

Aylesford
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22 May 2007

TM/07/01242/FL

Proposal: Extension to office building
Location: Leitrim House Little Preston Coldharbour Lane Aylesford Kent
ME20 7NS
Applicant: Gallagher Properties Limited

1. Description:

- 1.1 This application is for the erection of a two-storey extension to an existing office building, 'Leitrim House'. The extension is proposed from the north-eastern corner of the building allowing for expanded office accommodation over two floors (approx. 250m²) and a semi-basement storage area below (approx. 105m²). There is provision for a stairwell between the two office levels and an independent ground floor entrance and reception area. Twelve (12) additional car parking spaces are proposed to serve the extension. The applicant has advised that the extension is necessary to accommodate recent expansions to their business.
- 1.2 The proposal would involve an extension to the existing roof-ridge with the principle gable-end of the building projecting 3m further to the east. The ground floor entrance and reception area would project a further 3m from the eastern elevation and finish with a 5.5m high gable-end. A pair of cross-gables with a combined width of 10m would project 12m from the north-facing principle roof-slope. The ridge height of these cross-gables would be 9m on the northern elevation where the basement is partially visible, and 8m on the east and west elevations where the basement is completely below ground-level.
- 1.3 The extension would be constructed with materials to match the existing building which consist of plain concrete roof tiles, yellow stock brick and red brick feature soldier coursing and quoins. Fenestration consists of wooden joinery to match existing and would be inserted in all elevations at both ground and first floor levels of the proposed extension.

2. The Site:

- 2.1 Leitrim House is located at Little Preston on the eastern side of Coldharbour Lane, to the north of Junction 5 of the M20. This site is situated outside the built confines of Aylesford and straddles the boundary between an area designated for Open Storage (policy P5/14) and the Strategic Gap (policy P2/18). The Strategic Gap separates the Medway Gap urban area from the north western edge of Maidstone. It appears that a kerb denotes the approximate extent of the area designated for Open Storage and that the proposed office extension would therefore extend into the Strategic Gap by approximately 6m. There are two former railway containers positioned immediately to the north of proposed extension.

2.2 Leitrim House is a two-storey office building occupied by The Gallagher Group Limited. The area surrounding the office building is utilised for parking vehicles and equipment which are associated with the company's business. A pair of semi-detached dwellings and an area of open land (formerly an orchard) are located to the north, beyond which lies the Strood – Paddock Wood railway line. The KCC highway depot with storage and office buildings lies to the south.

3. Planning History (most relevant):

TM/98/01458 Grant With Conditions 23 October 1998

Extension to existing offices

TM/97/00542 Grant With Conditions 24 July 1997

Extension to existing offices

TM/91/567 Grant With Conditions 6 August 1991

Extension to office accommodation

TM/90/1465 Grant with Conditions 09 May 1994

Formation of basement, obscure glazed windows in north elevation and internal alterations to offices approved under reference TM/89/1561

89/776 Refuse 07 June 1989

Appeal Dismissed 23 July 1990

Use of land for open storage

TM/89/1561 Grant With Conditions 12 July 1990

Alterations and extensions to buildings approved under application TM/86/1452 for office accommodation with attached residential unit

TM/86/1452 Grant With Conditions 25 February 1987

Alterations to buildings approved under reference TM/85/860, change of use and redevelopment to extend civil engineering contractors plus caretakers accommodation, viz: (a) alterations to layout and external design. (b) increase in floor space

TM/85/860

Grant With Conditions

16 July 1986

Change of use and redevelopment to extend civil engineering contractors yard plus caretakers accommodation.

4. Consultees:

- 4.1 PC: No objection provided the extension does not conflict with local resident's level of privacy.
- 4.2 KCC Highways: Application site is located close to nearby motorway links and other traffic routes. Cars are likely to be the main form of transport for users of the site. The storage use could attract between 1 – 3 spaces and 12 for the proposed office. Proposed parking arrangements (12 additional spaces) are acceptable.
- 4.3 DHH: No objections/comments in relation to Pollution Control, Food and Safety, Waste Management Services, Housing and Contaminated Land matters.
- 4.4 Private Reps: (6/0X/5R/0S) including a petition from 5 neighbouring residents. The following is a summary of the objections:
- § The extension would lead to a loss of light and privacy to neighbouring residential properties.
 - § The extension is not necessary as there are other offices on the site which are let to other companies.
 - § The extension would generate additional traffic and require additional parking spaces.
 - § There would be erosion to the Green Wedge.
 - § Part of the site is subject to enforcement action and the extension would encroach into this area. Reference to Inspector's appeal decision.
 - § The extension would increase commercial activity within a residential area.

5. Determining Issues:

- 5.1 The main determining issues of this application relate to whether the proposal is acceptable in broad policy terms as well as in terms of design, impact on residential amenity and highway matters.
- 5.2 Policy EP7(ii) of the KMSP 2006 relates specifically to the development of employment uses within rural areas. It allows for the expansion of established businesses where there is good access to the primary road network. As this

application is for the expansion of an established business that is readily accessible from both the A20 and M20, the proposal is acceptable in broad policy terms.

