

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 2nd November 2005
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/1608/05/LB – Great Shelford

Alterations and Conversion of Barn to Dwelling Including Conversion of Garage to Bathroom and Hall, Replacement of Cart Lodge with Enlarged Cart Lodge and Utility, Replacement of Corrugated Roofing Material with Slate on Single Storey Buildings and Plain Tiles on Main Roof and Attached Post and Rail Fences and Gates

S/1609/05/F – Great Shelford

Extension and Conversion of Barn into Dwelling

The Oat Barn, De Freville Farm, High Green for M Funston & Dakin Estates Ltd

Recommendation: Refusal

Date for Determination: 11th October 2005

Conservation Area, Listed Building and Departure Application

Members will visit this site on Monday 31st October 2005.

Site and Proposal

1. De Freville Farm is located on the west side of High Green and to the south of the railway line. Although in the heart of the village, the farm lies outside the village framework and in the countryside and Green Belt. This application relates to a Grade II Listed 18th Century timber framed and weatherboarded three bay barn with a corrugated asbestos roof. The main part of the barn is approximately 8.8 metres high and there are single storey elements attached to its east and west sides which project beyond the northern elevation of the barn to form a small open courtyard area. To the east of the barn is a grassed area enclosed on its north and east sides by a wall whilst to the west is another grassed area partially bounded along its southern side by conifers. To the north of the site is De Freville Farmhouse, also a Grade II Listed Building, whilst to the south is a Listed thatched cottage. Beyond the western boundary of the site is a timber barn that was formerly part of the De Freville Farm complex but has recently been converted to a dwelling.
2. The applications, submitted on 16th August 2005, seek to extend and convert the barn into a four bedroom dwelling. As part of the proposals, a lean-to open cart lodge attached to the west side of the main barn would be removed and replaced with a larger pitched roof extension comprising a cart lodge and utility room. The roof of the main barn would be replaced with plain tiles whilst slate would be used for the single storey elements. In addition, post and rail fences and gates would be introduced on the presently open parts, including the courtyard, of the north and south boundaries of the plot in order to define the garden areas. Vehicular access would be gained from the existing access on the south side of the site and shared with that serving the converted barn to the west.

3. The application has been accompanied by planning and design statements as well as a bat report and structural survey. The planning statement explains that the proposal retains the open nature of the frontage of the site, with the layout enabling all domestic paraphernalia to be located either within the private courtyard or to the rear of the barn. In terms of the design of the scheme, existing openings have been utilised to form windows and doors and their location prevents significant overlooking and loss of privacy to the adjoining residential units. All parking has been concentrated to the rear of the barn and out of sight, with the replacement cart-lodge being considered crucial to the scheme to ensure that vehicles are properly planned as an integral part of the proposal. The statement also confirms that all works of repair and rebuilding will be undertaken in matching and sympathetic materials, with all joinery in timber.
4. The planning statement stresses that alternative commercial uses have been considered for the barn but, given its relationship and close proximity to nearby residential properties, it is considered that a commercial use would not be appropriate. In this respect, the Local Highways Authority has advised that the access to the site is not suitable for a commercial use. The possibility of retaining the barn for purposes ancillary to the use of the farmhouse has also been explored but both Cheffins and Carter Jonas have advised that this approach has no merit in practical terms as the existing ancillary buildings to the farmhouse are extensive and the liability of retaining the site within the curtilage of the farmhouse is unworkable. As a consequence, the barn has been severed from the farmhouse. Potential purchasers of De Freville Farmhouse were advised of the intended residential use of The Oat Barn and none raised any objections to this. In addition, the barn was offered for sale to prospective purchasers who, in all instances, showed no interest in securing additional outbuildings. The sale of the farmhouse includes an extensive range of barns and, therefore, any additional ancillary accommodation was beyond the needs of potential purchasers. The possibility of converting the barn to holiday accommodation has also been explored, but it is considered that the potential return would not justify the high level of expenditure required, whilst the use of the barn as a nursing/convalescent home would require a far greater floorspace than is available on the site.
5. The statement summarises that the barn has historic merit, is structurally sound and worthy of retention. It is capable of conversion to residential use in such a way as to respect the existing openings and timbers, to avoid any overlooking and to avoid visual harm when viewed from the public domain. It is argued that to allow buildings of this nature to fall into disrepair, therefore precluding their reuse, would harm the environment.

