

Application No: 18/1591M

Location: THE BOX, SELECT PROPERTY GROUP, HORSESHOE LANE,  
ALDERLEY EDGE, CHESHIRE, SK9 7QP

Proposal: Extension of existing offices (infill between buildings) and creation of  
additional car parking and landscaping.

Applicant: Mr Stott

Expiry Date: 24-May-2018

## **SUMMARY**

The proposed extension is considered to amount to limited infilling within a previously developed site and as such is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt. No concerns are raised with regard to the design of the extension, the impact upon the character of the area, the living conditions of neighbouring properties, trees of amenity value, ecology or highway safety.

However, the proposed car park extension is a material change of use of land, and an engineering operation that is considered to reduce openness and encroach into the countryside. Accordingly, the car park is an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt, which also adversely affects the visual amenity of the Green Belt by introducing the distinctly urban feature of a car park into this semi-rural location. The considerations put forward by the applicant are not considered to outweigh the substantial harm to the Green Belt and therefore the proposal is contrary to policy PG3 of the CELPS.

The applicant is seeking to implement a travel plan at the same time as providing additional car parking within the site, which will inevitably limit the effectiveness of the travel plan aimed at promoting sustainable travel. By virtue of the proposed car park's impact upon the Green Belt and the likelihood of it undermining any encouragement towards sustainable forms of travel the proposal is not considered to be sustainable development.

## **SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION**

Refuse

## **REASON FOR REPORT**

The application has been called in to Committee by the local Ward Member, Cllr Craig Brown, for the following reason:

*The site of the proposed development currently lies within the green belt. The application would therefore benefit from being heard at Northern Planning Committee, to enable the*

*question as to whether there are special circumstances, to be openly debated. The application site has been put forward by the applicant as potential employment land as part of the SADPD "Call for Sites".*

## **PROPOSAL**

The application seeks full planning permission for the extension of the existing offices (infill between buildings) and the creation of additional car parking and landscaping.

During the course of the application, revised plans were submitted reducing the size of the proposed extension.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

The application site comprises a recently created office development formed from the conversion of agricultural buildings, part of which is still under construction, and an open field, upon which temporary car parking is taking place. The site is located within the Green Belt as identified in the MBLP

## **RELEVANT HISTORY**

18/0674M - Retention of hard surfacing for use as a temporary car park for staff and visitors – Not yet determined

17/5487M - Variation of conditions 2,4,5 & 9 and removal of condition 8 on approval 16/5941M - (Variation of conditions 2,4 & 9 on approval 16/1778M for access road, temporary car parking area, drainage pond, landscaping and associated minor external works) – Approved 02.05.2018

17/1729M - Temporary use of land for staff and visitor car parking – Approved 26.05.2017

16/5941M - Variation of conditions 2, 4 & 9 on approval 16/1778M for access road, temporary car parking area, drainage pond, landscaping and associated minor external works – Approved 21.03.2017

16/1778M - Full planning permission for creation of access road, temporary car parking area, drainage pond, landscaping and associate minor external works (scheme associated with business centre established within the site) - Resubmission of planning application 15/4376M – Approved 11.08.2016

15/4376M - Private Access Road and Landscape Scheme, including an all-weather sports pitch/multi-use games area – Withdrawn 21.12.2015

14/3183M - Full planning permission for the partial redevelopment of site comprising - Regularisation of changes to the external appearance of existing offices constructed under planning permission 12/1839M, new office extension and glazed link, demolition of existing former dwelling building to be replaced with new office building and staff canteen/customer hospitality suite, erection of freestanding pod display unit, creation of ancillary car parking area and new site-wide landscaping and tree planting – Approved 18.06.2015

13/4098M - Full planning permission for the erection of extension to existing offices and glazed link together with additional ancillary car parking area, new orchard and site landscaping – Withdrawn 16.04.14

12/4424M – Replacement office – Approved 29.01.13

12/4264M – Removal of agricultural occupancy condition – Refused 21.12.12

12/1839M - External Alterations and Change of Use of Existing Mixed Agricultural, Business and Storage Buildings to Commercial Office and Storage Uses, Classes B1 and B8 – Approved 05.07.12

12/0972M - Demolition of existing farm shop and shed and erection of new building for office and storage, re-cladding of existing warehouse/office – Withdrawn 03.05.12

