

**Item No: 6**

**Reference: B/10/00442/FUL**

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**Parish: CHELMONDISTON**

**Location: Land to west and east of Stanley House, Main Road, Chelmondiston**

**Proposal: Erection of agricultural storage building**

**Applicant: Mr Cordle**

**Case Officer: Graham Chamberlain**

**Date for Determination: 09/06/10**

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### **RECOMMENDATION: Refuse planning permission**

#### **THE SITE**

1. The site comprises of a parcel of land to the west of Stanley House. Stanley House is a modern dwelling located on Main Road. It is located within a group of three dwellings (a semi and Stanley House). The site is very prominent as the landscape is relatively flat. There are footpaths to the north of the site and the southwest.
2. The red line site is an irregular shaped 'field' surrounding the three dwellings. The land has been seeded with grass and is mown short. This is no evidence of any agricultural activity taking place at the site.
3. The land used to be part of the large field to the south of the site (but has been subdivided by laurel hedging), which is Grade 2 agricultural land. Grades 1 - 3 are the best agricultural land with Grade 1 being 'excellent' Grade 2 is 'very good' and Grade 3 is 'good to moderate'.
4. The site is obscured from view by a 'wall' of crates and machinery arranged along Main Road.
5. The site is located within the countryside. The northern side of Main Road is located within the Suffolk Coast and Heath Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The site is also in close proximity to a number of large archaeological sites.

#### **THE PROPOSAL**

6. The proposal is for a general purpose agricultural store building. It would have the following dimensions,  
  
Height - 8m  
Width - 17.8m  
Depth - 25m  
Floor area - 441 sqm
7. The building would have a very shallow roof pitch with a high eaves line and would be located at the centre of the site. The materials would be profiled cladding. The north eastern elevation would have roller shutter doors in the gable end.
8. The application is supported by a Design and Access Statement.
9. The application documents can be viewed on line via the planning pages on the District Council's website.

## RELEVANT HISTORY

10. B/09/00143/AGD - This was a notification for the same building. The details were returned to the applicant as the proposal was not 'permitted development' and could not therefore follow the notification procedure. The main reason being that there was no agriculture taking place at the site. The site is being used to store timber, boxes and other paraphernalia. Furthermore, the site is not of sufficient size to allow the erection of a building under Part 6 of the General Permitted Development Order. (Notwithstanding this, the applicant purchased the building).
11. The applicant had sought pre application advice in 2008 (prior to the submission of the notification) regarding the erection of a building on this site. The applicant had sold his share in the surrounding farm but had retained the five acres around his house. The applicant had indicated that a building was needed to store equipment used for 'highway maintenance' and the storage of 'chick potatoes'. The advice given by Officers was that the area was open and therefore it would be unlikely that a building would be supported on the site. The applicant was advised to explore opportunities to site a small building within his residential curtilage rather than the open farm land to the side of his property.

## NATIONAL GUIDANCE

12. **PPS1** (Delivering Sustainable Development)
13. **PPS7** (Delivering Sustainable Development in Rural Areas)

## PLANNING POLICIES

14. The Development Plan comprises saved policies in the Suffolk Structure Plan, adopted 2001, and saved policies in the Babergh Local Plan (Alteration No. 2) adopted 2006. The following policies are relevant to this proposal:

### **Babergh Local Plan (Alteration No.2) 2006**

- **CR01** Development in the Countryside
- **CR07** Landscaping
- **CN01** Maintaining Local Distinctiveness

**The relevant policies can be viewed on line. Please see Page 3 for details.**

## CONSULTATIONS

15. Chelmondiston Parish Council - Recommends supporting this application on the proviso that the applicant clears the site surrounding the proposed building.
16. Suffolk Archaeology - No objection.
17. Suffolk Coasts and Heath AONB Unit - makes the following comments:
  - The site abuts the AONB; due to the flat landscape here new development can be intrusive on the protected landscape. A high standard of design is required due to the sensitivity of the area.
  - Concerned by the prominent location of the building. The development would be visible from considerable distances (including public rights of way).
  - The new building will not sit well in the landform, especially as there is no nearby wood to help blend the development into its setting.

- The development would be intrusive from inside and outside the AONB.
- The preference is for this type of building to be located in an existing cluster or group. This is not the case here; the building will form a very distinct and separate feature. Alternative locations should be considered.
- The materials and roof form/design is inappropriate and will not reduce the impact or help integrate the building into its surroundings.
- The proposal will affect the landscape in a negative way.

## REPRESENTATIONS

18. Five letters were sent in by the applicant's agent, raising the following points:-
- Mr Cordle (the applicant) undertakes hedge cutting, ploughing, heavy lifting and works at harvest time as and when required.

## PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

### Agricultural Need

19. Policy CR01 of the Local Plan states that the landscape quality and character of the countryside should be protected by limiting development in the countryside to that *'which is essential to the efficient operation of agriculture, forestry and horticulture and for appropriate outdoor recreation.'* The applicant therefore needs to demonstrate that the building is 'essential'.
20. The applicant is a farm contractor. There is no evidence he farms land himself. The site in Chelmondiston is laid over to the grass and the other small parcel of land owned by the applicant in Horham (Mid Suffolk) is part of a larger field. When assessing proposals for new agricultural buildings, it is normally expected that the building would be linked to an agricultural unit/holding. In this case the building would not be, and it would not be commensurate in size to the five acres of land owned by the applicant, albeit farmers/landowners can use contractors to help out at certain times of year, or use a contractor to farm the land on their behalf entirely.
21. The applicant runs a rural business which is engaged in general purpose agriculture, farm maintenance, hedge cutting etc. No evidence has been submitted that he farms land *per se* and any agricultural need relates to the farms the applicant works on, therefore a building could be sited in alternative locations.
22. As the applicant runs a 'rural business' rather than a farm there is no need for his storage building to be sited at this location. The building would be used to store equipment related to his business. This function could be performed by other storage buildings, whether on a farm or not. There is no need (in agricultural terms) for the building to be located on the site in question. The reason it is proposed here is because the applicant owns the land. Furthermore, it is unclear whether he needs to provide his own equipment for the contract work he undertakes; there is the possibility that use could be made of equipment supplied by the farmers.
23. Notwithstanding the above assessment, as part of demonstrating that the building is essential the applicant would be expected to have undertaken an assessment of the availability of existing buildings. The applicant already stores the equipment in a building on his brother's farm (this arrangement is coming to an end), so this demonstrates that it does not have to be on the application site for any functional reason. Alternatives that could be considered are:

- Farm buildings in the locality
  - Buildings on the farms he does contract work on
  - Other storage buildings unrelated to agriculture in the locality.
24. At a pre application stage the applicant was advised that a robust case would be required which included an assessment of alternative sites. No statement has been submitted which has assessed alternative buildings on other farms, for example 500m to the west of the site is a collection of empty buildings at White House Farm, which may be suitable. No statement has been submitted as to why the land owned at Horam has not been considered – it is understood that this is not near an AONB and is less prominent in the landscape. Furthermore, there may be other solutions available such as a long lease on land belonging to another farmer to enable him to construct his building within a cluster of existing buildings in the locality (if there is not existing buildings available).
25. The applicant has not demonstrated that the building is essential to the efficient operation of agriculture, that the building needs to be sited on the application site or that there are no alternative sites available. The case submitted is not robust and does not demonstrate an essential need for the building.

#### **Impact on the Countryside and AONB**

26. The above assessment is important as there is demonstrable harm to the countryside and the Suffolk Coast and Heath Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
27. Policy CR02 of the Local Plan states that AONB landscape will be safeguarded by the strict control of development. It goes on to state that development that has a significant impact will not be supported unless there is an overriding national need. The site is not in an AONB but abuts it. Due to the topography it 'reads' as part of the protected landscape.
28. Policy CR01 states that new buildings in the countryside should be compatible in scale with the surroundings and have due regard to the landscape characteristics. The buildings should be sensitively designed with high standards of landscaping, layout and careful choice of materials and not introduce a proliferation of buildings
29. The proposed building would be a large, bulky addition in the landscape. It would be isolated, drawing undue attention to itself. New buildings in the countryside are normally directed towards existing clusters of buildings. This enables the buildings to be seen against a backdrop of similar buildings (in terms of scale, materials and form). This also ensures that there is not a proliferation of buildings in the countryside which erodes its special character.
30. The layout of the site and proposed location of the building is such that it will read as an isolated building. It has no regard to any natural feature and would be located at the centre of the site in a prominent location.
31. The juxtaposition of the building with the dwellings to the west in terms of scale, form and materials will result in the building standing out in the countryside and the rural 'scene'. Not compatible in scale with the buildings nearby - this is why new buildings in the countryside are normally located in clusters with buildings of a similar design and scale. This lessens the impact compared with the sporadic scattering of buildings across the countryside.

32. The building would be utilitarian in appearance. Given the isolated location it can not be considered a sensitive design with a careful choice of materials. It is an 'off the peg' pre fabricated building. Whilst it is not untypical of modern farm buildings it should be sited sensitively to minimise the impact. The proposal does not achieve this.
33. In this case the landscape is flat and open. The building would not be seen against the backdrop of similar buildings. It would not be screened by the topography or other natural features such as a wood. There is a hedge along the front of the site but this is not sufficient to obscure the building from view and would not be a long term solution (as the hedge could die or be removed).
34. The applicant has planted a laurel hedge to try and obscure the building but this is an incongruous addition to the countryside, which has not matured and may fail. The Suffolk Coast and Heath AONB Unit have provided comments on the application. Your Officers agree with their assessment. The landscape characteristics as well as the buildings design will result in an undesirable intrusion into the landscape. The building would be clearly visible from the public realm including views from the Public Footpath to the north-west and the road. An extension to the cottage next door was dismissed on appeal last year due to the harm to the landscape and the prominence of the site (B/08/01525).
35. The Parish Council has recommended support of the application as long as the paraphernalia on the site is removed. Addressing the current harm to the visual amenity of the area caused by the current condition of the site is not sufficient justification for the building and would set an undesirable precedent. The storage being undertaken on the site is subject to a separate enforcement investigation.
36. The proposal is therefore found to be contrary to Policies CR01, CR02 and CR07 and is recommended for refusal.

#### **Other issues**

37. Neighbour amenity - the distance of the proposed building from the cottages to the west is sufficient to ensure there is no harm by way of overbearing, loss of light or loss of outlook.
38. Biodiversity - As the land is sown with grass which appears to be mown, there is unlikely to be much risk of protected species being impacted

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

That planning permission is refused for the following reasons:

- Adverse impact on the countryside and AONB contrary to Policies CR01, CR01 and CR02 of the Babergh District local Plan Alt 2 (2006).