Planning History

6. There is no history specifically relating to the application site. Planning and Listed Building consent for the extension and conversion of the barn to the west to a dwelling was granted under references S/1930/04/LB and S/1931/04/F and, prior to that, by consents issued in 2003.

Planning Policy

7. **Policy P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 resists development in the countryside unless proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.

8. **Policy P9/2a** of the Structure Plan states that development within the Green Belt will be limited to that required for agriculture and forestry, outdoor sport, cemeteries or other uses appropriate to a rural area.
9. Local Plan 2004 **Policy SE8** states that residential development outside village frameworks will not be permitted.
10. Paragraph 17 of Planning Policy Statement 7 'Sustainable Development in Rural Area' (2004) states that "The Government's policy is to support the re-use of appropriately located and suitably constructed existing buildings in the countryside where this would meet sustainable development objectives. Re-use for economic development purposes will usually be preferable, but residential conversions may be more appropriate in some locations, and for some types of building. Planning authorities should therefore set out in LDDs their policy criteria for permitting the conversion and re-use of buildings in the countryside for economic, residential and any other purposes, including mixed uses.

These criteria should take account of:

- a) The potential impact on the countryside and landscapes and wildlife;
 - b) Specific local economic and social needs and opportunities;
 - c) Settlement patterns and accessibility to service centres, markets and housing;
 - d) The suitability of different types of buildings, and of different scales, of re-use;
 - e) The need to preserve, or the desirability of preserving, buildings of historic or architectural importance or interest, or which otherwise contribute to local character.
11. Local Plan 2004 **Policy GB2** states that planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development in the Green Belt unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. Development is defined as 'inappropriate' unless it comprises (in part) the re-use of buildings provided that:
 - a) The development does not result in a materially greater impact on the openness and purpose of the Green Belt;
 - b) Strict control is exercised over any proposed extensions and associated uses of surrounding land;
 - c) The buildings are of permanent and substantial construction and capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction; and
 - d) The form, bulk and general design of the buildings are in keeping with their surroundings.
 12. **Policy P7/6** of the 2003 Structure Plan requires development to protect and enhance the quality and distinctiveness of the historic built environment.
 13. **Policy EN20** of the 2004 Local Plan states that permission will be refused for extensions to listed buildings which are not necessary to ensure the continuing use of the building, would dominate or detract from the listed building, would imply the loss of building fabric of architectural or historic interest, would damage archaeological remains of importance, or would harm the well being or setting of adjacent listed buildings.
 14. **Policy EN26** of the 2004 Local Plan states that, in judging applications for the change of use of listed buildings, the District Council will consider whether or not the existing use can continue with reasonable utility or life expectancy; all other options for less damaging uses have been explored; the proposed use can take place without the

necessity of extensive alterations or extensions which would be harmful to the fabric, character or setting of the building; the proposal would harm the setting and amenity of adjacent buildings.

15. **Policy EN28** of the 2004 Local Plan states that the District Council will refuse applications which dominate a listed building; damage the setting, well being or attractiveness of a listed building; or would harm the visual relationship between a listed building and its formal or natural landscape surroundings.
16. **Policy EN30** of the 2004 Local Plan requires new development in a Conservation Area to either preserve or enhance the character of the area.

Consultation

17. **Great Shelford Parish Council** states:

“No objection to the proposal which does not seem to conflict with green belt policies or conversion of listed buildings policies, but we do have some concern over the setting of the building. We hope the open field to the NE of the barn is retained in its present form as it adds to the agricultural appearance of the surrounding buildings. Should it become a garden it would detract from the open agricultural nature of the site.”

