

COMMITTEE REPORT

Committee: East Area
Date: 10 July 2008

Ward: Derwent
Parish: Holtby Parish Council

Reference: 08/00856/FULM
Application at: R S Cockerill York Limited Stamford Bridge Road Dunnington York YO19 5AE
For: Extension to pack house to provide additional potato washing, grading, packing, storage and staff facilities and covered loading bays and additional vehicular manoeuvring space. Installation of wastewater treatment plant.
By: R S Cockerill (York) Ltd.
Application Type: Major Full Application (13 weeks)
Target Date: 3 July 2008

1.0 PROPOSAL

1.1 The application relates to Cockerill's potato processing site located off Stamford Bridge Road in Holtby. Cockerill's have operated from this site since 1981 when the existing pack house was built. Further potato stores were erected in 1987 and 1995 with a new office and quality control laboratory being erected in 1998. This application seeks planning consent for an extension to the main potato packing plant.

1.2 The footprint of the existing facilities is 5600 sq m, the proposal is to extend this by 2800 sq m. The extension is proposed to follow the shape, style, and proportions of the existing pack house. The proposed extension would be approximately 62 m in length and 44 m in width and measure 11.5 m in height. The number of employees working at the plant is likely to increase from around 67 to 79 people. Vehicle movements would also increase from approximately 140-200 to 200-300 per week.

1.3 The additional floorspace would be used primarily for additional accommodation for potato washing, grading, packing and storage. Staff facilities would also be improved with a new canteen and toilets provided.

1.4 The application site is located wholly within the Green Belt.

1.5 As one of the key issues in this case relates to the impact of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt, it is proposed to carry out a site visit.

2.0 POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 Development Plan Allocation:

City Boundary York City Boundary 0001

DC Area Teams East Area (1) 0003

2.2 Policies:

CYGP1
Design

CYGP4A
Sustainability

CYGB1
Development within the Green Belt

CYGB11
Employment devt outside settlement limits

3.0 CONSULTATIONS

3.1 INTERNAL

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION UNIT - The distance between the additional vehicle turning area and the nearest residential dwelling is approximately 215m. The A166 is already a busy road, the estimated HGV movements rise to 200-300 a week from their current level of 140-200 per week. This is a small rise and the environmental protection unit therefore have no objections to this application.

HIGHWAYS (NETWORK MANAGEMENT) - The proposals would create an additional 12 jobs taking the number of employees to approximately 80. The operating times vary from a normal 5-day week of 7am to 5pm to seven day round the clock working depending on season and demand. The total number of employees would normally be considered sufficient to trigger the requirement for a travel plan to be submitted. The existing number of staff already exceeds the trigger point and the additional numbers are relatively small with the potential for variable working patterns. It is therefore considered that a travel plan is not required. A cycle store is already in place which can accommodate 20 bicycles and therefore encourage sustainable travel choice.

The number of HGV movements would increase as a result of the proposed development. The existing access has appropriate sight lines and is in a good state of repair. HGV's are well catered for within the site with regard to parking and turning facilities. It is not considered that the additional HGV movements would have a pronounced effect upon the highway network in terms of congestion or safety. Therefore there are no objections to the proposed development.

STRUCTURES AND DRAINAGE - The development is in low risk Flood Zone 1 and should not suffer from river flooding.

3.2 EXTERNAL

HOLTBY PARISH COUNCIL - No objections, Holtby Parish Council fully support a local business wishing to expand. However the following points should be considered in determining this application:

- water pollution as a result of the expansion;
- noise from ventilation fans;
- large vehicle access can only be from A166;

- fumigation needs to be considered.

NEIGHBOURS/SITE NOTICE - Letter of concern submitted by the residents of Hunters Lodge which is on the opposite side of the A166. The following points were raised:

- there were 3 accidents outside Cockerills last year and the proposed extension is likely to increase traffic numbers in the area and the number of people entering and leaving the site;
- the additional traffic would create more noise and the A166 is close to Hunters Lodge.

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY - No objections. The applicants may require written consent from the Agency to discharge sewage, surface water, or trade effluent into controlled waters.

4.0 APPRAISAL

4.1 Key Issues:

- Visual Impact on the Green Belt;
- Impact on the Amenities of Neighbours;
- Highway/Traffic Safety;

GREEN BELT

4.2 The application site is located within the Green Belt. Draft Local Plan Policy GB1 and national guidance contained within PPG2 'Green Belts' state that new industrial and storage and distribution operations within the Green Belt are inappropriate development. Therefore, there is a presumption against the proposed development.

