

Application No: 14/3183M

Location: HORSESHOE FARM, HORSESHOE LANE, ALDERLEY EDGE, WILMSLOW, CHESHIRE, SK9 7QP

Proposal: 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.

Applicant: Select Property Ltd

Expiry Date: 03-Nov-2014

REASON FOR REPORT

The application is a major development that requires a committee decision.

SUMMARY

The proposed scheme provides an acceptable design and the development is appropriate to the character of the area, and additional landscaping can be provided. It is also considered that the development would not have a detrimental impact upon neighbouring amenity, highway safety, flood risk or trees.

However, the proposal is an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt by virtue of the replacement building comprising office space, meeting rooms and cafeteria not being in the same use as the existing agricultural workers dwelling. No other harm is identified.

The dwelling is not currently used to accommodate agricultural workers, and would appear to have little prospect of being so. The site and surrounding land is owned by the applicant, with the nearest farmland being on the opposite side of Wilmslow Road. The dwelling is effectively severed from any agricultural land, which is not ideal for functional requirements of agricultural holdings. There is also no known demand for agricultural workers in Alderley Edge. The loss of the dwelling cannot therefore be afforded any significant weight.

In this case very special circumstances are considered to exist to outweigh the identified harm to the Green Belt, notably through the economic benefits this expanding local business provides. The business develops, markets and manages their own student and residential property in multiple locations in the UK and overseas. Horseshoe Farm is the headquarters of the business, with 80 staff currently based there. A further 20 are expected to be employed within the next year. The applicant, Select Property Group, is therefore a significant employer in Alderley Edge. The expansion of the business supports not just the local employment (with

additional new spending power available to the nearby Wilmslow Key Service Centre and Alderley Edge Local Service Centre) but also spin-off employment opportunities in local supplier companies for interior design, catering, office supplies and property maintenance.

In addition to these economic benefits, the development would provide accommodation for an existing thriving local business on a site that they have established for their own business purposes; the site is very accessible and is within walking distance of Alderley Edge village centre; there is no other harm identified to other matters of public interest, and; the overall quantum of development is similar to that which could be provided in converting the existing farmhouse to office accommodation as a fallback position.

Therefore, whilst substantial weight should be afforded to the harm arising from inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and whilst the matters noted above do not individually amount to very special circumstances, when taken together they are collectively considered to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness.

The application is therefore recommended for approval, subject to the receipt of outstanding comments from the nature conservation officer.

RECOMMENDATION

Approve

PROPOSAL

This application seeks full planning permission for the partial redevelopment of the site comprising - regularisation of changes to the external appearance of existing offices constructed under planning permission 12/1829M, 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.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site comprises a recently created office development formed from the conversion of agricultural buildings relating to the previous use of the site as a poultry farm, and an existing agricultural workers dwelling. A portacabin housing temporary offices is also currently positioned on the site, but does not form part of this application. The site is located within the Green Belt as identified in the MBLP

RELEVANT HISTORY

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

National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Of particular relevance are paragraphs:

- 14. Presumption in favour of sustainable development.
- 18-21 Building a strong, competitive economy
- 28 Supporting a prosperous rural economy
- 56-68 Requiring good design
- 89. Green Belt

Development Plan

The relevant Saved Policies of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan are:

- BE1 (Design principles for new developments)
- NE11 (Protection and enhancement of nature conservation interests)
- GC1 (New buildings in the Green Belt)
- DC1 (Design quality for new buildings)
- 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 (Protection of trees of amenity value)

The saved Local Plan policies are consistent with the NPPF and should be given full weight.

Other material planning considerations

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version (CELP)

The following are considered relevant material considerations as indications of the emerging strategy:

- MP1 Presumption in favour of sustainable development
- PG6 Spatial Distribution of Development
- SD1 Sustainable Development in Cheshire East
- SD2 Sustainable Development Principles
- IN1 Infrastructure
- IN2 Developer contributions
- SE1 Design
- SE2 Efficient use of land
- SE3 Biodiversity and geodiversity
- SE4 The Landscape

SE5 Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland
SE6 Green Infrastructure
SE9 Energy Efficient Development
SE12 Pollution, Land contamination and land instability
CO1 Sustainable Travel and Transport
CO4 Travel plans and transport assessments

CONSULTATIONS

Highways – No objections

Flood Risk Manager – No objections subject to condition relating to surface water drainage

Environmental Health - No objections

United Utilities - No objections

Network Rail – No objections

Manchester Airport – No objections subject to informative

Alderley Edge Parish Council – Recommend refusal on the following grounds:

- Site is a Farm, subject to Agricultural Use, and is within the Green Belt.
- Sufficient office space within the Village
- Only access is via an unmetalled, un-adopted, private road
- Volume of traffic which will be generated by this expansion will place an unacceptable burden on this road, which is in poor condition.
- Junction with London Road does not have the required visibility splays to allow safe ingress/egress

REPRESENTATIONS

Neighbour notification letters were sent to all adjoining occupants, a site notice erected and a press advert was placed in the Wilmslow Express.