18. **The Chief Environmental Health Officer** raises no objections subject to a condition restricting the hours of use of power operated machinery being attached to any consent in order to minimise noise disturbance to neighbours.
19. **The Ecology Officer** raises no objections subject to a condition requiring full details of measures for bat mitigation and conservation being attached to any consent.
20. **The Conservation Manager** objects to the application stating:
The main considerations are the physical impact on the historic fabric and the character of the grade II listed barn and the impact on the setting of the barn and the adjacent listed buildings.
 - a) Sub-division of the site will have a significant and detrimental impact on both the setting of the listed farmhouse and the barn as well as the other listed barns/outbuildings on the site;
 - b) The setting of the individual listed buildings owes its attractive character to the visual harmony produced by the grouping of the buildings around the former farmyard and the quality of the space between, in this case the former farmyard. The introduction of fences, to subdivide the barn from the farmhouse and the former farmyard, is considered to harm the visual relationship between the barn and its surroundings and damage the setting of all the listed buildings by severing its historic functional relationship as an agricultural group;
 - c) Conversion of the barn to a dwelling will alter its character both internally and externally to its detriment. Flooring over one bay of the main barn and installing a staircase will affect the spatial quality of the interior thereby harming its architectural character and resulting in damage to the historic fabric of the timber framed barn. Externally the changes will be visually more intrusive. New openings including rooflights and glazing existing openings will puncture the principal components of this agricultural building detrimentally altering its otherwise unaltered character and appearance as a building of special

architectural and historic interest. In addition the new door openings will result in the loss of historic fabric;

- d) The demolition of the lean-to cart shed and its replacement with a larger gabled extension to form garaging and a utility room will have an adverse impact on the southwest elevation of the barn. It also indicates that the building requires significant alteration and extension to achieve the proposed domestic conversion;
- e) Clearly the best use of a building is that for which it was originally designed. In this case no compelling evidence has been presented to show that some form of agricultural or storage use could not be maintained. It is clear that an alternative non-agricultural use would be difficult to accommodate due to the close proximity of the listed farmhouse and other listed buildings. However conversion to a dwelling is not considered to be an acceptable alternative for the above reasons. Consequently a less intrusive use should be sought which does not require so much alteration to the building and which avoids destroying its special character and importance as part of a historic group;
- f) The site is situated in a prominent location within the Conservation Area with open views across to the countryside beyond. The proposals by virtue of their impact on the character and visual appearance of the group of listed buildings will have an impact on the wider Conservation Area neither preserving nor enhancing its special character;
- g) The site lies within the Green Belt and there is a presumption against development unless special circumstances can be demonstrated. In this case the proposed re-use of the barn is considered to have an impact on the openness and purpose of the Green Belt. In addition it has not been demonstrated that the buildings are capable of conversion without major reconstruction and that the general design is in keeping with the surroundings;
- h) For the above reasons the proposals are considered to have a significant impact on the historic fabric and character of the barn and on the setting of barn, the adjacent listed buildings and the wider Conservation Area. The proposals are therefore considered to be contrary to policies EN26, EN28, EN30, GB2 (6) of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 and policy P7/6 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003.

Representations

- 21. One letter of objection has been received from the occupiers of Top Barn the converted barn situated to the west of the site. Concern is expressed in respect of the rebuilding and enlargement of the existing cart lodge and the construction of a new driveway. This would result in vehicle use and noise that the occupiers of the above property do not presently have to contend with.

Representation by the applicant's agent

- 22. The applicant's agent has responded in writing to the concerns expressed in respect of the proposal. It is pointed out that The Oat Barn has hardly been used for agricultural operations, being used only on a limited basis for the occasional storage of redundant farm machinery, a purpose that is no longer required as all agricultural operations have ceased on the site. It is clear that an agricultural use of the barn cannot be reinstated given the lack of need for it to be used agriculturally for many years, its location within the village and that no farm holding exists within the vicinity

to which it could be related. The marketing undertaken in relation to the sale of the farmhouse has demonstrated that no demand exists for the use of the outbuilding either for commercial purposes or uses linked to the farmhouse. It is considered that a residential use is the only way of securing the repair and retention of the barn. To leave it vacant will ensure that its appearance and structure will deteriorate thereby harming its future retention.

