

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

S/0712/05/F - Caxton
**Retention of Portakabin Office and Foul Drainage Pipe at Firs Farm, St. Peters Street
for R & J Millard.**

Recommendation: Delegated Approval
Date for Determination: 10 August 2005

Site and Proposal

1. The roughly rectangular site measuring 20m by 20m (0.04 ha) is situated on the eastern edge of Firs Farm adjacent St. Peters Street. A thin-strip of land 15m long by 1m wide, extends from the main portion of the site on Firs Farm, over St Peters Street, to the north-western boundary of the Bates Farmhouse site (diagonally opposite the site). The site is situated close to, but just outside the village framework boundary of Caxton. A row of trees runs along the road frontage, with some gaps between trees. The site is approximately 0.6m above the ground level of St. Peters Street.
2. The full application received 12 April 2005 seeks retrospective planning consent for the siting of a portakabin-type office measuring 12.15m in length, 3.61m in depth and 2.3m in height. The walls of the portakabin are clad in brown metal sheeting, with grey metal cladding on the roof. By virtue of amended plans received 15th June 2005, the proposal also seeks retrospective approval for a drainage pipe which passes diagonally through the site and under the portakabin office and is connected to drainage pipes installed on the adjacent Bates Farmhouse site.

Planning History

3. Planning permission was given in June 1997 for the conversion of farm buildings for business use, demolition of buildings and landscaping at Firs Farm, subject to the signing of a Section 106 legal agreement (**Ref: S/0452/94/F**).
4. Planning permission was also given in August 2000 for the conversion of agricultural buildings to offices at Firs Farm (**Ref: S/1363/00/F**).
5. In May 2002, planning permission for the renewal of application **S/0452/94/F** was given (**Ref: S/0787/02/F**). This consent has not been implemented.
6. Within the vicinity of the site, the following planning applications are also considered relevant:

In October 2003, planning permission was given for the erection of four dwellings and garages, and conversion of farmhouse into 2 dwellings on the Bates Farmhouse site, subject to the signing of a Section 106 legal agreement (**Ref: S/0710/02/F**).

On 5th August 2005, a planning application for the variation of Condition 1 of planning permission **S/0771/04/F** to extend period for which the mobile home can be used, on land to the north of the site was received (**S/1543/05/F**). This application is currently under consideration.

Planning Policy

The site lies outside the Caxton village framework boundary. As such the following policies are relevant:

7. **Policy P1/2: Environmental Restrictions on Development** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 ("The County Structure Plan") restricts development within the countryside, unless it can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
8. **Policy P1/3: Sustainable Design in Built Development** of the County Structure Plan requires a high standard of design, which responds to the local character of the built environment for all new development.
9. **Policy P2/6: Rural Economy** of the County Structure Plan states that sensitive small-scale employment development will be facilitated where it contributes to one of seven objectives, including enabling farm or rural diversification.
10. **Policy P6/4: Drainage** of the County Structure Plan requires all new development to "avoid exacerbating flood risk locally and elsewhere by utilising water retention areas and other appropriate forms of Sustainable Drainage Systems for the disposal of surface water run off."
11. **Policy CS3: Foul and Surface Water Drainage** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 ("The Local Plan") states that "in proposals for development, the presumption is for drainage to a public sewer to be provided wherever possible".

Consultation

12. **Caxton Parish Council** - In response to amended plans, has recommended the refusal of the planning application. It objects to both the retention of the portakabin office and the drainage pipe.

It is noted that the Parish Council recommended the approval of the original application submitted for the portakabin-type office alone.

13. **Building Control** - No objection. They add "with reference to the foul drainage, we already have an application. For connection of foul drains to the mains in Tates Field our reference is BN/05/0262. To date this work is satisfactory. As the portakabin is existing, we have no comment to make."
14. **Environment Agency** - No objection.
15. **Local Highways** - No comment

Representations

16. Letter received from local resident at 80 Ermine Street objecting to application on the following grounds:
- a) Planning permission should have been obtained upfront for portakabin and drainage pipe;
 - b) The Parish Council and local residents were led to believe that planning permission for Firs Farm was conditional to the relocation of the pig farm, with its long history of environmental problems;
 - c) The whole pig unit including the farm office should be relocated from the Firs Farm site;
 - d) The farm office should be sited at Redwood Farm, Gransden Road, which is "close to the existing (relocated) pig unit, within the extended farm area and just as close to both residential homes as St. Peters Street"; and
 - e) Concern that the portakabin will lead to additional development on the site.