## **NATIONAL & LOCAL POLICY**

### **Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy (CELPS) 2017**

MP1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

PG3 Green Belt

SD1 Sustainable Development in Cheshire East

SD2 Sustainable Development Principles

EG1 Economic Prosperity

EG2 Rural Economy

EG3 Existing and Allocated Employment Sites

EG5 Promoting a Town Centre First Approach to Retail and Commerce

SE1 Design

SE2 Efficient Use of Land

SE3 Biodiversity and Geodiversity

SE4 The Landscape

SE5 Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland

SE12 Pollution, Land Contamination and land Instability

SE13 Flood Risk and Water Management

CO1 Sustainable Travel and Transport

### **Macclesfield Borough Local Plan (Saved Policies)**

NE11 Nature conservation interests

GC1 Green Belt

GC12 Extensions to dwellings in the Green Belt

DC3 Protection of the amenities of nearby residential properties

DC6 Safe and convenient access for vehicles, special needs groups and pedestrians

DC8 Requirements to provide and maintain landscape schemes for new development

DC9 Trees of amenity value

DC17 Flooding

### **Alderley Edge Neighbourhood Plan**

Regulation 7 stage reached – Neighbourhood Area Designation.

No policies to afford weight to.

## **Other Material Considerations**

National Planning Practice Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework

## **CONSULTATIONS**

**Environmental Health** – No objections subject to conditions relating to piling, floor floating and contaminated land

**Flood Risk Manager** – No objections

**Highways** – No objections

**Network Rail** – No objections raised but make a number of points about protection of railway

**National Grid** – Raise a number of points about protection of their apparatus

**Alderley Edge Parish Council** - No objection subject to a landscaping condition and requirement for improved traffic management plans

## **REPRESENTATIONS**

One letter of representation has been received from a neighbouring property noting that:

- The proposed car park is inappropriate development and the Council will have to be satisfied that the “very special circumstances” advanced by the Applicant carry sufficient weight to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.
- If application is approved landscaping should be carried out in a timely manner
- Any illumination of the car park should be kept to a minimum

## **APPRAISAL**

### **Green Belt**

#### Office Extension

The limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development is one of the forms of development identified in policy PG3 of the CELPS and paragraph 89 of the Framework which are not inappropriate in the Green Belt.

Part of the proposed extension will sit between the gable ends of two existing buildings at the eastern edge of the site and will replace a “pod” building of comparable size. This part of the extension is flat roofed and low level. The other part to the extension will sit within a courtyard style setting at the front of the buildings, and will have a lightweight modern appearance. Due to the nature, form, materials and removal of the “pod” building, the proposed extension is not considered to have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt or the purpose of including land within it than the existing development. This element of the proposal is therefore not considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

### Car park

Engineering operations are one of the forms of development identified in policy PG3 of the CELPS and paragraph 90 of the Framework which are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided that they preserve openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt.

The car park is to be located in the field to the west of the buildings. It is proposed to use reinforced grass for the 25 boundary-facing parking spaces, a cellular gravel-filled surface for the surface of the car park and a further 25 spaces, and tarmac for a further 14 spaces along the access road, where space for 5 natural stone sett parking bays were previously approved. A tarmac footpath is also proposed from the pedestrian access on Horseshoe Lane to the buildings, which was previously approved as natural stone.

The proposed parking area will occupy a space of approximately 1,300sqm and create a significant area of hardstanding in an area where there is currently no development. Openness is commonly referred to as the absence of development, and the introduction of this area of hardstanding is therefore considered to reduce openness. The proposal also constitutes encroachment into the countryside which would consequently conflict with one of the identified purposes of the Green Belt. The proposed cycle stands also encroach into the field to the south of the buildings and reduce the openness of this area, albeit to a limited degree.

The car park proposal also represents a material change of use of the land. There is no exception in national or local plan green belt policy for this development and it must, as a matter of current planning case law, be classed as inappropriate development.

The proposal is therefore considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Policy PG3 of the CELPS states that planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development, except in very special circumstances. Further to this, paragraph 88 of the Framework states *“When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.”*

The applicant has put forward a number of material considerations in favour of the proposal, which they consider do amount to the required very special circumstances to outweigh the identified harm. These are explored in detail later in this report.