4.3 Chapter 5 of the Draft Local Plan states the objectives of Green Belt Policies. These are: a) to preserve the setting of York; b) to check unrestricted sprawl of York; c) to safeguard the surrounding countryside from further encroachment; d) to prevent neighbouring settlements from merging into one another; and, e) to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the use of urban land. It is not considered that the proposed development would significantly affect the setting of York given its location and size. The development does not encourage urban sprawl as the application site already exists and the proposed building extension would be located within an area which is currently used in part for external storage. The proposal would not contribute to neighbouring settlements merging into one another, the application site stands alone and does not border any settlement directly. In terms of promoting urban regeneration by encouraging development in urban areas, it could be argued that the site already exists and is well established and it would be unreasonable and perhaps impractical for the company to relocate to an urban area. Therefore it is considered that the proposed development would not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt as identified within the Draft Local Plan.

4.4 Draft Local Plan Policy GB11 allows for employment development outside of settlement limits where it involves a small-scale extension and it provides a direct

benefit to the rural economy and local residential workforce. The proposal cannot be described as small scale and thus very special circumstances are required to overcome the presumption against this development in the Green Belt.

4.5 The applicants have submitted a supporting statement with the application which seeks to demonstrate very special circumstances which outweigh any harm to the Green Belt through inappropriate development. The first of these is that old equipment needs to be replaced in order for the company to remain competitive. Whilst the development would increase the potential capacity of the grading/packing operations it will also act to safeguard the existing jobs and create new ones. New requirements and demands from customers have led to a greater variety of products being demanded often with very specific requirements, for example in terms of potato size and weight. The applicants argue that higher specification sorting and packing machinery is required. This machinery is significantly larger than what is used at present and there is insufficient space within the existing unit to accommodate this. A potato polishing machine would also be installed which brings the benefits of reduced water use during the washing process.

4.6 In addition to the jobs which are created at the pack house itself, the potato grading and packing facility provides income to a number of local businesses. Cockerills deals directly with a large number of potato growers within a 30-mile radius of the site. In the last full accounting year 13,050 tonnes (87% of potato stocks) were purchased from farms within a 30-mile radius of Cockerills. 123 growers produced these potato stocks and therefore it is argued that Cockerills currently helps support a number of local farmers with the potential for additional supplies being required if productivity increases. Products such as packaging materials and paper sacks are also sourced locally.

4.7 It is also argued that the proposal would improve standards of health and safety within the pack house and across the site generally, to provide better amenities and facilities for staff. Current facilities for pack house staff are inadequate and are not health and safety compliant. There are just two WC's and a portacabin acts as the canteen. There are no disabled facilities and staff lockers and changing facilities are inadequate. The proposed extension would incorporate facilities to overcome these current problems and raise the standard and quantity of facilities available to staff.

4.8 A large amount of forklift truck activity takes place in an area with heavy pedestrian traffic. For this reason a separate loading area would be provided in the extension to reduce the vehicle/pedestrian conflict. Additional storage space is also required so that raw and finished goods are stored in different areas, this is a requirement of the British Retail Consortium (BRC) but is currently difficult to achieve. BRC accreditation is required in order for the business to operate. Additional storage space for packaging materials would also allow less frequent deliveries of these materials and thus reducing traffic levels.

4.9 It is considered that safeguarding the current business and supporting the local rural economy combined with meeting health and safety requirements for staff could be justified as very special circumstances that are sufficient to overcome the harm to the Green Belt caused through inappropriateness. There is no definition of what are or are not very special circumstances. Members must be satisfied that the circumstances of this application justify a major development within the Green Belt

and would not act as an unwanted precedent for future applications. The proposal would by its very nature harm the openness of the Green Belt and thus the reasons for allowing the development must be seriously considered.

4.10 For information, a submission has been made by Cockerills to the Local Plan team which states that the site should be included as a major developed site in the Green Belt when the Local Development Framework is published. If Cockerills were included as a major developed site the presumption against the development would be removed.

DESIGN

4.11 If members are satisfied that the principle of developing the site has been established the details of the scheme itself are to be assessed. The site is set down from the A166 and is not visually prominent in the landscape when viewed from this road. However, the site is more visible from the north. The proposed extension is of typical design for an industrial plant and would be seen within the context of the existing main building and the surrounding structures. It is considered that the design of the structure is acceptable given its context with an existing industrial site. The site benefits from a good level of landscaping around it and Cockerills have continued to plant trees and shrubs in and around the site to reduce the potentially harsh appearance of the industrial development in the open countryside. A landscaping condition could be included within any approval if members wished for a greater level of planting around the proposed extension in order to soften its visual impact.