23. Policy SE8 seeks to resist any form of residential development outside village frameworks. Whilst the site falls outside the framework, it is within an area dominated by residential uses. The character of this area of countryside would therefore not be altered.
24. An aerial photograph has been submitted with the agent's letter showing that further buildings extended to the rear of Oat Barn and walling formed an enclosed area of courtyard. It cannot therefore be concluded that the introduction of walls and fences is fundamentally wrong as this re-establishes the historic position. The severance of the barn from the listed buildings and farmhouse has already occurred and The Oat Barn is a separate unit surrounded on all sides by residential curtilages. Through appropriate boundary treatments, the relationship of the barn to the farmhouse will still be clear.
25. In terms of the impact of the proposal on the character of the barn (as commented upon by the Conservation Officer), the agent's letter states the following:
 - a) The rooflights proposed in the main barn replace existing openings;
 - b) The northern wing was widened into the courtyard around 1980;
 - c) Prior to this extension, the original elevation of this building incorporated two double garage type doors. The 'lean-to cart shed' referred to by the Conservation Officer was never a cart shed but was used as a cattle shed and is of recent construction, possibly Victorian;
 - d) Neither the northern or southern wing attached to the barn are mentioned in the listing schedule.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

26. The key issues to consider in the determination of this application are:
 - a) The principle of a residential use of the barn in light of settlement policies;
 - b) Whether a new use for the barn is necessary and whether a residential use is most appropriate;
 - c) Impact of the proposal upon the character and appearance of the Listed barn and upon the setting of nearby Listed Buildings;
 - d) Impact upon the character and appearance of the Conservation Area;
 - e) Impact upon the countryside and Green Belt;
 - f) Residential amenity.
27. Policy SE8 of the Local Plan states that residential development outside village frameworks will not be permitted. The use of the barn as a dwelling is therefore contrary, in principle, to the development plan and the application has consequently been advertised as a Departure. Given that the proposal is a departure from the plan, it is necessary to consider whether there are other material considerations in this instance that would render the application acceptable, in particular whether a new use for the barn is necessary and, if so, whether a residential use is the most appropriate rather than, for instance, ancillary accommodation to the farmhouse or an employment use.

28. It is clear from the information submitted with the application that an agricultural use of the barn is no longer viable. Given its listed status and historic importance, it is therefore necessary to find a new use for the building and the planning statement submitted with the application has explored a number of alternative uses. However, none of the evidence submitted has convinced Officers that the barn cannot be used as ancillary accommodation to the main farmhouse or for a low key employment/storage use, possibly linked to the occupation of the farmhouse. The applicant's agents claim that there has been no interest whatsoever from potential purchasers of De Freville Farmhouse for The Oat Barn to be included in the sale, and copies of letters from estate agents have been enclosed with the planning statement. However, the letter from Cheffins, dated 22nd June 2005, states:

"De Freville Farmhouse has been on the market for 6 months during which time it has been viewed by 48 prospective purchasers with very few parties expressing any concerns about the Oat Barn being converted to a single dwelling. Some expressed the view that ideally they would like the barn included with the house but accepted the fact that this would not necessarily be possible. They were all, however, concerned about the possibility of the barn being used for commercial purposes or falling derelict."

29. The possibility of using and marketing the barn as an ancillary outbuilding to the farmhouse appears to have been discounted on the basis that it would be a deterrent to purchasers due to its size, maintenance costs and security issues. However, the above letter clearly states that some parties have shown interest in using the Oat Barn in association with the farmhouse. The fact that 'this would not necessarily be possible' perhaps indicates that the barn has been priced to reflect its intended use as a residential property rather than ancillary storage building therefore making it an unviable proposition for prospective purchasers. Certainly, it is clear from the planning statement and accompanying letters and marketing information that the barn has not been offered for sale with the farmhouse and, by not pursuing this option, Officers consider that the applicant has not adequately demonstrated that such a use would be unviable.

30. The possibility of using the barn for commercial purposes has also been explored but discounted on the basis of the Local Highways Authority's advice that such a use could generate more daily vehicular trips than that which could have been expected of the agricultural use. Whilst I would agree that this would rule out an intensive employment use, I remain to be convinced that a low-key employment use (eg – an office, perhaps used in conjunction with one of the adjoining residential units) would not be appropriate in this instance. I agree that the use of the barn as holiday-let accommodation would not be financially viable and that the use of the site as a nursing/convalescent home would also not be appropriate.

