

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

**S/1544/05/F - Shepreth
Erection of Industrial Unit (Class B2) Following Demolition of Existing Unit
for S Hebditch**

**Recommendation: Refusal
Determination Date: 30th September 2005**

Site and Proposal

1. The site lies immediately adjacent to the A10 and is accessed from Dunsbridge Turnpike, a no through road. It comprises a dwelling and three buildings used for industrial purposes.
2. A small wooded area lies to the north and the site is screened from the A10 by a line of trees. To the south lies a field and beyond this a residential property known as Dunsbridge Cottage.
3. The full planning application, received 5th August 2005, proposes the demolition of an existing single storey building of approximately 40m² and replacement with a single storey building of 5.1m in height (approximately 1.5m higher than the existing) and 144m² in area (12m x 12m). The application is accompanied by a planning statement (see appendix).
4. The site area is larger than the approved area for industrial use which extends only to the southern elevation of the largest of the buildings. The new area is approximately as large as the existing commercial area of the site. This area is currently being used by the existing firm for commercial purposes. The application for the building is intimately linked to the operation of the site as a whole and it is therefore reasonable to consider the application to be part retrospective in that it includes the change of use of this land from garden to industrial even though the application forms do not indicate a change of use is being applied for.

Planning History

5. Full planning permission was granted for the use of the site for industrial purposes in February 1994 (ref. S/1871/93/F). Conditions were imposed restricting the occupation of the dwelling to users of the site, no outside storage of materials, limitation on hours of operation, limitation of the use of individual buildings so that only the larger of the three commercial buildings was to be used for industrial processes with the other two for storage and other safeguarding measures.
6. Full planning permission was refused for the erection of an industrial unit (Class B2) following the demolition of an existing building in October 2004 (ref. S/1657/04/F).

Planning Policy

7. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 Policy P1/2 – Environmental Restrictions on Development states (in part):

“Development will be restricted in the countryside unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.”

8. Policy P2/6 - of the Structure Plan encourages sensitive small scale employment development in rural areas by inter alia, rural diversification, re-use of existing buildings and re-use of vacant, derelict or under-used land within villages.

9. South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 (Local Plan) Policy EM7 – Expansion of Existing Firms at Villages states:

“Development for the expansion of existing firms within village frameworks or on suitable brownfield sites next to or very close to the village frameworks will be permitted subject to the provisions of Policy EM3 and EM6. A firm or business will be considered as ‘existing’ if a significant element of its operations has been based in the Cambridge Area for a minimum of two years prior to the date of any planning application for development.”

The limited occupation provisions of Policy EM3 do not apply here.

The provisions of Policy EM6 are:

- “(a) There would be no adverse impact on residential amenity, traffic conditions, village character and other environmental factors, and
- (b) The development would contribute to a greater range of local employment opportunities, especially for the semi-skilled and unskilled, or where initial development is dependent on the use of locally-based skills and expertise”.

10. Policy EM10 of the Local Plan 2004 encourages change of use and conversion of rural buildings to employment use in the countryside.

Consultations

11. **Shepreth Parish Council**
Recommends approval.
12. **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue**
Comments are awaited in relation to any potential need for additional water supplies for fire fighting.
13. **Chief Environmental Health Officer**
No objections.
14. **Environment Agency**
No objections subject to conditions.

Representations

15. None received.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

16. The key issues are the visual impact on the surrounding countryside and the impact of the intensification of the use of this countryside site.

Previous application

17. This proposal differs from that refused in October 2004 in that the proposed building is approximately 4% smaller and the rooflights have been omitted.
18. **Visual impact**

It is accepted that the site is well screened from the north and west and that the proposed building although significantly higher than the original structure will not be readily visible from these directions. However the existing building is a small makeshift structure that is not structurally sound (at one place the roof is held up with a tree branch). The proposal will introduce a permanent building of significant size into this countryside location. Views into the site are possible from the entrance and the screening on the southern boundary is not as full as that on the northern and western. The omission of the rooflights and the very modest reduction in size do not, in my opinion, overcome the reasons for refusal of the earlier application.
19. **Neighbour amenity**

The dwelling on site is connected to the use of the site by condition so that the amenity of the occupiers of the property is only affected by their own activity.
20. A dwelling to the south, Dunsbridge Cottage, lies some 30m away from the site where there is potential for the activity to cause nuisance to the occupiers of this property. However, I note that the Chief Environmental Health Officer has no objections to the proposal.
21. **Intensification**

PolicyEM7 restricts the expansion of employment sites in the countryside to within villages or on brownfield sites adjacent or close to village frameworks for firms that have been based in the Cambridge Area for a minimum of two years.
22. The largest of the three buildings on site is permitted for B2 use with the other two for storage use only restricted by means of conditions on that permission (ref. S/1871/93/F) in order to limit the intensification of the use of the site. That permission was also on a smaller site which extended only to the southern elevation of the large building.
23. The proposal extends the site to the south making the commercial area approximately twice the size of that permitted. This land is reasonably close to the village framework (approx 85m at its closest point) but it has only previously formed the rear part of the garden to the existing property and not been developed for any commercial activity.
24. The firm on site, Robsport International, has two elements to its commercial activity. It restores classic vehicles (mostly triumph cars) and stores and distributes, mainly through the internet, car parts (mostly for triumphs). There is a small reception area for on site sales but this activity is not a significant part of the business.
25. The Company bought the site in February 2004 relocating the business from Cokenach, approximately 5 miles south of the Cambridgeshire border. It does not therefore strictly qualify as an 'existing firm' under Policy EM7.
26. The restoration works are currently taking place within the large building. Parts are being stored in the other two buildings as well as in a temporary structure that has been erected between the two storage buildings and within two portable buildings that have been erected on the new southern portion of the site. One of these is also used as the office and reception area. This land to the south is also used to park approximately 20 cars. This development does not have the benefit of planning permission. The application does not provide any details in relation to the unauthorised structures but it is understood that if consent were to be granted these would be removed from the site.

27. A separate toilet block and shed have also been erected without permission.

Need

28. The applicants have stated that the new building is required because the current facilities do not provide sufficient storage facilities for the car parts side of the business. However, the application seeks the erection of a building for general industrial purposes. Insufficient justification has been given for the building.

In Conclusion

29. The proposal represents significant new build in the countryside for a firm that is not 'existing' as defined in the Local Plan. There is a general presumption against development in the countryside and there is insufficient justification to demonstrate that this larger and taller building is essential in this location.
30. This proposal, for a large B2 building to replace a small storage building and to increase the size of the site significantly, represents a further intrusion into the countryside and a significant intensification of the use of the site that was carefully restricted by conditions in order to protect not only the visual quality of the environment but to limit the scale of development so as to ensure the small scale sustainable use of a rural site.

Recommendation

29. Refusal for the following reason:
30. The proposed building to be demolished is restricted to storage use. Insufficient justification has been provided to show that the replacement of this building with a larger structure for general industrial (Class B2) use is essential in this rural location. The erection of this larger building will adversely affect the visual quality of the surrounding countryside that should be protected for its own sake and together with the expansion of the site further into the countryside will result in an intensification of the use of the site that will be to the detriment of the surroundings. The new building is required for a firm that has relocated from outside of the Cambridge Area within the last two years. The proposal cannot therefore be considered to be the expansion of an existing firm as detailed in Policy EM7 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004. As such the proposal is contrary to Policy P1/2 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and Policy EM7 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Planning Files reference S/1544/05/F, S/1657/04/F and S/1871/93/F South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.
County Structure Plan 2003

Contact Officer: Nigel Blazeby – Senior Planning Assistant
Telephone: (01954) 713256