NEIGHBOURS/HIGHWAY SAFETY

4.12 One letter of concern was raised by a neighbour regarding traffic and the potential for additional accidents as a result of greater vehicle movements. Highway Network Management have assessed the proposal and are satisfied with the existing site lines. There is sufficient space within the site for vehicles to enter in a forward gear, turn around, and leave in a forward gear. In response to the neighbours concern Cockerills stated that there had been problems with drainage on the A166 near the entrance which during cold weather could create black ice forming on the road. However, it is understood that the Highway Authority has now corrected the drainage problems and there have been no further accidents since then.

4.13 It is anticipated that there would be an increase in traffic movements as a result of the proposed development from approximately 140-200 to 200-300 per week. However, as the site is accessed from the A166 which is already very busy it is not considered that the small daily increase in traffic would significantly harm neighbours amenity through noise and disturbance.

4.14 A green travel plan is not required for the proposed development. The site already has 20 cycle parking spaces which is considered sufficient and in line with local standards. The proposed development would incorporate showers which could be used by members of staff travelling by bicycle. Therefore, a sustainable transport choice is available should staff wish to participate. A frequent bus service also runs between the city centre to Holtby past the application site which further reduces the dependency on using a private vehicle to reach the site for workers.

4.15 So far as the construction of the building is concerned, the application was submitted prior to the sustainability guidance being adopted by the Council. A standard BREEAM condition is therefore recommended.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 The proposed extension is of significant size and constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt and is therefore by definition harmful to the Green Belt. In such circumstances the onus is on the applicant to prove that very special circumstances exist which would outweigh this harm. The main reasons offered by the applicant to demonstrate this are to improve efficiency and productivity which can bring direct benefits to the local rural economy and secondly the need to meet health and safety requirements and provide reasonable staff facilities.

5.2 The proposal would create a small number of additional jobs within the pack house and would safeguard existing jobs. In addition, the company is considered to bring significant benefits to the local economy through the purchase of potatoes from a large number of local farmers and this is also considered to be a material consideration.

5.3 There is a significant issue over the size of the proposed new building but the applicant has submitted information in support of this and it is difficult for officers to question this perceived operational need. Therefore, whilst it is a finely balanced argument, officers consider that the applicant has demonstrated that, for a combination of reasons outlined above, very special circumstances do exist which outweigh the harm by inappropriateness and that planning permission should be granted.

5.4 If members were minded to approve the application, it must be referred onto the Secretary of State as the proposal constitutes a departure from the Development Plan as the building is over 1000 sq metres and is deemed to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Under the terms of the Green Belt Direction January 2006, this requires referral.

COMMITTEE TO VISIT

6.0 RECOMMENDATION: Approve after referral to Secretary of State

1 TIME2 Development start within three years

2 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out only in accordance with the following plans:-

Drawing Numbers RSC/04/1 Rev 7, RSC/04/2 Rev 8, RSC/04/3 Rev 6, RSC/04/4 Rev 7, RSC/04/6 Rev 8, RSC/04/7 Rev 3, 10013 Issue 2, received by The CoYC on 03/04/08

or any plans or details subsequently agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority as amendment to the approved plans.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried

out only as approved by the Local Planning Authority.

3 No development shall take place until there has been submitted and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority a detailed landscaping scheme which shall illustrate the number, species, height and position of trees and shrubs. This scheme shall be implemented within a period of six months of the completion of the development. Any trees or plants which within a period of five years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of a similar size and species, unless alternatives are agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: So that the Local Planning Authority may be satisfied with the variety, suitability and disposition of species within the site.

4 VISQ8 Samples of exterior materials to be app

5 The building shall not be occupied until the areas shown on the approved plans for parking and manoeuvring of vehicles have been constructed and laid out in accordance with the approved plans, and thereafter such areas shall be retained solely for such purposes.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

6 Prior to the commencement of the development, the developer shall submit for the written approval of the Local Planning Authority a preliminary BREEAM Design and Procurement stage assessment for the development. This shall indicate that a minimum "Very Good" rating will be achieved under the appropriate code. This shall be followed by the submission of a BREEAM Post Construction Review, and a BREEAM Certificate for this review shall then be submitted to the Local Planning Authority after completion and before first occupation of the building. Both assessments shall confirm the minimum "Very Good" rating indicated in the preliminary BREEAM Design and Procurement assessment submitted with the application.

Reason: In the interests of sustainable development

7.0 INFORMATIVES:

Notes to Applicant

1. REASON FOR APPROVAL

In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority the proposal, subject to the conditions listed above, would not cause undue harm to interests of acknowledged importance, with particular reference to the aims of including land within the Green Belt and the living conditions of neighbours. As such the proposal complies with Policies GP1, GP4a, GB1, and GB11 of the City of York Draft Local Plan.

Contact details:

Author: Michael Jones Development Control Officer

Tel No: 01904 551325