31. The Conservation Manager has raised strong objections to the proposal on the basis of the impact of the internal and external changes of the barn upon its character and appearance. In addition, the subdivision of the site, including the introduction of post and rail fences to separate the barn from the farmhouse and former farmyard, is considered to harm the visual relationship between the barn and its surroundings and to damage the setting of all the listed buildings by severing its historical functional relationship as an agricultural group. Due to the impact of the proposals upon the character and appearance of the listed buildings, the development would also neither preserve nor enhance the character and appearance of the wider Conservation Area. In addition, the proposal would be contrary to Policy GB2 of the Local Plan given that the buildings are not capable of

being used for residential purposes without substantial modifications both to the building and its immediate surroundings, and the development therefore represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt by definition.

32. In addition to the principle of using the barn for residential purposes, both in terms of settlement policies and policies relating to the conversion of rural buildings, it is also clear that a less damaging alternative that does not require so much alteration to the building so as to destroy its special character and historic importance should be sought.
33. I am satisfied that the conversion scheme would not result in undue harm to the amenities of adjoining residents. The proposed means of access is an existing vehicular access used by 'Top Barn', the converted barn to the west of the site, and the slight intensification in the use of this access would not result in undue noise and disturbance to the occupiers of No.21 High Green. Windows have also been positioned so as to avoid serious overlooking of adjoining properties.

Recommendation

34. Refusal of both the planning and listed building applications for the following reasons:
 1. The proposed conversion of the 18th century grade II listed barn to a dwelling will alter its character both internally and externally to its detriment. Flooring over one bay of the main barn and installing a staircase will affect the spatial quality of the interior thereby harming its architectural character. Externally the changes will be visually more intrusive. New openings including rooflights and glazing existing openings will puncture the principal components of this agricultural building detrimentally altering its otherwise unaltered character and appearance as a building of special architectural and historic interest. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy P7/6 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and policy EN26 (3) of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.
 2. The proposed alterations which will be necessary to convert the barn to a dwelling including the insertion of insulation, new openings and services will damage the historic fabric of this timber framed barn, contrary to policy P7/6 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and policy EN26 (3) of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.
 3. Sub-division of the site will have a significant and detrimental impact on both the setting of the listed barn and the grade II listed farmhouse as well as the other listed barns/outbuildings on the site.

The setting of the individual listed buildings owes its attractive character to the visual harmony produced by the grouping of the buildings around the former farmyard and the quality of the space between, in this case the former farmyard. The introduction of fences, to subdivide the barn from the farmhouse and the former farmyard, is considered to harm the visual relationship between the barn and its surroundings and damage the setting of all the listed buildings by severing its historic, functional relationship as an agricultural group. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy P7/6 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and policy EN28 (2, 3) of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.

4. The proposed conversion will have a significant and detrimental impact on the setting of the adjacent grade II listed 18th century thatched cottage, by visually eroding its character as a component of an agricultural group, contrary to policy P7/6 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and policy EN28 (2) of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.
5. The demolition of the lean-to cart shed and its replacement with a larger gabled extension to form garaging and a utility room will have an adverse impact on the southwest elevation of the barn. It also indicates that the listed barn requires significant alteration and extension to achieve the proposed domestic conversion. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy P7/6 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and policy EN20 (2) of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.
6. The proposed new use is not considered to be appropriate for the above reasons and no compelling evidence has been presented to show that its original design use or some form of alternative use such as storage use could not be maintained. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy EN26 (1) and (2) of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.
7. The site is situated in a prominent location within the Conservation Area with open views across to the countryside beyond. The proposals by virtue of their impact on the character and visual appearance of the group of listed buildings will have an impact on the wider Conservation Area neither preserving nor enhancing its special character. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy EN30 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.
8. The site is located outside the village framework and within the Cambridge Green Belt. It forms part of an important visual link between the developed area and the enclosing countryside. The proposed re-use of this agricultural building is not possible without substantial alteration and extension and would result in an intensification of residential development into the green belt, thereby detracting from its openness and purpose. The proposal is therefore contrary to policies GB2 (6) of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 and policy P9/2a of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003.

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 applications refs S/1609/05/F and S/1931/04/F

Listed Building applications Refs: S/1608/05/LB and S/1930/04/LB

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