

Application No: 15/1123C

Location: Somerford Park Farm, Holmes Chapel Road, Somerford, Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 4SW

Proposal: Retrospective application for retention of a new stable building with ancillary grooms accommodation (resubmission 14/4518C)

Applicant: Simon King

Expiry Date: 05-Jun-2015

**SUMMARY:**

It is considered that the principle of the proposed development is not acceptable as the proposal has a harmful impact upon the character of the existing countryside and landscape and is therefore contrary with Local Plan Policies PS8, GR1, GR2, GR4, E5, RC5 and PG5 of the development plan as well as Policies PG5 and SD2 of the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version and advice within the NPPF. The proposed use of the site is likely to have a minimal impact upon matters relating to highway safety, residential amenity or ecology and therefore the scheme is acceptable in this regard. However, these considerations are insufficient to outweigh the visual harm of the proposals. A recommendation for refusal is made.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

REFUSE

**PROPOSAL:**

This application seeks full planning permission for the retention of a new stable building with ancillary groom's accommodation at Somerford Park Farm, Holmes Chapel Road, Somerford. This application proposes some amendments to the previously refused scheme referenced 14/4518C that is currently subject of an appeal. The proposed changes would comprise of:

- Removal of the projection on the southeast facing elevation
- Painting the roof a darker colour
- A landscaping scheme

**SITE DESCRIPTION:**

This application relates to the existing, large equestrian facility, situated on the north eastern side of Holmes Chapel Road, Somerford. The land is designated in the local plan as being within the Open Countryside. There are residential properties to the west and open countryside to all other directions.

This is an extensive equestrian facility that attracts many visitors to the area. Full planning permission was granted under planning ref; 12/2794C for the erection of a veterinary building. The building has been erected; however, the construction is larger than that shown on the approved plans. Additionally, it is now proposed that the building be used for stables and grooms accommodation rather than as a veterinary practice as originally envisaged.

### **RELEVANT HISTORY:**

Somerford Park Farm has an extensive planning history; however, the most recent and relevant are:

14/4518C - Retrospective application for retention of a new stable building with ancillary groom's accommodation – Refused 18-Dec-2014 – Appeal in progress

14/1118C - Erection of a stable block comprising 20 no. stables with tack / feed / wash / store areas; bulk straw and chipping storage and a muck room – Approved 23-Apr-2014

12/2794C - Erection of veterinary building – Approved 12-Oct-2012

11/0561C - Erection of a Satellite Stable Block Comprising 20no. Stables with Tack / Feed / Wash / Store Areas; Bulk Straw and Chipping Storage and a Muck Room – Approved 28-Jul-2011

### **NATIONAL & LOCAL POLICY**

#### **National Policy:**

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

Of particular relevance are paragraphs 17 and 28.

#### **Development Plan:**

The Development Plan for this area is the adopted Congleton Borough Local Plan First Review (2005), which allocates the site within Open Countryside under Policy PS8.

The relevant Saved Policies are: -

PS8 Open Countryside  
GR1 New Development  
GR2 Design  
GR5 Landscaping  
GR6 Amenity and Health  
GR9 Accessibility, servicing and provision of parking  
RC5 Equestrian Facilities

NR1 Trees

E5 Employment Development in the Open Countryside

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

**Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version (CELP)**

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

PG5 Open Countryside

SD 1 Sustainable Development in Cheshire East

SD 2 Sustainable Development Principles

SE 1 Design

SE 4 The Landscape

EG 1 Economic Prosperity

**CONSULTATIONS:**

**Highways:**

No objection

**Environmental Protection:**

No objection subject to an informative relating to contaminated land.

**Natural England:**

No objection

**PARISH COUNCIL:**

**Somerford Parish Council: No objection** - The applicant has explained that the original application was for an equine hospital and unfortunately the proposer retracted the offer to be on site therefore he was left with the building. There was the opportunity for two customers to utilise the buildings for stables. This has now been constructed, although higher than the original plan to make the best use of the asset by the owner.