### **Design / character**

Policies SD2 and SE1 of the CELPS expect all development to contribute positively to an area's character and identity. The application site is a former poultry farm, and the existing buildings on the application site retain the farmstead character of the former agricultural holding. Previous applications have always ensured that the development was largely contained within the developed areas of the former farmstead, with the fields to the south and west remaining open.

As noted above, part of the proposed extension will sit between the gable ends of two existing buildings at the eastern edge of the site and will replace a detached “pod” building of

comparable size. This part of the extension is flat roofed and low level, and will be fabricated in timber and metal cladding to match the existing buildings. The other part to the extension will sit within a courtyard style setting at the front of the buildings, and will be a lightweight, modern, glazed structure. Having regard to the physical characteristics of the extensions they are considered to respect the existing architectural features of the buildings. They will not be prominent features and therefore any impact upon the character of the area will be minimal.

Whilst a driveway has been approved and constructed from Wilmslow Road to the buildings within the site, the remaining field areas have been left open and free from development. This provides an appropriate setting to this former farmstead, retaining the open, semi-rural character of the area. Whilst the use of reinforced grass for the boundary-facing parking spaces and a cellular gravel-filled surface for the rest of the proposed new parking areas would be a permeable surfacing solution, some concern is raised over its practical use for a permanent parking facility. There is nothing to prevent people parking on the grassed bays as opposed to the gravel bays on a daily basis. Therefore the grass could be easily worn away with continued use and gravel can become loose or kicked out from the cells. However, most importantly the car park will serve to urbanise the area, with the parking of an additional 59 vehicles between the buildings and Wilmslow Road. Whilst landscaping will be provided, as noted in the submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, which will help to provide some screening of the development, it is considered that views of the expanse of parked cars will still be possible from Horseshoe Lane and Wilmslow Road. Such an urban encroachment into the open areas of the site is not considered to contribute positively to the area's character and identity, and as such there is conflict with policies SD2 and SE1 of the CELPS. This is additional harm against the proposal in the "Green Belt balance" that carries significant weight.

### **Living conditions**

The proposed extension comes no closer to neighbouring properties, the nearest of which are positioned approximately 45 metres to the south on Horseshoe Lane, than the existing buildings and as such, having regard to the location and scale of the proposed extension, this element of the proposal raises no significant amenity concerns.

The proposed car park is located to the south east of the property known as Mayfield on Wilmslow Road. The car parking spaces come within 4 metres of the boundary with this property, leaving some space for landscaping. The property itself is set between 20 and 25 metres further away from the shared boundary. Given these distances it is not considered that any significant impact upon the living conditions of this neighbour would arise from the comings and goings associated with the use of the car park. No lighting of the car park is shown on the plans.

No further amenity issues are raised and the proposal is therefore considered to comply with policy DC3 of the MBLP.

### **Highways**

#### **Access and Parking**

The Strategic Highways Manager has been consulted on the application and has noted that the site has increased in size considerably over the last few years. Historically, there have been problems with both access and overspill parking from the site. The access problem was

resolved when a new dedicated access drive was approved directly from Wilmslow Road to serve the site.

The current parking provision on site is 58 spaces and it is proposed to have 150 staff on this site in 2020, and the current proposal seeks to increase the level of parking to 118 spaces. This is well in excess of the CEC parking standards in the CELPS, which state that 51 parking spaces would be required to serve the extended office development.

As part of the application, the applicant has also proposed a number of off-site highway measures along Wilmslow Road. These include:

- Sections of coloured textured road surface treatments with 30mph roundels or SLOW markings to remind drivers of the speed limit
- The creation of a “Welcome to Alderley Edge” gateway treatment, to remind drivers that they are entering a settlement; and
- Dropped kerbs in two locations to enhance pedestrian linkages between the site, Alderley Edge and the two closest bus stops on Wilmslow Road.

In summary, the Strategic Highways Manager raises no objections to the proposal as safe access and adequate car parking is provided, but they note that the proposed improvement measures are not necessary to make the development acceptable from a Highways perspective.

