

COLY VALLEY
(Widworthy)

07/1677/FUL

Target Date: 08.08.07

Applicant:

Mr Cooke

Location:

Land adjacent Sutton Barton Recycling Centre, Offwell

Proposal:

Erection of farm shop

CONSULTATIONS

Highways Agency

No objections to these proposals.

County Highway Authority

Objections to original submission on grounds of sustainability, A35 impact, inadequate approach roads and inaccurate/insufficient layout plans in respect of site access, visibility and parking provisions

Continued objections to amended submission on grounds of sustainability, A35 impact, inadequate approach roads and inaccurate/insufficient layout plans in respect of site access and visibility.

South West Water

Not received

Environment Agency

Not received

Environmental Health

Recommended conditions relating to noise and emissions

Economic Development

I met the applicants at Sutton Barton Farm some months ago.

Under normal circumstances, one of the most efficient ways of managing and operating a successful farm shop is to locate it as closely as possible to the centre of the farm enterprise. However, despite the high quality of the buildings and the setting at Sutton Barton Farm, the nature of the roads that give access to it are such that it would be impracticable to attempt to operate a farm shop from this location.

The applicant's preferred location is a site in their ownership that adjoins the access road to the Sutton Barton Recycling Centre, just off the A35. They have usefully demonstrated that significant numbers of potential farm shop customers are already using this road to access the recycling facility.

In my view there is a compelling business case for co-locating the Cooke's farm shop as closely as possible to this important community facility.

Hopefully, it will provide visitors already committed to a journey to and from the Recycling Centre with an opportunity to purchase and enjoy the products of Sutton Barton Farm.

Long term viability is a crucial test of any new farm enterprise proposal. I sense that the applicants have given careful consideration to both the potential and appropriateness of this location and would be grateful if you would bring these comments to the attention of Members.

TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL

No objections

WARD MEMBER(S)

The initial comments of the Ward Member (Councillor Godbeer) is:

“Support the application. Amended entrance to access site from recycling road.”

In the event that this application comes to Committee I would reserve my position until I am in full possession of all the relevant facts and arguments for and against.

REPRESENTATIONS

Objections

1 letter has been received raising the following points:

- Concern about volume and speed of traffic coming off A35 on to de-restricted narrow lane
- Traffic increases through Offwell
- Days and hours of operation needs consideration

Support

No letters have been received

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

App.No:	Proposal	Decision	Date
06/1041/FUL	Erection of farm shop building and widen existing access to serve parking area	Refused	13.06.06

PLANNING POLICIES

Government Guidance

PPS 7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

Devon Country Structure Plan (2001-2016)

Policy ST5 - Development Priority 2001 to 2016
Policy CO3 – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Policy C06 - Quality of New Development
Policy TR10 – Strategic Road Network and Roadside Service Areas

East Devon Local Plan (1995-2011)

Policy S4 - Countryside Protection

Policy D1 – Design and Local Distinctiveness

Policy EN1 – Development in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Policy SH9 - Rural Shops, Garden Centres, Nurseries and Similar Retail uses

Policy E5 - Rural Diversification

Policy TA6 - Adequacy of Road Network and Site Access

SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The site refers to an agricultural field located in the open countryside within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The field forms a corner with the access road to the Sutton Barton recycling centre to the west. The field is also adjacent to a classified minor road.

The field is currently used for agriculture and there are no existing buildings on the site or visible from the site. A mature, native hedge encloses the field on all sides, but due to the relatively flat topography of the landscape and the large size of the field, it is prominent within the landscape from the south and west.

The site is approximately 750m from the applicants farm which lies to the south of the site.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

This is a full application to erect a modern agricultural barn style building measuring 6.9 m wide x 15.9 m in length for use as a farm shop set in a site area of approximately 20 m x 24 m to provide visibility splays and parking.

