
MAIN CASE

Proposal: Siting of container units for storage , with gates fencing and parking

Location: Land Adj 3 Saxon Business Park Littleport Ely Cambridgeshire CB6 1XX

Applicant: Steven Layn Holdings Ltd

Agent:

Reference No: 10/00908/FUM

Case Officer: Sue Finlayson

Parish: Littleport
Ward: Littleport West
Ward Councillor/s: Councillor Neil Morrison
Councillor Christine Ambrose-Smith

Date Received: 4 November 2010 Expiry Date: 3 February 2011

[K286]

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This proposal is to site an additional 158 shipping storage containers on land at Saxon Business Park, making a total of 210 containers, as the siting of 52 has already been approved under planning reference E/10/00012/FUL. The containers would serve in the main for domestic self storage or for small business use. The proposal is partially retrospective, many of the containers already being on site. As the site is part of a Business Park, such a use of the site would be supported by Core Strategy Policies relating to employment use, provided it is restricted to storage only. For the avoidance of doubt a planning condition has been attached in this respect. Conditions have also been imposed to restrict opening hours and current numbers of containers, to reflect the application. Whilst the containers are visible, it is considered that their appearance can be minimised by controlling the height of storage units, painting the perimeter edge green, and the requirement for substantial landscape planting, all of which are dealt with by planning condition. No highway issues have been raised which cannot be dealt with by planning condition. The application is therefore recommended for approval.

2.0 THE APPLICATION

2.1 The application, which is partially retrospective, proposes the siting of 158 additional shipping storage containers (resulting in 210 in total), security fencing and gates, security lighting and parking, on an area of land forming the southern part of the Saxon Business Park. It changes the layout of the 52 storage containers already

approved on the site under application E/10/0012/FUL. The applicant states that the containers will be used for self storage for private individuals storing domestic items such as furniture (often space is needed when moving house), but they could also be used by small businesses for storage of tools and supplies, as a low cost alternative to permanent storage space. This application forms phase two of a three phase proposal.

2.2 The containers are steel, and blue in colour. They are 2.5m in height, 2.4m wide and 6.0m in depth (measured externally). They are sited to the perimeter of the site abutting Woodfen Road and the A10 (where there is a buffer zone of 20m), and wrapping around an existing industrial building to the north. The containers would have a 190m frontage to Woodfen Road and 137m frontage to the A10. Overall the proposal provides 2,554sqm of storage space (773 sqm of which have already been approved).

2.3 The access for the site would be via the existing main access serving the Saxon Business Park. The application proposes security gates and fencing at the internal access point and 2.0m high steel palisade security fencing to the boundary areas not secured by the containers themselves, i.e. small sections to the north east, behind the adjacent commercial building, to the north west, at the entrance, and to the southernmost tip of the site.

3.0 **THE APPLICANT'S CASE**

3.1 The applicant's case can be viewed in full via the following link:
<http://anitepa.eastcambs.gov.uk/AnitePublicDocs/00035781.pdf>

3.2 The key points raised by the applicant are:

- The proposed use is for self storage, mainly domestic
- The site is within an area allocated for employment use
- There will be no additional noise generated
- Whilst traffic movements will increase slightly, vehicles will be small, not large
- The site has consent for 52 storage units
- The proposed layout is designed to achieve maximum density while enabling free access within the site
- Comprehensive landscaping is proposed
- Discussions have been carried out with County Highways
- This site will allow gradual clearance of containers at Station Good Yard, Littleport and some from Armourstore Black Bank Road

4.0 **THE SITE AND ITS ENVIRONMENT**

4.1 The site, which is outside the settlement boundary, is part of the Saxon Business Park, situated to the west of Littleport, and accessed directly from the A10. The application site is in the southern part of the Park adjacent to a large building which was given B2 use under planning permission E/09/00172/FUL. There are no residential properties in proximity to the site. The main access to the site is in Flood Zone 2/3, but the rest of the application site is within Flood Zone 1. The site borders Woodfen Road at the rear, a narrow no through route, which opens on to farm land, and the front of the site is bound by the A10. There is some screening of the site by

highway hedgerow when approaching the site from the south, but there is little other vegetation on the frontage. There are a number of mature trees on the Woodfen Road edge at the rear of the site which can be seen from the A10. The site is currently very visible from the A10, due to the fact that the road is slightly higher than the site itself, and the bright colour of the containers.