3 letters of representation have been received objecting to the proposal on the following grounds:

- Loss of agricultural housing stock
- Change of use will make surrounding fields less viable as agricultural land
- Will affect area detrimentally
- Land and farmhouse serves all five purposes of Green Belt
- Agricultural potential of house should be genuinely sought and fulfilled
- Further office development is over development
- Light pollution from floodlights spoils the area and affect properties until midnight
- Vehicles speed up to site – Further development will exacerbate this.
- Field to south of offices should have been landscaped, but is an eyesore.
- Field to west has been left unkempt
- Heavy vehicles occasionally use the property at unsocial hours

- Designated Office space is widely available within the village and surrounds which conforms to the Local Plan
- Despite previous warnings, there has never been enough parking for the offices
- Increased levels of activity will be detrimental to character of area and to amenities of neighbouring properties.

APPRAISAL

The key issues are:

- Whether the proposal is acceptable in the Green Belt
- Impact upon nature conservation interests
- Impact upon character of the area
- Amenity of neighbouring property
- Highway safety

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Green Belt

The reuse of the former agricultural buildings for office /commercial use and the use of the former shop building on the site, also for office use, have all previously been accepted. Whilst the commercial use of these buildings has been implemented, some of the external and internal alterations have not been carried out in accordance with the approved plans. Nonetheless, given that the commercial use has now been implemented, it is considered that the site is previously developed land insofar as it relates to the previous permissions.

It should be noted that the existing agricultural workers dwelling has not formed part of any previous commercial use application or permission.

Extension and external alterations

An extension is proposed to link the two former agricultural buildings together, which amounts to approximately 34% of the combined floor area of the two buildings. Paragraph 89 of the Framework allows for the “*extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building*”. Policy GC12 of the local plan allows limited extensions to dwellings in the Green Belt and defines “*disproportionate*” as an increase of more than 30% of the original dwelling. Whilst GC12 is not wholly consistent with the Framework because it only refers to dwellings, not all buildings, it does provide a definition of disproportionate. Paragraph 89 of the Framework also allows for “*limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites...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.*” Due to the increase in built form over and above the existing there will inevitably be a greater impact upon openness than the existing development. However, given the limited scale of the extension and its positioning in an already enclosed space between the buildings and the railway embankment, this loss of openness would not be a significant loss and therefore this aspect of the proposal is not considered to be inappropriate in the Green Belt.

New build “Pod”

This 30sqm display pod is limited in scale and is considered to amount to limited infilling of the previously developed site, which does not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land in it than the existing development. As a result the “pod” is not considered to be an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt.

Replacement building

As noted above the existing agricultural workers dwelling lies outside of the previously approved commercial site. Therefore it is considered that this aspect of the proposal should be assessed as a replacement building. Paragraph 89 of the Framework allows *“for the replacement of a building, providing the building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces.”*

	Footprint	Total floorspace	% floorspace increase over existing	Eaves height	Ridge height
Existing	117sqm	197sqm	n/a	2.4m	7m
Proposed	132sqm	218sqm	11%	5.4m	7m

The proposed new building has the same ridge height as the existing, but the eaves to the two-storey element are increasing by 3 metres. The two-storey element only covers less than two-thirds of the building, and the new building has an increase in floorspace of 11%. The proposal is therefore not considered to be materially larger than the existing building. However, the new commercial building is not in the same use as the existing agricultural workers dwelling it replaces. This aspect of the proposal is therefore inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Car park

Engineering operations are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. The existing car park provision has been reconfigured during the application process to avoid encroachment into the field to the south of the buildings. This is a very open area and perhaps the most prominent part of the site, therefore avoiding car parking in this location is in the interests of the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt. The car parking is now provided where it currently is, in addition to an area to the north of the site in what was an overflow parking area / external storage area. The revised parking layout is not considered to have any significant impact upon the openness of the Green Belt or the purposes of including land in it than the existing situation. This aspect of the proposal is therefore not inappropriate.

Very Special Circumstances

As noted above the replacement building is not in the same use as the existing and is therefore inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which is harmful by definition. Very special circumstances are therefore required to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm. This matter is considered below in the Planning Balance section of this report.

