

Mereworth **566176 153790** **18 December 2006** **TM/06/03907/FL**
(Mereworth)
Hadlow, Mereworth And
West Peckham

Proposal: Demolition of existing office building, erection of new office buildings and associated outbuildings
Location: Land West of 'The Farmhouse' (formerly known as 'The Cross'), The Street Mereworth Maidstone Kent ME18 5LS
Applicant: Mr A Pallant

1. Description:

- 1.1 This application proposes the demolition of a range of small buildings that were previously used for poultry farming purposes but now benefit from planning permission for B1 business purposes (as allowed on appeal) and their replacement with two office buildings designed to resemble barns.
- 1.2 The largest of the new office buildings would have a footprint of approximately 24.5m x 4.5 and feature a two storey central section standing 7.4m high at the apex of its roof and two splayed identical one storey wings standing 5.4 m high. The taller section of the structure would include two dovecot/bell house type features on its apex, a large centrally placed glazed bay to almost full height and three glazed sections two storeys high on its rear elevation.
- 1.3 The smaller office building proposed would have a footprint of 7m x 15m and also featured a pitched roof with a dovecote/bell house feature.
- 1.4 Both buildings would be constructed from weatherboarded elevations under slated roofs and provide a total 610sqm of office floorspace and 130sqm storage floorspace. The proposals include providing 28 car parking spaces in a single car park, cycle storage within the smaller building and comprehensive formal landscaping to the site's frontage.

2. The Site:

- 2.1 The site lies within the MGB, a SLA and is situated adjacent to the Mereworth CA. A Grade I Listed Building, St Lawrence Church, and its grounds are located adjacent to the western boundary of the application site. 'The 'Farmhouse' and 'The Oast House' lie immediately to the east and both properties are Grade II Listed buildings in residential use. 115 The Street which lies to the north (opposite the site's frontage) is also a Grade II Listed Building.
- 2.2 The land falls in a southerly direction towards the A228 but does not feature any other significant physical characteristics. Following the recent removal of a small nut plat, the only vegetation of note is an area of scrub to the south and some mature trees and shrubs along the western boundary. The buildings currently

occupying the site are relatively low level structures of mixed designs and materials and cumulatively provide 230 square metres of floor space. There are also extensive areas of concrete hardstanding within the complex. Vehicular access is obtained directly from The Street via a shared access with 'The Farmhouse' and 'The Oast House'.

3. Planning History:

TM/01/03047/FL Approved with conditions 31 December 2001

Replacement vehicular access and new internal driveway.

TM/02/00099/RD Approved 21 February 2002

Details of landscaping submitted pursuant to condition 6 of TM/01/3047/FL (replacement vehicular access and new internal driveway).

TM/03/01183/FL Refused 14.10.03 but 15 December 2003
Granted on appeal

Refurbishment of existing building including relocation of workshop and use as offices - land class B1- with provision of parking and service areas.

TM/06/00149/FL Refused 29 March 2006

Demolition of existing buildings and construction of one house and garage.

4. Consultees:

- 4.1 PC: Mereworth Parish Council is mindful of the Planning Inspector's decision of 24 November 2004 and is not averse to a single new office block. However, the area and height of the proposed development far exceed the area permitted by the Inspector and will dominate the site in a manner the Planning Inspector was at pains to avoid.
- 4.2 The Georgian Group: Object on the grounds that the development would harm the setting of the Grade I Listed Church of St Lawrence.
- 4.3 DHH: No objections.
- 4.4 KCC (Highways): No objections subject to conditions.
- 4.5 Private reps: 19/3R/0X/0S: The three letters of objection include a response on behalf of Mereworth Parochial Church Council and express concern the development would have the following detrimental impacts.

- 4.6 The height and bulk of the proposed buildings are significantly larger and taller than the existing structures on site and would be harmful to the setting of the Listed Buildings surrounding the site, including the Grade I church, which is of significant importance.
- 4.7 The height and bulk of the proposed buildings are significantly larger and taller than the existing structures on site and, therefore, the proposals would be harmful to the CA.
- 4.8 Because of the increase in height and bulk, represent harmful 'inappropriate' development within the MGB and would be contrary to policy.
- 4.9 Intensification of use and opening hours would give rise to harm to amenities of nearby properties.
- 4.10 Some support has been offered in respect of the actual principle of replacing the existing buildings, which are considered to be unsightly, with more suitable single storey structures.