- 5.3 The proposed office extension would project 6m beyond the boundary of the Open Storage designation into the Strategic Gap. The Strategic Gap has an important role in preventing the coalescence of existing settlements. Given the scale of the extension in context of the existing development on the site, I do not consider the proposal would unduly harm the open character of the Strategic Gap. Furthermore, I note that a large part of the existing office building is already located outside the Open Storage designation and within the Strategic Gap. Conversely, the extension would also result in the loss of a small area of land designated for Open Storage uses. However, I do not consider this would represent a significant loss to the overall provision of Open Storage land, given the small area involved and its inconspicuous location in the corner of the site adjoining existing buildings.
- 5.4 A number of neighbours have mentioned in their written representations that the proposed extension encroaches into an area subject to an enforcement notice. The proposed office extension would project approximately 6m into this area. However, I do not consider this to be of great relevance to this application, given the proposal does not fall within the unlawful uses described within the enforcement notice, namely - *“the open storage of civil engineers plant vehicles and equipment and imported earth spoil and the storage of skips, bulk container units and caravans”*. The potential adverse effects from a modest extension to the existing office building would be insignificant compared to those associated with the uses detailed above, which would have resulted in additional activity, traffic, noise and dust as well as being highly visually intrusive.
- 5.5 The design of the proposed extension is acceptable and would be in keeping with the character and appearance of the existing building. The use of materials to match the existing building would ensure a satisfactory external appearance. It would, however, be a reasonably modest addition in relation to the existing building, and I do not consider the extension would constitute a cumulative overdevelopment of the site. Views of the proposed extension are mainly from within the site itself, and many viewpoints are obscured either totally or partially by existing built development or vegetation.
- 5.6 I do not consider that the proposed development would be intrusive or overbearing upon these neighbours. Some shadowing would inevitably occur given the two-storey nature of the development, but this would be limited to part of the rear garden of No. 285 Coldharbour Lane. I do not consider this to be significant enough to warrant a reason for refusal. Most importantly, no habitable rooms would experience loss of sunlight or daylight as they are located in excess of 30m from the proposed extension.

- 5.7 There is potential for overlooking from the first floor windows of the extension, but again this is more likely to affect the rear garden and not any habitable rooms in the neighbouring dwellings given the distance involved. I also note that a row of tall trees along the common boundary would offer some seasonal screening, and that there are already windows at first floor level in the existing office building which are located closer to the boundary than those proposed by this application.
- 5.8 The hours of use for the existing office have not been restricted by condition of previous approvals, and I would consider it to be unreasonable do so at any time since an office or B1 use is defined as one which can take place in a residential area without detriment to the amenities of neighbours by reason of noise, vibration and dust and the like.
- 5.9 With regard to highways issues, the applicant has submitted a plan to demonstrate that 12 additional car parking spaces can be provided on site to serve the proposed development. The KCC Highways Manager considers that this provision is adequate.
- 5.10 In light of the above considerations, I am satisfied that the proposal is acceptable in broad policy terms as well as in terms of design, impact on residential amenity and highway matters. I am satisfied that the extension would not harm the open character of the Strategic Gap or the functioning of the Open Storage Site. The proposal does not conflict with previous enforcement action and appeal decisions. As such, I recommend planning permission is granted.

6. Recommendation:

- 6.1 **Grant Planning Permission** in accordance with the following submitted details: Letter dated 05.04.2007, Design and Access Statement dated 05.04.2007, Floor Plan 3055F/P02 dated 05.04.2007, Floor Plan 3055F/P03 dated 05.04.2007, Elevations 3055F/P04 dated 05.04.2007, Photographs dated 05.04.2007, Location Plan DHA/6175/01 dated 05.04.2007, Letter dated 22.05.2007, Parking Layout DHA/6175/03 dated 22.05.2007 subject to compliance with the following conditions:

- 1 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: In pursuance of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

- 2 All materials used externally shall match those of the existing building.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not harm the character and appearance of the existing building or visual amenity of the locality.

- 3 The extension hereby permitted shall be used only in conjunction with the main office building and no subdivision shall take place without the prior written approval of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the Local Planning Authority can assess the impact of any alternative use arrangements.

- 4 The use shall not be commenced, nor the premises occupied, until the area shown on the submitted layout as vehicle parking space has been provided, surfaced and drained. Thereafter it shall be kept available for such use and no permanent development, whether or not permitted by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any order amending, revoking or re-enacting that Order) shall be carried out on the land so shown or in such a position as to preclude vehicular access to this reserved parking space.

Reason: Development without provision of adequate accommodation for the parking of vehicles is likely to lead to hazardous on-street parking.

- 5 The developer shall afford access at all reasonable times to any archaeologist nominated by the Local Planning Authority and shall allow him/her to observe the excavation and record items of interest and finds. The developer will inform the Local Planning Authority of the start date of construction works on site not less than two weeks before the commencement of such works.

Reason: In the interests of archaeological research.

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