5.0 **PLANNING HISTORY**

5.1

09/00172/FUL	Change of use of existing class B8 to unit B2	Approved	23.04.2009
94/00151/FUL	Vegetable Coldstore (2184m2)	Approved	06.05.1994
00/00953/OUT	Proposed outline application for 2.9ha (7.2 ac.) commercial/industrial site of mixed B1 B2 & B8 category uses including improvements and use of existing vehicular/ pedestrian access and new roads	Approved	21.05.2001
10/00012/FUL	Siting of storage container units and office building - Retrospective	Approved	11.03.2010
10/00931/FUL	Construction of single storey office and separate customer toilets	Approved	06.01.2011

6.0 **REPLIES TO CONSULTATIONS**

- 6.1 Site notices were posted at the main entrance to the site and on Woodfen Road. Seven neighbouring occupiers on the Business Park were notified. No replies were received.
- 6.2 **Ward Councillor:** (Councillor Morrison) This appears to be a retrospective application. I raise objections to the proposal as being contrary to Policy EN1, as the blue containers form a stark hard edge to the A10 frontage, which requires landscape screening to mitigate the impact. I would consider the highways authority to have concerns regarding access and egress from the A10, as an increase of 403% will generate significant traffic flow from customers using the facilities.
- 6.3 **Parish Council:** Approve, but comments were made about increased traffic flow to the site, lack of landscaping and containers should be painted green to blend with the countryside.
- 6.4 **Trees Officer:** The proposed landscape plan shows containers abutting Woodfen Road, with no boundary planting. This is objected to as a solid line of containers would be dominant in the landscape and offer no opportunity for biodiversity enhancement. A planting strip of 3-5m should be created with native hedging planted. On the A10 frontage the proposed hedgerow should be continued

northwards and some standard specimen hedgerow trees should be planted in the hedgerow between the proposed planting 'blocks'. The existing hedgerow should be retained.

- 6.5 **Local Highways Authority:** Content that the revised plan now shows containers clear of the public highway on Woodfen Road. No objection to the application subject to imposition of conditions relating to controlling access to the main Saxon Business Park access, with no access from Woodfen Road, and control of lighting to ensure no adverse impact on highway users.

7.0 **THE PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT**

7.1 **East Cambridgeshire Core Strategy 2009**

CS1 Spatial Strategy
CS4 Employment
CS11 Littleport
EN1 Landscape and settlement character
EN2 Design
EN6 Biodiversity and geology
EN7 Flood risk
S6 Transport impact
S7 Parking provision

7.2 **National Planning Policy**

PPS4 Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth
PPG13 Transport

8.0 **PLANNING COMMENTS**

- 8.1 The main issues for consideration of this proposal relate to the principle of the proposal in policy terms, impact on the highways and landscape impact.
- 8.2 **Policy:** Policies CS1 Spatial Strategy, CS4 Employment and CS11 Littleport are most relevant with regard to the principle of the development on the site. Policies CS1 and CS4 aim to concentrate employment uses in main centres such as Littleport, and Policy CS11 advocates that approx 9 ha of employment land remains unused, which will be re-assessed for suitability and deliverability with regard to employment use through the Site Allocations DPD. This application site is considered appropriate for business use as it forms part of the 9ha of unused allocated employment land. The site was allocated for B1, B2 and B8 use under policies 145 and 187 of the East Cambridgeshire District Local Plan 2000, and Policy 187 is one of the policies saved within the Core Strategy. The northern part of the site also has consent for the storage of 52 containers under planning reference E/10/00012/FUL.
- 8.3 The applicant makes the case that container storage provides valuable space for domestic storage when people move house or require extra space. It can also enable small businesses to hold stock etc. at a reasonable cost. The use is a form of B8 use (storage and distribution), and will create 3 full time and 2 part time jobs. It is considered that such development is best placed on industrial parks where

infrastructure exists to cater for traffic, and where such activity would not be detrimental to residential amenity through noise, traffic and other disturbance. The view is therefore taken that the principle of siting the 210 containers can be supported in policy terms. However, it is considered that the use of the containers should be limited to storage only, to ensure no retail or other uses occur on the site, which would have the potential to increase traffic visiting the site, and would undermine other policies in the Core Strategy relating to appropriate sustainability and retail siting. A condition is also proposed for the hours of opening, which have been restricted to those applied for, i.e. 7 am to 7 pm Monday to Saturday and 8 am to 6 pm on Sundays and Bank Holidays.