A previous application was refused in June 2006 for the following reasons:

1. The proposed farm shop and hard standing, by virtue of their siting and appearance would constitute an obtrusive development in the open countryside that fails to preserve or enhance the natural beauty of the landscape designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies SH9 (Rural Shops, Garden Centres, Nurseries and Similar Retail uses) and EN1 (Development in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) of the East Devon Local Plan Revised Deposit 2003 (incorporating Proposed Modifications 2006) and Policy C03 (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) of the Devon Structure Plan (2001 - 2016).
2. The proposed farm shop, by virtue of its proposed siting would be distanced from and unrelated of the group of farm buildings to the south and is therefore contrary to Policy E5 (Rural Diversification) of the East Devon Local Plan Revised Deposit 2003 (incorporating Proposed Modifications 2006).
3. The proposed access to the site, by virtue of the lack of detailed information, cannot be fully considered by the Local Planning Authority and therefore fails to satisfy the requirements of Policies TA6 (Adequacy of Road Network and Site Access) and SH9 (Rural Shops, Garden Centres, Nurseries and Similar Retail uses) of the East Devon Local Plan Revised Deposit 2003 (incorporating Proposed Modifications 2006).

CONSIDERATIONS AND ASSESSMENT

Justification for the Proposed Siting

The proposed farm shop is situated a significant distance from the farmstead (approximately 750 metres) such that the farm is not actually visible from the application site and Local Plan Policy

E5 on Rural Diversification specifically requires that “*any new building is modest in scale and is sited in or adjacent to an existing group of building*”. Therefore the proposal is immediately in conflict with Policy E5 and we need to consider whether sufficient justification has been provided in the application for the proposed siting.

A report on the proposed farm diversification has been submitted with the application and this identifies a need for the host farm to diversify and proposes a farm shop in this location in order to tap into the number of passing visitors to the recycling centre. Based on average visitor numbers to the recycling centre of 70,000 visitors a year the report estimates that there would be a customer base of 14,000 for the farm shop and an average turnover of £120,000 on the assumption that 20% of visitors to the recycling centre would also visit the farm shop once established. These estimated figures were queried with the agent and a further traffic count and limited visitor survey was undertaken and on the basis of these results, the same size customer base is identified for the farm shop. Support is also given for the proposed siting of the farm shop by the Economic Development Officer who identifies that the access roads to the existing farm are poor and would not be suitable for increased traffic and who considers that there is a compelling business case for locating the farm shop near the recycling centre.

However, it must be stressed that the figures quoted in support of the application are only estimates and are not based on any firm evidence; rather it is only assumed that visitors to the recycling centre will also visit the farm shop. While Policy E5 does not require viability of diversification schemes to be established it does require new buildings to be closely related to existing groups of farm buildings and it is not considered that the estimates and assumptions made in support of the application justify the provision of a new building and retail function in such an isolated location.

Local Plan Policy SH8 on Rural Shops also stipulates that where new buildings are provided for retail use outside of defined Built Up Areas the goods sold should be wholly or predominantly produced on site or on adjoining land to ensure that the proposals will not adversely affect the vitality or viability of retail facilities in any local town centre or village. The application does not contain a detailed business plan identifying where produce will come from and makes only very vague references to selling “*wherever possible, products produced locally by his neighbouring farmers*” (emphasis added). While it would be open to the authority to grant permission with conditions controlling what produce is sold these types of conditions are very difficult to enforce and without evidence to show the shop can be adequately supplied by local produce the application essentially amounts to the provision of a new retail use in the open countryside and remote from the host farm which would potentially compete with local town and village centres. This type of development is therefore contrary to national and local policies on retail development and countryside protection and notwithstanding the comments of the Economic Development Officer the application is not considered to be acceptable. Members will recall the recent approval for a farm shop at Hayne Lane Farm, Honiton. That proposal was well located within the farm complex; was well located in relation to Honiton; and confirmed that 70% of the produce would come from the estate farm. The current proposal is, therefore, not comparable.

