

ASSINGTON – MILL FARM, BURES ROAD

Change of use of agricultural building to holiday accommodation.

Applicant: Mr R Cowlin

Case Officer: Richard Collins

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**BACKGROUND**

**This application is reported to Development Committee at the request of the Local Member.**

SITE

1. The application site is located to the south of Bures Road, accessed via a narrow unmade track. The site lies outside the built-up area boundary, within a Special Landscape Area. This is a curtilage listed building of the Grade II listed farmhouse. A public footpath crosses through the site between the former water mill building and the farmhouse.

PROPOSAL

2. This planning application seeks permission for the change of use of part of the former water mill building from agricultural to holiday accommodation.
3. The application is purely for a change of use with no internal or external alterations proposed (internal and external alterations already approved on this building in connection with a planning permission for the change of use to residential guest annexe in 2003).
4. The former water mill building subject of this application, called Mill Cottage by the applicant, is attached to the Mill building to the west (subject of B/06/00578/FUL for change of use to education/tourist use and item 12 on this schedule) and a cartlodge further to the west. The building measures 7.9m wide, 4.3m deep and 6.4m high, covering a floor area of approximately 34 square metres. One car parking space is provided for this building within the complex of the farm buildings.
5. A letter from the applicant has been submitted in support of the application. The following comprises a summary of the points raised: -
  - The farm comprises 86 acres of poor quality land farmland.
  - The cost of cultivation of the arable fields has been greater than the profits from the crops over the past three years.
  - Seeking to diversify and make low-key commercial use of one of the eight buildings on the site.
  - Three years ago, all the buildings were in a semi-derelict state, two nearing collapse.

- Three have been repaired, one re-built, and now run out of capital. In an attempt to fund the restoration of the last major buildings we are applying to Defra for part funding for holiday accommodation, under the Rural Enterprise Scheme.
- Assured by the East of England Tourist Board that there is likely to be a good rate of occupation for this small cottage.
- For past 3 years have worked with the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Countryside Project to create 12 acres of new woodland, with public access, 900m of new hedging, 6m margins around all the arable fields and a new permissive path.
- Proposal would accord with planning policy in that;
- No impact on the listed buildings and their surroundings, and no detrimental effect on the landscape or residential amenity.
- Satisfactory retention of a traditional farm building.
- Encouragement of the rural economy through the diversification and sensible re-use of rural buildings.
- Support for the local economy through tourism and the greater use of the farm shop nearby, the village pub, and the employment of a cleaner.
- Making the countryside and informal recreation more accessible to the public.
- Sustainable transport, around 24 buses a day pass the end of the access track, and connect Assington to the railway stations at Colchester and Sudbury.
- Happy to enter into an agreement with the LPA to restrict the building to holiday accommodation only.

#### RELEVANT HISTORY

6. 2006 – Current application for change of use of part of former water mill building from agricultural to education/tourist use - B/06/00578/FUL
7. 2005 - Planning permission granted for erection of summerhouse - B/05/01063/FHA
8. 2005 - Planning permission refused and appeal dismissed for change of use of outbuilding from tractor shed to educational use - B/04/01883/FUL
9. 2003 - Planning permission and listed building consent granted for conversion of agricultural outbuilding to residential guest annexe - B/03/00842/FUL and B/03/00843/LBC
10. 2003 - Planning permission and listed building consent granted for erection of two-storey side extension and single storey rear extension - B/03/00844/FHA and B/03/00845/LBC
11. 2003 - Planning permission granted for erection of outbuilding for use as agricultural storage/shed/workshop and siting of mobile home for 2 years - B/03/01859/FUL

## POLICY

### **PPS 1 (Delivering Sustainable Development)**

13. Good quality, carefully sited accessible development within existing towns and villages should be allowed where it benefits the local economy and/or community. Accessibility should be a key consideration in all development decisions. Most developments which are likely to generate large numbers of trips should be located in or next to towns or other service centres that are accessible by public transport, walking and cycling. Decisions on the location of other developments in rural areas should, where possible, give people the greatest opportunity to access them by public transport, walking and cycling.

### **PPS 7 (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas)**

14. Planning authorities should focus most new developments in or near to local service centres where employment, housing, services and other facilities can be provided close together. This should help to ensure these facilities are served by public transport and provide improved opportunities for access by walking and cycling. These centres (which might be a country town, a single large village or a group of villages) should be identified in the development plan as the preferred location for such development.
15. 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.