We do have to acknowledge that the applicant has contravened planning rules but after consulting two of the immediate neighbours they are not disturbed or aggravated by the change in height.

The establishment is a great asset to the Parish and probably for many surrounding miles; it does create a vibrant economic hub for Somerford.

The Parish feels it has to support this local business.

**REPRESENTATIONS:**

Representations have been received from 21 addresses all in support of this proposal. The reasons for supporting the scheme are summarised as follows:

- Building is in keeping with the other buildings in the area, is well set-back and not intrusive
- Site provides social and economic development along with valuable leisure and recreational facilities and support to local voluntary charitable organisations
- Building easily disguised by tall trees & other landscaping
- Equestrian centre is recognised internally and nationally for its excellence
- Contributes to the local rural economy
- Site provides local jobs and employment opportunities
- Building is required to keep the business growing
- Visual appearance of the barn is smart, tidy and conventional
- Ample parking and access good
- No impact on neighbouring amenity
- The recent housing developments are more visually intrusive
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**MP Fiona Bruce** has also written in support of this application. She has commented that the operations employ approximately 60 people (10 in the proposed building) and is therefore a very important business in the area. Further, the impact on the countryside of the light coloured roof is less significant than the recent housing developments in the area.

#### **APPRAISAL:**

The key issues are:

- Principle of the development
- Design, Siting and Scale
- Amenity
- Highways & Parking
- Ecology

#### **Principle of Development**

The site is designated as being within the Open Countryside, where Local Plan Policy PS8 states that development involving facilities for outdoor sport, recreation are acceptable in principle provided that they preserve the openness of the countryside.

Local Plan Policy RC5 deals specifically with proposals for equestrian facilities and states that proposals will be acceptable where they do not adversely affect; ecology; landscape; agricultural land; amenity and provide adequate parking provision and is linked to the bridleway network.

Local Policy E5 allows for the expansion or redevelopment of an existing business, appropriate to a rural area or essential for the continuation of operations which are already on site where there are no suitable existing buildings which could be re-used.

The existing operation is a commercial operation and employs over 35 full time equivalent staff. Whilst a building in this location has previously been accepted as being appropriate in this rural area, it was for much lower building (in terms of its overall height) and therefore the size and scale was much reduced. The building as erected is much more intrusive and it is considered that it does not preserve the openness of the countryside or respect the landscape. This will be explored below.

Additionally, the building was to be used for veterinary purposes and not for stabling or groom's day accommodation which is the use proposed as part of this application. It is important to note that in recent years, the enterprise at Somerford Park Farm has already benefitted from permission to create a number of stables. It is considered that the need for such stabling is not necessary and could be accommodated by the proposal which granted planning permission for the erection of 20. no stables and received approval under planning ref; 14/1118C. As such, the proposal is considered to be at variance with Local Plan Policies PS8, RC5 and E5.

### **Design, Siting and Scale**

The existing building is of portal framed construction and the general design and style is one that has been found to be acceptable in the vicinity. However, the building occupies a prominent position where it is clearly visible from Holmes Chapel Road. The most significant public views are obtained when approaching the site from the east with the large expanse of light coloured roof prominent. Whilst the approved building would also have been visible, the impact would have been much less owing to its lower height and therefore reduced scale.

This proposal would see the removal of the existing projection along the northeast facing elevation (the elevation visible when travelling along Holmes Chapel Road. The right hand side of the building steps further forward and consequently the eaves and the roof continue down to a lower level than the remaining building. This application proposes to remove this section of the building which would 'square-off' the footprint. The applicant contends that this would reduce the expanse of roof thereby reducing the visual impact.