Design / character

The agricultural workers dwelling is of little architectural merit. The design of the replacement building is to be similar to the existing converted agricultural buildings currently in use as

offices. As such the design of the building is not out of keeping with its surroundings. The flat roof / terrace element does dilute the utilitarian appearance of the building to some extent, but given its limited prominence, and its scale and positioning in the context of the site as a whole, this is not unduly harmful. The display pod has a similar appearance built for function not form, and has limited impact upon the character of the area.

The site is set back from Wilmslow Road by over 100 metres, and the built form from Horseshoe Lane by over 70 metres. The predominant views of the site would be from Horseshoe Lane, which is a quiet cobbled lane. However, at these distances the buildings and car parking are viewed collectively, and are not significantly detrimental to the character of the area. Additional landscaping will further soften the impact of the development. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with policies BE1 and DC1 of the local plan.

Trees

The acceptability of formalising the car park arrangement along the northern boundary of the site within the Root Protection Area of the offsite protected Oak trees has been confirmed as part of previous applications. The ground associated with the proposed car parking area has been historically compacted as part of the site's historical usage. This does not appear to have compromised the Oaks which have adapted to their circumstances. No significant tree issues are therefore raised and the proposal is considered to comply with policy DC9 of the Local Plan.

Ecology

Recent ecological surveys have been carried out across the site, and the findings have been submitted to the Council. Comments are awaited from the nature conservation officer, and further details will be provided in a written update.

Residential Amenity

Local Plan policy DC3 seeks to protect the amenity of residential occupiers. Policy DC3 states that development should not significantly injure the amenities of adjoining or nearby residential property and sensitive uses due to matters such as loss of privacy, overbearing effect, loss of sunlight and daylight and traffic generation and car parking. Policy DC38 sets out guidelines for space between buildings.

The main concern on previous applications in terms of residential amenity was upon the existing farmhouse. However, this is now included within the application site, and therefore the only impact will be upon nearby properties on Horseshoe Lane. The impact upon the property to the west at Mayfield is acceptable due to the scale of the development, the distance to this neighbour and intervening vegetation. The neighbours to the east are on the opposite side of the railway line and are largely unaffected by the proposals. In terms of the properties on Horseshoe Lane, as with the previous approval, there will be comings and goings that may impact upon these properties, although given the scale of the current proposals this is not considered to be a significant impact. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with policy DC3 of the Local Plan.

Highways

The submitted transport information uses the TRICS database to determine the likely levels of traffic the development would attract. Compared to the previous approval, the information shows that the proposed development is likely to add 6 vehicle movements in the busiest

hour of the day. This would have little impact upon the overall vehicle movements from and from the site or the safety of the access onto Horseshoe Lane and then Wilmslow Road.

The development would provide office floorspace of approximately 1080 square metres. The Council's parking standards in the submission version of the local plan require 1 space for every 30sqm of office space. In this case, this would equate to 36 parking spaces. The proposed layout plan shows the provision of 58 parking spaces, which is well beyond the minimum requirement.

The Head of Strategic Infrastructure raises no objections to the proposed development.

It should also be noted that the accessibility of the site has already been accepted for the office use. The site is approximately 500m from the railway station in Alderley Edge and 300m from a bus stop. Service 130 operates along Wilmslow Road and connects the site to Macclesfield, Wilmslow, Handforth, Cheadle and Manchester city centre.

Flood Risk

A flood risk assessment has been submitted and the Flood Risk Manager raises no objections to the proposals but recommends a condition requiring details for the disposal of surface water to be submitted.

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Other than the provision of employment opportunities for local people, the social benefits of the proposal will be limited.

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

As noted above the proposal will present employment opportunities for local people, as well as well as bringing direct and indirect economic benefits to Alderley Edge village centre including additional trade for local shops and businesses, jobs in construction and economic benefits to the construction industry supply chain.

PLANNING BALANCE

The proposed scheme provides an acceptable design and the development is appropriate to the character of the area, and additional landscaping can be provided. It is also considered that the development would not have a detrimental impact upon neighbouring amenity, highway safety, flood risk or trees.

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The application is therefore recommended for approval, subject to the receipt of outstanding comments from the nature conservation officer.

In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Committee's decision (such as to delete, vary or add conditions / informatives / planning obligations or reasons for approval/refusal) prior to the decision being issued, the Planning and Enforcement Manager has delegated authority to do so in consultation with the Chairman of the Northern Planning Committee, provided that the changes do not exceed the substantive nature of the Committee's decision.

Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to following conditions

1. A03FP - Commencement of development (3 years)
2. A01AP - Development in accord with approved plans
3. A05EX - Details of materials to be submitted

4. A01LS - Landscaping - submission of details
5. A04LS - Landscaping (implementation)
6. A01GR - Removal of permitted development rights
7. A14GR - Business hours (excluding Sundays)
8. A12GR - No external storage
9. No additional car parking
10. Surface water drainage details to be submitted.

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