

APPENDIX

7. FULL APPLICATION – RE-LOCATION OF COACH (PSV) OPERATING CENTRE AND GARAGE, ERECTION OF NEW COACH STATION AND GARAGE INCLUDING NEW VEHICULAR AND PEDESTRIAN ACCESS AT GOLDEN GREEN GARAGE, BARROW MOOR, LONGNOR (P8102, 03.11.06, NP/SM/1106/1010 405928/364477/ALN)

Golden Green Garage is an isolated coach operating centre and garage located on the Longnor to Royal Cottage road at Barrow Moor. The property currently consists of the original farmhouse, an attached barn with permission for conversion to a local needs dwelling and a range of modern garage buildings.

To the west of the garage site is a field, which is currently let for grazing and is the site for the proposed coach station. Adjacent to the field and set back from the road there is another bus garage operated by another company. This operator has a large garage which accommodates several coaches.

History

1973 – consent for bungalow as second dwelling to allow supervision of garage (not tied to garage)

1981 – refusal for barn conversion adjacent to farmhouse because of a lack of identified need

1996 – application for barn conversion approved subject to S106 agreement tying it to the house and garage and local needs condition

1997 – bungalow sold off into separate ownership and permission and consent granted for new vehicular access

2001 – renewal of consent granted for conversion of barn to dwelling (consent still not implemented)

2006 – application for re-location of coach operating centre and garage withdrawn

Adjacent bus operator:

1986 permission to relocate here from Vein Farm Reapsmoor.

1988 permission to convert outbuildings to residential.

1994 Refusal of permission for a second essential worker's dwelling

1996 Permission to extend the garage upto 28m long to accommodate around 11 coaches of varying size.

Key Issues

- Whether the planning gain achieved through removal of the garage use from the existing site outweighs the impact of a large new building in open countryside.
- The fact that the business provides a community service and is a local employer and whether that warrants an exception to normal policy

Proposal

As amended, to remove the existing modern garage buildings and associated hardstanding and to return the site to the front of the barn and dwelling to a landscaped 'paddock' area. This will involve blocking off two of the three existing vehicular access points to the front of the site. It is then proposed to erect a new garage building in the open field to the west of the site, between the existing garage site and another coach operating centre to the west. The building would be positioned on the western side of the field, approximately 60 m away from the existing site.

The main part of the building would measure 18.2 m wide by 22 m deep by 4.6 m high to the eaves with the ridge running north to south. A smaller, lower section, set back off the front elevation would extend off the south gable, measuring 9 m wide by 15 m deep by 4.5 m high to the eaves. The building would be dug into the ground on the western side.

The submitted plans showed the building to be constructed in pre-coated profile sheeting on the roof, upper gables, north and west walls. The front (east) elevation contains five large bay doors which will be separated by stone piers. The total floor area provided would be 557 sq metres. The building will provide space for the storage and maintenance of the coaches and buses, together with a coach lift. There will also be an MOT testing bay for smaller vehicles and a car lift. Space will also be provided on the ground floor for a store, wc and washroom, dining area and reception. Above this area in the roofspace will be another store and an office.

To the front (east) of the garage building will be a large hardstanding area for manoeuvring and parking (including 12 parking bays), to be constructed in concrete or block paving and a new access will be constructed onto the road.

Consultations

Highway Authority – no objections subject to conditions

District Council – Refuse due to the size of the proposal and the harm to the landscape. Creation of new jobs is insufficient to outweigh landscape impact.

Parish Council – the garage is seen as an asset to the area and provides local employment. Fully support the application.

Environment Agency – initially raised objections due to use of a cess pool for foul drainage. The agent has provided additional details to the agency and approval subject to conditions is now recommended.

Authority's Landscape Architects – initial concerns about detailing but no objections to amended plans subject to landscaping conditions

Councillor Gill Heath (Ilkeston Rural, Staffs Moorlands) supports the proposal as it provides a good local service and local jobs. Planning gain is to be derived from removal of the unsightly existing buildings.