In terms of dimensions, the difference between the approved vets building, the refused scheme and the one subject of this application are as follows:

	Approved vets building	Constructed stable building	Proposed stable building	Difference between approved and proposed
<b>Eaves height</b>	3.5m	4.08m	4.08m north elevation 5.35 south elevation	+0.58m to +1.27m
<b>Ridge height</b>	6.42m	8.12m	8.12m	+1.72m
<b>Roof pitch</b>	14 degrees	12.5 degrees	12.5 degrees	
<b>Width</b>	23m	Western half – 36m Eastern half – 24m	Western half – 30m Eastern half – 24 m	+1m to +7m
<b>Length</b>	46.1m	48m	48m	+1.9m

Coupled with the amendments to the building, it is also proposed to paint the roof a darker colour in order to allow it to blend more against the landscape. Subject to an appropriate shade, this would allow the roof to blend in more sympathetically; however, such benefits would not be sufficient to outweigh the impacts of the scale and height. Further, the LPA would need to be sure that treatment of the large area concerned is feasible, the treatment durable and able to be maintained in perpetuity.

It is also proposed to provide mitigation planting and a landscape mound. The proposed mound and associated planting would reduce the visibility of the development when viewed from the south and east with the mound providing immediate impact. Nevertheless, the topography in this vicinity is generally flat and in such setting, the introduction of mounding of the height and scale proposed and landscaping would appear stark.

As such, despite the proposed amendments, the proposal fails to recognise or respect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and is therefore contrary to the advice within the NPPG (para 17) as well as the relevant local plan policies.

## Amenity

Policy GR6 requires that new development should not have an unduly detrimental effect on the amenities of nearby residential properties from loss of privacy, loss of sunlight or daylight, visual intrusion, environmental disturbance or pollution and traffic generation access and parking.

The proposed building is sited be in excess of 40 metres distance away from the nearest residential property to the south, referred to as 'The Woodlands'. Owing to this distance, the proposal would not materially harm this neighbour's residential amenity by reason of loss of light, visual intrusion or direct overlooking.

Further, having regard to existing equestrian operations at the site, use of the building would not give rise to harm with regard to noise. The Council's Environmental Protection department

has assessed the application and has offered no objection to the proposal. As such, it is not considered that there would be any adverse impacts on residential amenity.

### **Highways & Parking**

Policy GR9 states that proposals for development requiring access, servicing or parking facilities will only be permitted where a number of criteria are satisfied. These include adequate and safe provision for suitable access and egress by vehicles, pedestrians and other road users to a public highway.

The proposal would not lead to any loss of parking spaces and there would be no alteration to the existing access. There would be an adequate level of parking provision within the site and the wider equestrian complex. In the absence of any objection from the Strategic Highways and Transportation manager, the proposal is therefore considered to be in compliance with Policy GR9 of the adopted local plan.

### **Ecology**

The original application (ref; 12/2794C) was supported by an extended phase one habitat survey that was undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced ecological consultant. Given that the previous proposal was found to be acceptable in this regard and given that the building has already been erected, it is not considered that the proposal would materially harm species protected by law. This has been confirmed by the Council's Nature Conservation Officer.

The River Dane Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is nearby the site; however, Natural England does not consider that the development would have any adverse impact on the SSSI. The proposal is therefore considered to be acceptable in ecological terms.

### **Planning Balance**

The proposal is contrary to development plan policies PS8, GR1, GR2, GR5, RC5 and E5 of the adopted Congleton Borough Local Plan First Review 2005 as well as Policies PG5 and SD2 of the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy and therefore the statutory presumption is against the proposal unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

It is considered that any social and economic benefits derived from this proposal are not sufficient to outweigh the environmental harm in terms of the visual impact of the proposals. Accordingly, the proposal would not amount to a sustainable form of development.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**REFUSE for the following reason:**

- 1. The scale, height and massing of the development results in a building which detracts from the openness of the countryside and has an adverse impact on the landscape and the character of the area. It is therefore contrary to the Local Plan Policies PS8, GR1, GR2, GR5, RC5 and E5 of the adopted Congleton Borough Local Plan First Review 2005 as well as Policies PG5 and SD2 of the emerging**

**Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version and advice within the NPPF.**



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