Representations by Agent

17. The agent has stated in the application that the portakabin is used as a farm office for agricultural land in Caxton, Huntingdonshire and Northamptonshire extending to 103.2 hectares in size; and that the use of the site for pig rearing ceased four years ago. The farm office was previously located in Firs Farmhouse on the opposite side of St. Peters Street, but this site is no longer available due to the sale and refurbishment of the farmhouse. Three persons are employed at the site and it is anticipated that one to two vehicles visit the site on an average working day.
18. The applicant lives locally and wants to retain their farm office in the locality. It is intended to create a replacement farm office within the buildings that have been granted planning permission for business use conversion (Ref: S/0787/02/F). "Unfortunately, due to financial and commercial reasons the conversion works have been delayed and as an interim arrangement our clients found it necessary to install the Portakabin office building for the farm needs. That said, an office building would also be required in association with overseeing the approved conversion works".
19. Letter from the agent dated 6 June 2005 states "it is the intention that the Portakabin will also serve as a site office for the conversion works, and allowing for the anticipated programme of these works, we invite you to consider granting planning permission for a period of two years".

Planning Comments - Key Issues

20. The key issues for consideration in this application are:
- a) Whether the proposal is acceptable in this rural location and if not, whether there are material considerations which justify a departure from this policy;
 - b) The visual impact of the proposed building on the visual amenities of the countryside;
 - c) Potential impacts on the amenity of adjacent land users; and

d) Whether the proposal will have any impact on local flooding or water quality.

Principle of New Farm Office Building On-Site

21. The proposal represents a Departure from Development Plan policies. The proposal is contrary to Policy P1/2 of the County Structure Plan, as it is not essential in this rural location and is contrary to Policy P1/3 of the Country Structure Plan, which requires a high standard of design that would contribute to a positive sense of place.
22. Nevertheless, I am of the view that there are material circumstances in this case, which outweigh more general planning considerations. The site benefits from planning permission for the conversion of buildings to business use (Ref: S/0787/02/F). It would be possible to convert some of the existing agricultural buildings to a farm office for the use of the applicant, under the above planning application, without the need for a further consent from the Local Planning Authority.
23. It is noted that the stationing of a portakabin on-site to administer building work associated with the implementation of the above consent, would not require planning permission.
24. The portakabin positioned on site is of modest size and height and is largely screened from public view by existing vegetation along the road frontage. The portakabin is sited near a cluster of existing farm buildings, and will not be seen as an isolated new building within the countryside. I am of the view that the proposal does not seriously harm the visual amenities of surrounding land within the countryside.
25. I am of the view that the impacts of the proposal are able to be sufficiently mitigated by a temporary period of consent for the proposed portakabin.
26. The proposal would not adversely affect the amenity of adjacent land owners.
27. The drainage pipe proposed is considered adequate for the portakabin and no objection to this pipe has been received from the Environment Agency or Building Control. Given its underground position, it has no impact on the visual amenities of the countryside.
28. The adequacy of the drainage pipe for drainage associated with the implementation of planning application S/0787/02/F or future development applied for on the site, will be examined through the signing off of conditions of consent, or the assessment of a new planning application, respectively.
29. Having regard to the nature, scale and limited life of the proposal, together with the existing planning permission on the site, I do not consider it to be necessary to refer the application to the Secretary of State.

Recommendation

30. Delegated approval as amended by letter dated 6th June 2005 and Drawing No. M-318/P/3 franked 15th June 2005, subject to the expiry of the notification of the application as a departure from the development plan.

Conditions

1. The portakabin, hereby permitted, shall be removed and land restored to its former condition on or before the 31st December 2006 or within 14 days of the completion of the conversion of an existing farm building (or part thereof) to farm office, whichever is the sooner.
(Reason - Approval of the proposal on a permanent basis would be contrary to the proper planning of the area and land should be reinstated to facilitate future beneficial use.)

Informatives

Reasons for Approval

1. The proposed portakabin is not essential in this rural location, contrary to Policy **P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and is not of a high standard of design that would contribute to a positive sense of place, contrary to Policy **P1/3** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003.
2. Nevertheless, it is considered that there are material considerations in this case, which include the existing planning permission on the site, the presence of several farm buildings in the vicinity of the portakabin, location of applicant's farm in the region, unavailability of previous site for farm office, partial screening of site by trees/hedgerow along the road elevation and the temporary nature of farm office, which warrant the granting of temporary consent.

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
- Planning File References S/0452/94/F, S/1363/00/F, S/0787/02/F, S/0710/02/F, S/1543/05/F and S/0712/05/F

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