#### Sustainable travel

A number of policies in the CELPS relate to sustainable modes of travel including policy SE1 (Design) – encourages sustainable modes of travel through design; policy SD1 (Sustainable Development in Cheshire East) - Ensure that development is accessible by public transport, walking and cycling; policy SD2 (Sustainable Development Principles) – Minimise trip generation; policy CO1 (Sustainable Travel and Transport), and; policy CO4 (Travel Plans and Transport Assessments).

In this regard the applicant has submitted a travel plan as part of their transport statement accompanying the application. The travel plan sets out a number of actions to encourage staff and visitors to use alternatives to the private car. These actions include:

- Establish car sharing scheme
- Set up season ticket loan scheme
- Promote use of bus and train services
- Maintain showers, changing facilities and cycle parking
- Personalised travel planning
- Shuttle bus service to be extended to Macclesfield, Wilmslow and Alderley Edge stations

The merits of the travel plan are discussed further below.

#### **Trees**

There are protected trees along the northern boundary of the application site, which are unaffected by the current proposals. The proposed infill extension between the existing buildings has no direct or indirect implications for trees but a section of the additional parking area extends within the root protection areas (RPA) of retained trees, which are not covered by TPO.

The application proposes a 'no dig' geo-cell construction within the identified RPAs, which the Forestry Officer advises is accepted as a suitable construction technique and accords with the requirements of current industry best practice BS5837:2012. The detail provided in the submitted General Arrangement Plan and the Tree Root Protection Plan are considered to be acceptable in terms of safeguarding trees of amenity value, and can be secured by condition. No significant arboricultural issues are therefore raised and the proposal is considered to comply with policy DC9 of the MBLP and SE5 of the CELPS.

## **Ecology**

There is not considered to be any significant ecological issues associated with the proposed development.

## **Very Special Circumstances**

The proposal is an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt, which will also have an adverse impact upon the visual amenity of the area by the virtue of the large parking area serving to urbanise the semi-rural character of the area. As noted above, and as advised in the Framework, substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt.

The applicant puts forward the following material considerations in favour of the development, which they consider to amount to the required very special circumstances to *clearly* outweigh the identified harm to the Green Belt:

### *The economic benefits that will arise*

An Economic Benefits Statement has been submitted which outlines:

- The 125 employees have annual expenditure of £2.8m in the local economy, and a proportion is likely to occur in Alderley Edge.
- Capacity for 150 employees
- Estimate applicant has a GVA per worker of £77,600 per annum compared to £59,500 for Cheshire East
- Applicant supports other local businesses such as local cleaning firm and local taxi company (unnamed)
- Would need to move their offices if planning permission is refused

### *The need for the car parking spaces*

- Transport Statement concludes inadequate existing car parking
- Paragraph 39 of the Framework states that in setting local parking standards LPAs should take account varying factors including the accessibility of the development and availability of public transport.

### *Improvements to highway safety*

- The provision of dropped kerbs and tactile paving along with revised roads markings, signage and a gateway feature on the approach to the village will have the effect of reducing vehicle speeds and will provide better defined pedestrian routes.

### *Ecological benefits and visual enhancement*

- Wildflower grassland, woodland planting, new hedgerow or tree belt would be provided



Whilst the economic benefits are acknowledged, these are estimated and in some cases speculative. For example, the applicant states of the £2.8m annual employee expenditure, “a *proportion is likely* to occur in Alderley Edge”. It is inevitable that some expenditure will take place in Alderley Edge, but it is not clear what it actually is or therefore what the benefit would be. All the identified economic benefits could be secured from a non Green Belt site, and it is therefore considered that only limited weight can be attributed to the suggested economic benefits. Furthermore, any business could benefit from inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which in part exists to direct development to more sustainable locations. For example, Cheshire East has many small to medium sized businesses based in barn conversions in Green Belt locations and, whilst each case would be taken on its merits, if this proposal is granted permission it is difficult to see how the same weight of argument would not apply to any business seeking to grow and encroach into the Green Belt. If this was acceptable in principle, there would be a national and local policy allowance for it. Such developments would have a very damaging incremental effect on the openness of the Green Belt, which is its fundamental purpose.

