going towards Cambridge “coprolites” have been extensively dug during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century - I quote from Mr Conybeare’s book “The Highways and Byways of Cambridgeshire”. It has been discovered that the “upper greensand” (here a narrow deposit immediately over the gault and usually some 15 or 20 ft below the surface) was full of organic remains worth extracting for manure.

These remains were never true coprolites, but mostly formless nodules rich in phosphate of lime, many being sponges, along with abundance of sea urchins, molluscs, crabs and innumerable sharks’ teeth.

The industry brought a wave of prosperity to the district for coprolites were worth some £3 per ton, and the average yield was some 300 tons per acre. The merchants usually offered the landowner £150 or more per acre 3 years occupation, being bound also to level and resoil it at the end of their tenancy. Wages too ran high, a good ‘fossil-digger’ could earn his 40s per week; this caused a corresponding rise in agricultural wages which went up from 10s or 12s to double that amount, piece work for digging.

After being brought to the surface in a horse-mill on the spot, the water ran off as thick mud. The nodules were ground to powder, treated with sulphuric acid, thus producing super-phosphate of lime for manure.”

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

10. The key issue is the impact of the monument on the Conservation Area. The proposed monument has been the subject of pre-application discussions with the Parish Council and, if approved, will be part funded by this Council. The Conservation Manager does not wish to oppose the project but would have preferred a design that had the input of an artist/designer. Obviously there is a significant cost implication if the design is more intricate, not to mention the time delays involved.
11. Much local comment has been made about the subject matter of the sculpture, but this is not a planning matter. The size of the sculpture is relatively modest (about 1.7m high) and the siting on the village green appropriate as a focal point in the High Street. The plinth will be partly obscured by the low hedge on the frontage of the green, which will help assimilate the sculpture into the street scene.

### **Recommendation**

12. **Approve**

1. Standard Condition A – Time limited permission (Reason A);
2. No development shall commence until details of the following have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority:
  - a) Samples of the materials to be used for the plinth
  - b) The Design of the bronze coprolite sculpture

The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

## **Informatives**

### **Reasons for Approval**

1. The development is considered generally to accord with the Development Plan and particularly the following policies:
  - **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003:**  
**Policy P1/3** (Sustainable Design in Built Development)  
**Policy P7/6** (Historic Built Environment)
  - **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004:**  
**Policy EN30** (Development in Conservation Areas)
2. The development is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the following material planning considerations which have been raised during the consultation exercise:
  - Impact on Conservation Area

**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/1306/05/F

**Contact Officer:** Bob Morgan - Planning Officer  
Telephone: (01954) 713395