The Government expects most tourist accommodation requiring new buildings to be located in, or adjacent to, existing towns and villages. Local planning authorities should support the provision of other forms of self-catering holiday accommodation in rural areas where this would accord with sustainable development objectives. The re-use and conversion of existing non-residential buildings for this purpose may have added benefits, e.g. as a farm diversification scheme.

16. Recognising that diversification into non-agricultural activities is vital to the continuing viability of many farm enterprises, local planning authorities should be supportive of well-conceived farm diversification schemes for business purposes that contribute to sustainable development objectives.

### **PPG21 (Tourism)**

17. Tourism makes a major contribution to the national economy and to the prosperity of many cities, towns and rural areas. Its continuing growth generates a range of economic activity and new job opportunities. Because it often depends on a high quality environment, it can act as a positive force for environmental protection and enhancement.

18. In recent years leisure demands have changed markedly. Many people take several holidays a year, some of which may be short breaks, no longer just in the summer months. Much of this demand is for self-catering accommodation - whether new buildings (including mobile homes) or converted properties - which may be constructed to a standard that would equally support permanent residence in some comfort. But this accommodation may also be located in areas in which the provision of permanent housing would be contrary to national policies on development in the countryside or not in accordance with development plan policies, or both.
19. The planning system can respond to these changes in the holiday market without compromising policies to safeguard the countryside. The Government now believes that in exceptional cases holiday occupancy conditions can reconcile these two objectives. Indeed, conversions of redundant buildings into holiday accommodation where conversion to residential dwellings would not be permitted may reduce the pressure on other housing in rural areas.

### **PPG15 (Planning and the Historic Environment)**

20. Any object or structure which is fixed to a listed building, or is within the curtilage and forms part of the land and has done so since before July 1948 - are also treated as part of the building for the purposes of listed building control. Once lost, listed buildings cannot be replaced; and they can be robbed of their special interest as surely by unsuitable alteration as by outright demolition. They represent a finite resource and an irreplaceable asset. There should be a general presumption in favour of the preservation of listed buildings, except where a convincing case can be made out, against the criteria set out in this section, for alteration or demolition.
21. Generally the best way of securing the upkeep of historic buildings and areas is to keep them in active use. For the great majority this must mean economically viable uses if they are to survive, and new, and even continuing, uses will often necessitate some degree of adaptation. The range and acceptability of possible uses must therefore usually be a major consideration when the future of listed buildings or buildings in conservation areas is in question.
22. The best use will very often be the use for which the building was originally designed, and the continuation or reinstatement of that use should certainly be the first option when the future of a building is considered. But not all original uses will now be viable or even necessarily appropriate: the nature of uses can change over time, so that in some cases the original use may now be less compatible with the building than an alternative. For example, some business or light industrial uses may now require less damaging alterations to historic farm buildings than some types of modern agricultural operation.

**Please note that details or extracts of policies are no longer included in reports – see page 4 of these papers.**

23. The following adopted development plan policies provide the framework against which this application should be judged:

## **Suffolk Structure Plan 2001**

- Policy ENV1 (Conservation of the Built Environment)
- Policy ENV2 (Conversion and re-use of rural buildings)
- Policy ENV3 (Design Standards)
- Policy ENV4 (Protection of the countryside)
- Policy ENV8 (Special Landscape Area)
- Policy ENV14 (Flood Protection)
- Policy ECON12 (Tourism)
- Policy ECON13 (Tourism)

**Babergh Local Plan Alteration No.2 (2006)** *the policy references below relate to the adopted version of the Local Plan - the policy numbers in some cases differ from those in the second deposit draft. Where this is the case, the previous reference number is given in brackets*

- Policy CR01 (Protection of countryside)
- Policy CR04 (CR05) (Special Landscape Areas)
- Policy CR17 (CR29) (Farm diversification)
- Policy CR18 (CR30) (Conversion of buildings in the countryside)
- Policy CR19 (CR31) (Conversion of building in the countryside)
- Policy EN11 (EN05) (Flood risk)
- Policy CN06 (CN10) (listed buildings)
- Policy CN01 (General Design)
- Policy EN03 (CR14) (Protected Species)

## OBSERVATIONS

24. PC – Approve. Proposal shows a very sensible, sound approach. The holiday accommodation makes good sense and is potentially beneficial to the village.
25. Adjoining PC (Leavenheath) - To be reported if available.
26. CHA – Recommends standard conditions.
27. HoES – No objection, but would recommend an Advisory Note is attached to any planning permission regarding possible hydrocarbon contamination.
28. SCC Archaeological Service – No objection.
29. EA – As building has a valid planning permission for residential guest annexe and application proposal is not to a more flood risk sensitive use, a Flood Risk Assessment is not required in this instance.
30. English Nature – Recommend building is surveyed for bats prior to application being determined.
31. SWT – No objection following submission of Bat survey.