5. Determining Issues:

- 5.1 In terms of the principle of such a form of development, PPG2 and Policies SS2 of the KMSP and P2/16 of the TMBLP all presume against the erection of new commercial developments within the Green Belt. The proposal therefore represents 'inappropriate' development which, by definition, is harmful to the Green Belt. The applicant has not submitted any case of very special circumstances to justify this proposed departure from Green Belt policy and, accordingly, I must object to the application on this basis. Other factors must, however, be taken into account.
- 5.2 Some support is provided by paragraph 19 of PPS7 for the redevelopment of agricultural buildings with new buildings for commercial use but only where there would be an overall improvement in environmental impacts terms but this support does not override MGB policy. Even in such circumstances, clearly a proposal would not simply need to be more attractive in terms of its materials and general appearance, it should not provide for a significantly taller or larger extent of built development – it would need to be of a no more than similar physical scale in order to ensure that openness and rural amenities were comparatively similar. Although the design and materials of the buildings proposed are clearly of a higher standard than the ones that they would replace, the significant increase in height and size of the proposed replacement buildings in comparison to the small, low level structures is at odds with the aforementioned principles of support for redevelopment within PPS7 in my view. It must also be borne in mind that the Inspector in allowing the appeal to reuse the existing buildings for B1 use, recognised the acceptability of reuse. The key therefore is whether the current

proposal meets the expectations set by policy as assessed by the Inspector. Purely in terms of the scale of development, I do not feel that the case is made in this latest application.

- 5.3 I also feel that, notwithstanding the applicant's attempts to make the buildings reflect the vernacular of local agricultural buildings and appropriate use of slate and weatherboarding, the larger office building with its very ordered, symmetrical splayed wings and fenestration detailing would appear as quite an urban, contemporary building which would not be appropriate in this countryside location.
- 5.4 I concur with the views of the Georgian Group, the PC and third parties that on balance the height and scale of the new buildings proposed are such that they would adversely affect the setting of surrounding Listed Buildings and the wider character of the adjacent CA. In my assessment, a development of this height and scale would be likely to 'challenge' the importance and visual dominance of the Listed Buildings in the locality in a way that the small, low level very basic characteristics of the existing buildings do not.
- 5.5 Turning now to residential amenity issues, DHH has not raised objection. I agree that this proposed B1 use, although on a larger scale than that previously approved through TM/03/01183/FL, is capable of being acceptable in terms of impacts upon the amenities of the nearby dwellings. However, the Inspector considered it appropriate to restrict through condition the hours of use to a lesser extent than the applicant is now proposing. The Inspector's decision to limit hours is important and I would seek to impose a similar regime on this application were I recommending approval.
- 5.6 There is sufficient distance between the new offices and its closest neighbours to ensure that there would not be any undue loss of light, privacy or outlook.
- 5.7 KCC Highways has not objected to these proposals. I am satisfied that parking and access arrangements detailed in the application would be satisfactory in highway safety terms.
- 5.8 In summary, I consider that the proposal causes harm to this rural MGB location and to the character of the adjacent CA and the setting of surrounding Listed Buildings. I therefore recommend that this application be refused.

6. Recommendation:

6.1 Refuse Planning Permission for the following reasons:

- 1 The site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt where there is a strong presumption against permitting inappropriate development, as defined in PPG2: Green Belts and policy MGB3 of the Kent Structure Plan 1996. The proposed

development constitutes inappropriate development and is therefore contrary to the principles of PPG2 and to policy SS2 of the Kent Structure Plan and policy P2/16 of the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Local Plan 1998.

- 2 The proposal would be undesirable in an area which is predominantly rural in character, and would be detrimental both to the appearance and to the rural amenities of the locality through its unacceptable height, scale, bulk and design. The proposals are therefore contrary to the provisions of policy P4/11 of the Tonbridge & Malling Borough Local Plan 1998.
- 3 The height, bulk, scale and design of the development is such that it would harm the setting of several buildings listed under Section 1 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as being of special architectural or historic interest, and the proposal would be detrimental to the character of the building. Accordingly, the proposals are considered to be contrary to policies QL8 of the Kent & Medway Structure Plan and policy P4/4 of the Tonbridge & Malling Borough Local Plan 1998.
- 4 The height, bulk, scale and design of the development is such that it would harm the character of the Mereworth Conservation Area. Accordingly, the proposals are considered to be contrary to the provisions of policy QL6 and policy P4/4 of the Tonbridge & Malling Borough Local Plan 1998.
- 5 The Local Planning Authority does not consider that there is any justification, in the circumstances of the present application, for overriding the planning policy objections. (GR03)

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