The applicant, Select Property Group, is clearly a very successful local company. This is evident in the growth the company has experienced in recent years since moving onto the site. The applicant's Economic Benefits Statement states that “*Select's workforce grew by 25% between 2015 and 2016, to 223 employees....78% growth between 2016 and 2017 to 398 staff. Select expects continued growth, with its workforce reaching 773 employees in 2020*”. Whilst not all these employees are based at their Head office at the application site, it is clear that the company has grown considerably to the extent that their requirements are now encroaching into the Green Belt. It does appear that the business may have outgrown the site. It is also noted that the application comes just 12 months after the Council has allocated 380 hectares of employment land through its Local Plan Strategy. Therefore the possibility of alternative sites within the Borough for this expanding local company is a strong possibility, which would not result in harm to the Green Belt.

In terms of the need for the car parking spaces, the submitted transport assessment does suggest that additional car parking is required for staff and visitors at the site. However, there is no evidence to suggest that a travel plan, which incentivises employees to use alternative transport modes to the private car, has previously been operational in order for it to have any identifiable success or failure. As the applicant notes, paragraph 39 of the Framework requires LPAs to take account varying factors including the accessibility of the development and availability of public transport, when setting local parking standards. In this case, the site is very accessible by bus and train, and therefore a robust travel plan would be the most efficient way to manage parking demand within the site.

If parking levels were an issue, a travel plan could have been implemented previously. The relative success of a travel plan is likely to influence the parking demand on the site. The site is very accessible by bus and train services; therefore the potential for alternative transport modes is there to be exploited. However, it would appear that a very big barrier to the success of these actions will be the fact that a lot of free car parking will be available as a result of this development which will inevitably act as a disincentive to staff and visitors to consider alternative transport modes. This is not considered to encourage sustainable modes of travel through design in accordance with policy SE1 of the CELPS, in fact the additional car parking will discourage sustainable travel. The proposal also does not give priority to walking,

cycling and public transport within its design in accordance with policy CO1. Consequently, only limited weight can be given to the need for the parking spaces.

The Strategic Highways Manager advises that the proposals to improve road safety are not required to make the development acceptable. Whilst they might offer some small benefit to pedestrian safety along Wilmslow Road, it is considered only limited weight can be afforded to these measures.

Similarly, only limited weight can be given to the ecological benefits and visual enhancement. The baseline situation adopted in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment is one of a construction site, including the temporary car park. This is a situation that has been created by the applicant, and is not representative of the permanent condition of the site. The recently constructed driveway also includes a landscape scheme that will deliver similar benefits.

Consequently, it is considered that the material considerations put forward by the applicant in favour of the development, taken individually or cumulatively, do not clearly outweigh the substantial harm to the Green belt in this case. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy PG3 of the CELPS and national planning policy

## **CONCLUSION**

The proposed extension is considered to amount to limited infilling within a previously developed site and as such is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt. No concerns are raised with regard to the design of the extension, the impact upon the character of the area, the living conditions of neighbouring properties, trees of amenity value, ecology or highway safety.

However, the proposed car park extension is a material change of use of the land and an engineering operation that is considered to reduce openness and encroach into the countryside. Accordingly, the car park is an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt, which also adversely affects the visual amenity of the Green Belt by introducing the distinctly urban feature of a car park into this semi-rural location. The considerations put forward by the applicant are not considered to outweigh the substantial harm to the Green Belt and therefore the proposal is contrary to policy PG3 of the CELPS.

The applicant is seeking to implement a travel plan at the same time as providing additional car parking within the site, which will inevitably limit the effectiveness of the travel plan aimed at promoting sustainable travel. By virtue of the proposed car park's impact upon the Green Belt and the likelihood of it undermining any encouragement towards sustainable forms of travel the proposal is not considered to be sustainable development.

The application is therefore recommended for refusal for the following reason:

- 1. The proposed car park is an inappropriate form of development within the Green Belt, as defined by the Development Plan. The material considerations in favour of the development advanced by the applicant do not outweigh the identified harm to the Green Belt. The development is therefore contrary to policy PG3 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy 2017. The development is similarly**

**contrary to national policy guidance relating to development within the Green Belt.**

*In order to give proper effect to the Committee's intent and without changing the substance of its decision, authority is delegated to the Head of Planning (Regulation) in consultation with the Chair (or in their absence the Vice Chair) to correct any technical slip or omission in the resolution, before issue of the decision notice*