AONB Impact

The farm shop is proposed is to be sited approximately half way down the field boundary with the access road to the recycling centre set at right angles to the adjacent hedgerow in a separately defined site area enclosed by a hedge boundary and we need to consider how the proposal impacts visually on the character and appearance of the area and AONB.

The area is characterised by large undeveloped agricultural fields with mature hedge boundaries and the site is open to long distance views from the approach road to the north east of the site. Any development in this field would therefore be fully visible and prominent and it is considered that this particular proposal, by virtue of the orientation of the building, its position in the centre of the field and the artificial enclosure of the parking area would be particularly prominent and obtrusive in the landscape. Where new buildings are required for agriculture they are often best

sited near existing buildings or in low lying areas of land and/or in field corners so that the visual intrusion is minimised. This current proposal makes no attempt through its siting to minimise the visual impact of the building and it is considered that the resulting development will have an adverse and visually intrusive impact on the landscape character of the AONB. The intrusive appearance of the building and associated parking area would also be further emphasised by its isolated appearance away from other buildings and the main farm. Members are reminded that Local Plan policy and government guidance states where there is a conflict then conservation of the landscape is of primary importance.

Tree/Hedge Impact

There is a group of protected trees to the north of the site that are not affected by the proposal by virtue of their distance from the site. However the provision of the new site access and required visibility splays will result in significant loss of and disruption to the mature hedge bounding the site and this will further add to the visual intrusion of the development in the AONB.

Highway Impact

Concern has been raised by the Highway Officer in respect of the sustainability of the development and the adequacy of the submitted site plans in relation to the proposed site access and visibility splays. An amended site layout plan was submitted but the Highway Officer remains of the view that the plans lack sufficient detail to satisfy the concerns he has identified. The plans in particular do not show sufficient visibility and are lacking in accurate topographical detail and while further amendments could be sought the Authority must consider the plans submitted. The lack of accurate plans of the access and visibility splay also make it difficult to judge the impact on the existing hedgerow.

On the recommendation of the Highway Officer the Highway Agency has been consulted in respect of the impact on the A35 and they have not objected; however the concerns regarding the impact on the local road network remain outstanding at this time. However, the presence of the recycling centre using the same access roads weakens the case for highway objections.

CONCLUSIONS

It is not considered that sufficiently robust supporting information has been provided in the application to justify the proposed development which is contrary to relevant Local Plan policies and will result in a visually intrusive and prominent development in the AONB. Insufficient information has also been provided to show that the highway implications of the development have been adequately dealt with.

RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE for the following reason:

1. The proposed farm shop would be distanced from and unrelated to the main farm holding and farm buildings to the south and does not provide adequate information in relation to the produce to be sold from the farm shop to satisfy the Local Planning Authority that the development will not adversely affect the vitality or viability of local town or village centres. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies E5 (Rural Diversification) and SH8 (Rural Shops, Garden Centres, Nurseries and Similar Retail Uses) of the East Devon Local Plan 1995 – 2011.
2. The proposed farm shop and associated parking area, by virtue of its siting and appearance, would constitute a highly prominent and obtrusive isolated development in the open countryside which would detract from the open character of the area and would fail to preserve or enhance the natural beauty of the landscape designated as an Area of

Outstanding Natural Beauty. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies C03 (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and C06 (Quality of New Development) of the Devon Structure Plan (2001 - 2016) and Policies S4 (Countryside Protection), D1 (Design and Local Distinctiveness), EN1 (Development in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty), E5 (Rural Diversification) and SH8 (Rural Shops, Garden Centres, Nurseries and Similar Retail Uses) of the East Devon Local Plan 1995 – 2011.

Refused plans

Site Location Plan received 13 June 2007

Amended Site Layout Plan received 17 July 2007

Elevations Drawings received 13 June 2007

List of Background Papers

Application file, consultations and policy documents referred to in the report.