32. Dedham Vale & Stour Valley Project – Recommend clarification that surveys have been undertaken on the building for the presence of protected species before they could support the application.
33. Letters – One letter of support received. The following comprises a summary of the support offered: -
  - I can see no possible objections to this as it seems very little different from the earlier application that was granted permission in 2003 for residential guest annexe.

## ASSESSMENT

34. The most relevant policies to this case are ENV2, CR18 and CR19, which seek to ensure that the conversion of rural buildings will be supported for employment purposes where the building and the proposed use respect the rural setting.
35. Also relevant in this case are policies ENV1, and CN06, which seek to ensure that the character and setting of listed buildings will be protected and enhanced, and that new developments affecting listed buildings must be in harmony with their surroundings.
36. Also relevant to this case are policies ENV4, and CR01, which seek to ensure that the landscape quality and character of the countryside will be protected.

### **Policy Considerations**

37. Adopted Development Plan policies generally support farm diversification where, amongst other things, the proposal facilitates economic activity, has no detrimental effect on landscape characteristics, and has no adverse impact upon residential amenity or the highway network. These policies reflect the aims of the Government as stated within PPS7 in supporting the re-use of rural buildings for economic purposes and for farm diversification in general.
38. The Adopted Local Plan policies relating to ‘conversions’ expand upon the more general policy in the Suffolk Structure Plan. Local Plan policy establishes that the re-use of redundant or under-used buildings in the countryside for residential or holiday accommodation will only be permitted if (inter alia) it can be demonstrated that the alternative uses for business, community and leisure uses have been discounted, the buildings location makes it unsuitable for conversion to other uses, the building is of architectural or historic merit and is capable of conversion, and the method of conversion retains the character of the building .
39. In this instance, the building is of historic interest and forms a curtilage structure to a Grade II listed building. The proposal for the conversion of the outbuilding to be used as a holiday let cottage is considered to accord with the general aim of retaining buildings that make a positive contribution to the landscape by bringing about a viable and productive use for the building. In addition, the exterior and interior alterations have already been approved for the use of the building as a residential guest annexe, but has not been implemented.

## **Alternative Use Exploration and Highway Considerations**

40. No supporting documentation has been submitted with the application indicating other possible uses have been examined for the site, however due to the remote location of the outbuilding the site is considered unsuitable for commercial uses. It is agreed that due to the sensitive location and access arrangements to the building, alternative non-residential uses would not be appropriate, therefore it is considered there would be little point in carrying out a marketing campaign for alternative non-residential uses.
41. In addition, and given the above, the building, due to its size and position, are not thought to be compatible with modern farming practices, and together with the close proximity to an existing dwelling, any realistic opportunity for this building to be used for business, agricultural, community or recreational purposes is severely limited.
42. Furthermore, the access track is considered to be unsuitable for any form of commercial traffic, and together with the close proximity of the existing farmhouse and the residential property towards the top of the track, any realistic opportunity for this building to be used for business, community or recreational purposes is severely limited
43. On this basis, it is agreed that the building is unlikely to be considered entirely suitable for any use other than residential/holiday let and as such, a marketing campaign has not been required of the applicant.
44. In view of the above and having regard to the relevant Development Plan and its policies, the following recommendation is made -

### REASON FOR APPROVAL

The application building makes a positive contribution to the character and visual amenity of the area. Although a marketing campaign has not been pursued to investigate the non-residential alternative uses of the building, it is considered that the proposal offers the most appropriate re-use of the building. The restricted access track and access to the site along an unclassified road further serve to limit any other viable alternative use, and in the absence of any harmful impact upon the character of the locality, the proposal is considered acceptable having regard to those relevant policies within the Development Plan.

### RECOMMENDATION

Grant Planning Permission subject to the following conditions –

- As recommended by CHA
- Fenestration details
- Building to be used only as holiday accommodation.

### DECISION

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