- 8.4 **Impact on Highways:** Policy S6 Transport impact, and S7 Parking provision require proposals to reduce the need for travel by car, ensure safe and convenient access to the highway network, provide sufficient parking, and be accompanied by a Transport Statement. The access to the proposal site is through the existing access from the A10, which serves the Business Park as a whole. County Highways have considered the trip rate information submitted for the earlier container application in conjunction with the former use of part of the site as a haulage depot. They have no objection to the proposal providing access is limited to the existing A10 Business Park access, and suggest planning conditions to ensure this and also control lighting to a level which would not adversely affect highway users. With regard to parking, whilst not explicitly shown on the submitted plan, there is a large area in front of the proposed entrance for parking, and most visitors will take their vehicles into the site to access their storage containers. The containers are appropriately spaced to allow this to occur. The access routes between the containers will initially be hard-cored, but the applicant states they will eventually have a tar chipping surface. It is also unlikely that many people would be visiting the site at any one time, and as the access road is 19m wide there is room for additional parking there if necessary.
- 8.5 **Affect on landscape and character of area:** Policy EN1 Landscape and settlement character, requires proposals to protect, conserve and enhance the settlement edge. Policy EN2 Design requires development to make efficient use of land whilst respecting character, landscape etc of the area, and to be of a scale, mass and materials which relate sympathetically to the surrounding area. Policy EN6 seeks to ensure the protection of existing biodiversity features, such as trees and hedges and also to maximise opportunities for habitat creation. Policy EN7 seeks to ensure all development is carried out in Flood Zone 1.
- 8.6 The site is situated on a business park, surrounded by open land, on the edge of the settlement. There are a number of commercial buildings on the site of varying form, but little vegetation, apart from hedging to the south western boundary with the A10. At the time of writing this report many of the storage containers have already been positioned on the outer perimeter of the site. The positioning around the edge of the site is necessary to create a secure perimeter, any gaps on the boundary between the containers being in-filled with steel palisade fencing. This has created a stark, very visible edge to the site from the A10 and Woodfen Road, exacerbated by the fact that the containers are bright blue. However, having discussed this visual impact with the applicant, he has agreed that the outer perimeter faces of the containers will be painted olive green to match the green cladding on the existing industrial buildings on the site. It is understood this work is to be carried out prior to the Planning

Committee meeting, but a condition is proposed to ensure this change is made, and that the colour is retained in future.

- 8.7 Whilst the painting of the containers will reduce their impact considerably, it is felt that much more natural screening to the site is needed to provide a softer, more rural edge, and to help biodiversity in the area. Considerable planting has therefore been agreed to the boundary with the A10 including a hedge and groups of trees. The Trees Officer has also requested hedging to the boundary with Woodfen Road, which has been agreed by the applicant for two thirds of the boundary length, the remaining third being restricted by existing concrete hard standing. Some standard specimen hedgerow trees have also been requested to be added to the hedge on the A10 boundary. It should be noted that the applicant has also agreed to improve the landscaping to the frontage of the adjacent car sales use to the north to improve the screening of that site and the approach to the container site, when travelling on the A10 from the north. The boundary landscaping is proposed to be secured by planning condition, which will also require the retention of the existing hedgerow adjacent to the highway. It is considered that this landscaping treatment will provide a much enhanced boundary to the site as a whole, and that with this treatment the proposal will comply with policies EN1, EN2 and EN6.
- 8.8 The current application layout allows for the potential increase in number of containers to 300, as envisaged in Phase 3 of the applicant's plans, as there is space in the centre of the site. However, that application is not before Members at present. The issue is raised only to illustrate that additional containers could be sited without further significant adverse visual impact, as they would be within the existing perimeter containers. The key issue in considering further expansion of the site would therefore be traffic impact, and we would be guided by County Highways in this respect.
- 8.9 To ensure no further visual intrusion it is proposed to limit the height of storage, by planning condition, to a single storey so impact will not be increased. At the request of the Highways Authority and in the interests of overall visual appearance it is considered that the proposed lighting for the site should be agreed with the Local Planning Authority by way of planning condition. Whilst it is accepted that the containers do have an impact on the character of the area, mitigation methods are proposed by condition, and a balance must be struck between this impact and the fact that the site is designated for employment use, where such uses should be encouraged.
- 8.10 As previously stated, this application alters the layout of the 52 units already approved, and adds 158 units to a much larger site. Members should be aware that an application for a small office and toilet block, submitted under reference E/10/00931/FUL, to be sited at the entrance to this enlarged site, was approved on 6th January 2011. It was proposed that this office be used in conjunction with the application now under consideration. This application was approved in advance of consideration of this current application as the proposed use was for B1, a use which is appropriate to the site's designation as employment land within Use Classes B1, B2 or B8. Approval of that application allows that building to be used in conjunction with the current application, if Members resolve to approve the current application. However due to the designated use of the land, there would not be a conflict if

Members determined otherwise, as the building, if constructed, would form a small office on an employment site.

8.11 **Summary:** The proposal is partially retrospective, many of the containers already being on site. As the site is part of a Business Park, such a use of the site would be supported by Core Strategy Policies relating to employment use, provided it is restricted to storage only. For the avoidance of doubt a planning condition has been attached in this respect. Conditions have also been imposed to restrict opening hours and current numbers of containers, to reflect the application. Whilst the containers are visible, it is considered that their appearance can be minimised by controlling the height of storage units, painting the perimeter edge green, and the requirement for substantial landscape planting, all of which are dealt with by planning condition. No highway issues have been raised which cannot be dealt with by planning condition. The application is therefore recommended for approval.