Main Policies

Relevant Regional Spatial Strategy 8 policies include: Policy 10 and policy 9 in the draft RSS 8

Relevant Structure Plan policies include: GS1, C2, C5, SC2, E1

Relevant Local Plan policies include: LC4, LS4, LE4

Comment

Policy Background

Structure Plan policy C2 states that development outside the confines of towns and villages will not normally be permitted unless it is necessary for agriculture, forestry, farm diversification, extension to dwellings, recreation and tourism, mineral working or conversion of traditional buildings for affordable housing for local needs. Policy C5 states that development which harms the character and appearance of agricultural landscapes will not normally be permitted. Policy SC2 aims to support the development and improvement of community services but is qualified by Local Plan policy LS4 which guides new community facilities into existing settlements and Policy E1 allows for economic development, but not normally outside of towns and villages. In the Local Plan, policy LC4 aims for a high standard of design and landscaping. Perhaps most directly relevant to this case is policy LE4 which states that outside of settlements, expansion of existing industrial and business development will not be permitted unless it is of a modest scale in relation to the existing activity and/or building and does not extend the physical limits of the established use, it does not harm the character of the area and proper consideration is given to the possibilities of using existing buildings to meet the needs of the business.

The site is not within a town or village, so the thrust of policy is very much against development of the type proposed which amounts to the creation of large coach operating centre in the open countryside. The question is whether the mitigating measures proposed in terms of removal of the existing garage buildings and restoration of the site, the landscaping and design features proposed and the employment opportunities and community service provided outweigh any harm created by a large new building in the open countryside.

Landscape Impact

The applicants wish to re-site their centre of operations to enable the coach business to comply with the current VOSA (Vehicle Operator Services Agency) requirements for improved maintenance and repair facilities and also the necessity for a 'drive through' MoT testing bay. The new garage will be able to accommodate the larger vehicles and coaches with adequate manoeuvring space within the site. The business was established in 1964 and now operates 10 local school contracts for Staffordshire County Council in the Staffordshire Moorlands area, employing local people including 3 diversified farmers. Due to the new VOSA requirements, the applicants do not feel that they can continue to operate in the premises as they are.

The site is situated in an open, upland landscape, characterised by large areas of enclosed grazing land, interspersed with occasional isolated farmsteads. The site is adjacent to the Longnor to Royal Cottage road and is clearly visible from it and from surrounding minor roads and public rights of way, particularly to the south. The site at present does not enhance the landscape and the modern garage buildings, which are poorly designed appear out of keeping with their setting and also spoil the setting of the house and barn to the rear. However, the site is fairly well screened by large mature trees and shrubs and as the existing buildings are low, single storey structures, they are not particularly intrusive in the wider landscape other than by their white painted colour which draws the eye.

The submitted plans showed the existing garage and hardstanding area to be changed to two garden areas, one for the house and one for the barn. However, the barn has a local occupancy restriction and it is considered that a large curtilage would mean that it may not remain affordable. Therefore amended plans have been received showing the area to be returned to a 'croft' or 'paddock' area with a single access serving both properties. There will clearly be some planning gain therefore in removing the current use and building from the existing site.

The new building however will appear as a very large, modern building in the landscape and the large forecourt area will be particularly prominent from the road. The garage may be particularly prominent at night when the forecourt area in particular will be lit although the agent states that low energy lighting will be used. The building will have the advantage of being dug into the land on the western side so that when approaching on the road from the west, only the roof will be visible. Following negotiations with officers and the Authority's Landscape Architects amended plans have been received which show the building pushed back further into the north west corner of the site.

Improvements have been made to the design and a landscaping scheme is proposed which will eventually help to screen the building. Because of the distance between the site of the new building and the existing dwelling and barn, the new building will be seen more in relation to the forecourt and large, unsympathetic garage building associated with the adjacent coach operating business. Nevertheless, the overall massing of the building, the large garage doors, shallow roof pitch and modern materials will mean that it will stand out as an industrial scale building in an open landscape. Although there is a coach garage to the west and despite the comments by the Authority's Landscape Architect, it is considered that the harmful landscape impact of the new building will outweigh the benefits of removing the existing untidy, but relatively unobtrusive structures. Although the proposed planting will eventually screen the building in the summer months, this will take many years to become established and provide an effective screen. A sedum roof would have helped the building blend into the landscape better. However, the agent is reluctant to accept such a roof as he is not convinced of the cost benefits.

The applicant and agent have provided information which shows that they have 12 vehicles in total, 10 of which are 19 seaters and above. The calculations submitted for the size of vehicles and space required for their safe storage and maintenance seems to be acceptable. The size of the building therefore appears to be justified in practical terms. However, officers are still concerned about the impact of the proposed building on the landscape, particularly when viewed from the south and west. Officers tried to negotiate with the applicant to break the roof up by providing a double span rather than single span roof. This would also have had the benefit of enabling a steeper roof pitch to be provided. However, this did not prove to be acceptable due to regulations which require a minimum clearance height for MOT testing.

Impact on neighbouring properties

The only independent residential property within the vicinity of the site is the modern bungalow 'Coniston' which lies to the immediate east of the existing buildings. This dwelling was approved to support the garage business in the 1970s but was later sold off into separate ownership. The proposals will have the benefit of moving the centre of operations further away from the bungalow which will improve their level of privacy and amenity. It is considered that the proposal will not harm the amenity of the nearby dwelling to the north west which is also directly associated with the other coach operator

Access

Visibility at the point of the new access to the garage is good in both directions and it is far enough away from the existing access to the house and barn to provide safe manoeuvring at both points.

Economic and Community Considerations

In terms of providing a community facility, the garage does clearly provide local school bus services at present along with MoT testing facilities. The applicant was asked to provide evidence of a search for other suitable premises in line with policy LE4 (b). They have submitted a letter stating that they have investigated the units on the industrial estate at Warslow, but they weren't considered to be large enough to meet their requirements. They state that all employees are local and that all of their County Council school contracts start within a two mile radius from the garage feeding Warslow, Leek and Buxton schools and also Longnor Primary School.

In terms of the policy on Industrial and Business expansion LE4 (b) the proposals cannot be said to be of a modest scale in relation to the existing activity because they represent around a 500% increase in available floorspace. It is considered that the new building will harm the landscape character of the area and although evidence has been provided of a search for alternative premises, it is considered that there is still scope to consider other premises perhaps outside the park (ie Harpur Hill Industrial Estate, Buxton – which would still be within a reasonable distance from the schools mentioned). Whilst there would be a loss of local employment if the business closes as a result of refusal of the application, on balance it is considered that the harm to the landscape of such a large, modern building must outweigh these concerns.

Conclusion

The applicants have gone to some lengths to amend their proposals to address the concerns raised by officers. However, unfortunately it is not considered that the planning gain provided by removing the existing buildings and retaining an employment and community facility outweighs the harmful landscape impact of the proposed new building and associated hard standing and the proposals are therefore recommended for refusal.

Sustainability Issues

As amended the proposal show that a below ground tank would be incorporated which will re-use grey water for washing vehicles and flushing wc's. Officers also suggested the use of a sedum roof. The agent has concerns about the cost benefits and has indicated a reluctance to incorporate such a roof. A waste engine oil burner will be used to heat the workshops and provide hot water for radiators and washing. Any heat produced in the workshop will be re-circulated. Sun catcher domes will provide passive stack ventilation and eliminate the use of extractor fans.

Human Rights

Any human rights issues have been considered and addressed in the preparation of this report.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the application be REFUSED for the following reasons:

- 1. Proposals would have detrimental impact on landscape character and would be contrary to policies GS1, C2, C5, LS4, E1, LC4 and LE4**

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

Nil