9.0 **RECOMMENDATION** – Approve subject to the following conditions:

1 The development hereby permitted shall be commenced within 3 years of the date of this permission.

1 REASON: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended.

2 The change of use hereby approved is restricted to the storage of 210 container storage units only, providing a total of 2, 554 sqm of storage area. The containers shall be used for storage only and no sales or any business unrelated to the container storage will be conducted from the site.

2 REASON: The application has been assessed on the basis of 210 storage units only, as detailed in the planning application, and highway implications have been assessed on that basis. Additionally any retail use from the site would be contrary to policies in the East Cambridgeshire District Core Strategy 2009, in particular Policy S1, which seek to ensure retail and other town centre uses are located in more sustainable town centre locations.

3 The storage containers shall be stored at ground level only, to a height of 2.4m and shall not be stacked one on top of another.

3 REASON: The storage units are very visible from public view and storage at any greater height could have an adverse visual impact on the character of the area which is in adjacent to open countryside, contrary to Policy EN1 of the East Cambridgeshire Core Strategy 2009..

4 Notwithstanding the details shown on Landscape Drawing No SAXO 119/1-002 Rev C , within 2 months of the date of approval of this application details of the following additional landscaping shall be submitted to and agreed by the Local Planning Authority in writing:

(a) hedging to the Woodfen Road frontage of the site;

(b) the inclusion of standard specimen native hedgerow trees to the hedgerow proposed on the A10 frontage, and the extension of the hedgerow to the north.

These details shall include planting plans; a written specification; schedules of plants noting species, plant sizes, proposed numbers/densities; and an implementation programme.

The agreed works in (a) and (b) above, together with those shown on Landscape Drawing No SAXO 119/1-002 Rev C , shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details in the first planting season following approval of the development, or in accordance with a programme agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

4 REASON: To assimilate the development into its surroundings, and to improve the biodiversity of the area in accordance with policies EN1 and EN6 of the East Cambridgeshire Core Strategy 2009.

5 Within 6 months of the date of this decision a scheme for the maintenance of the approved landscaping scheme, for a minimum period of 15 years, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include details of the methods for the proposed maintenance regime, a detailed schedule, and details of who will be responsible for its continuing implementation. The soft landscaping shall be maintained in accordance with the agreed scheme.

5 REASON: To ensure the longevity of the landscaping scheme, in accordance with policy EN1 of the East Cambridgeshire Core Strategy 2009.

6 The existing hedgerow/tree planting to the southern boundary with the A10 shall be retained in perpetuity.

6 REASON: To safeguard the character and appearance of the area, in accordance with policies EN1 and EN2 of the East Cambridgeshire Core Strategy 2009.

7 No pedestrian or vehicular connection shall be made to the public highway of the A10 except at the main entrance to the Business Park.

7 REASON: In the interests of highway safety, in accordance with policies S6 and S7 of the East Cambridgeshire Core Strategy 2009.

8 No pedestrian or vehicular connection shall be made to the public highway of the Woodfen Road.

8 REASON: In the interests of highway safety, in accordance with policies S6 and S7 of the East Cambridgeshire Core Strategy 2009.

9 No lights shall be installed, either free standing, or to buildings, without the prior written agreement of the Local Planning Authority in conjunction with the Local Highways Authority.

9 REASON: To ensure the impact of light pollution on the character of the area, night sky and adjacent highway users is minimised in accordance with policies EN1, EN2, EN8 and S6 of the East Cambridgeshire Core Strategy 2009.

10 No customers shall be on the premises outside the hours of 7:00 to 19:00 Monday to Saturday and 08:00 to 18:00 on Sundays and Public Holidays.

10 REASON: In the interests of site security, personal safety and general amenity, in accordance with policy EN2 of the East Cambridgeshire Core Strategy 2009.

11 All road facing facades of the perimeter containers hereby approved, i.e. to the A10 and Woodfen Road, shall be painted olive green within 1 month of the date of this approval. The painted facades shall be thereafter maintained, and any new containers placed on the perimeter, or repositioned temporarily, shall be painted olive green to maintain a uniform appearance, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

11 REASON: To ensure the impact of the containers is minimised to the wider public view from the A10 and Woodfen Road, in accordance with policies EN1 and EN2 of the East Cambridgeshire Core Strategy 2009.

<u>Background Documents</u>	<u>Location(s)</u>	<u>Contact Officer(s)</u>
Application Files E/10/00012/FUL E/10/00931/FUL PPS4 Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth PPG13 Transport	Sue Finlayson Room No. 011 The Grange Ely	Sue Finlayson Team Leader, Development Control 01353 665555 sue.finlayson@eastcambs.gov.uk