
MAIN CASE

Proposal: Erection of workshop, offices and storage for maintenance staff and relocation of City of Ely Council offices and meeting room.

Location: Ely Cemetery New Barns Road Ely Cambridgeshire

Applicant: City Of Ely Council

Agent: Tony Walton Design

Reference No: 10/01037/FUL

Case Officer: Rebecca Saunt

Parish: Ely
 Ward: Ely North
 Ward Councillor/s: Councillor Ron Bradney
 Councillor Allyson Broadhurst
 Councillor Mike Rouse

Date Received: 14 January 2011 Expiry Date: 11 March 2011

[K330]

1.0 **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This application seeks permission for the erection of workshop, offices and storage for maintenance staff, and the relocation of the City of Ely Council offices and meeting room.
- 1.2 The proposed building and site were originally considered acceptable for a building associated with, and ancillary to, the cemetery. However, the proposed City of Ely Council offices and meeting room would not be ancillary to the cemetery and are classified as a town centre use in PPS4 and Policy S1. The applicant has not demonstrated that all the centre options have been thoroughly assessed and that there are no town centre sites that could accommodate the proposed development; that there would be no adverse effect on the vitality and viability of the centre of Ely; and that the proposal would be accessible by a choice of means of transport. The design also remains essentially utilitarian, as befits its initial purpose for ground maintenance. However, for a public building such as it is now intended to be, it might reasonably be expected to exhibit a more interesting and welcoming street façade.
- 1.3 This application is therefore recommended for refusal.

2.0 **THE APPLICATION**

- 2.1 The applicant seeks permission for the erection of a workshop, offices and storage for maintenance staff, and the relocation of the City of Ely Council offices and meeting room.
- 2.2 The proposed building would be 'L' shaped, with the main bulk of the building measuring 7.2 metres by 12.3 metres and the single storey element protruding to the front by 4.4 metres, with a width of 4.7 metres. The main bulk of the building would measure 6.5 metres to the ridge and the single storey element would measure 4.8 metres to the ridge, with detailing to the front elevation. The front elevation of the main building and the single storey element would be constructed with Ely Cream facing brick by Traditional Brick and Stone Co, with a slate roof to the single storey office area. The remaining elevations would be constructed with colourcoat steel sheeting in Forest Green, with the roof in a similar material but in Goosewing Grey.
- 2.3 The workshop, storage and offices for the cemetery staff would have a floor area of 310 metres squared and the new offices and meeting room for the City of Ely Council would total 182 metres squared. The ground floor of the building would contain a storage and workshop area, a visitor's room, offices, staff restroom, locker area, toilets and shower and an accessible toilet for visitors. The proposed offices on the ground floor would provide for the needs of the administrative staff for the City of Ely Council, with a main members meeting room at first floor level.
- 2.4 Vehicular and pedestrian access to the site would use the existing access to the recycling area from New Barns Avenue. Staff and visitor parking and covered cycle storage would be provided to the front of the building.

3.0 **THE APPLICANT'S CASE**

- 3.1 The applicants case has been put forward in the design and access statement and the additional application information dated 24th February 2011, which can be found on the planning file and can also be viewed online via public access <http://pa.eastcambbs.gov.uk/online-applications>

4.0 **THE SITE AND ITS ENVIRONMENT**

- 4.1 The site is approximately 0.16 hectares, located within the development envelope and conservation area of Ely. Part of the site is currently used as a recycling centre, and the other part is cemetery land.
- 4.2 To the north of the site is a children's play area, with the boundary defined by a close boarded fence and hedge, to the south and east is Ely Cemetery and to the west is New Barns Avenue and residential dwellings.

5.0 **PLANNING HISTORY**

- | | | | | |
|-----|--------------|--|-----------|------------|
| 5.1 | 10/00248/FUL | Erection of workshop, offices and storage building for maintenance staff | Withdrawn | 29.12.2010 |
|-----|--------------|--|-----------|------------|

6.0 **REPLIES TO CONSULTATIONS**

- 6.1 Access Group – The proposed access to the Council Chamber using a chair lift excludes those people who use a wheelchair, as this is a facility to which the public will be invited, it does not comply with Part M of the Building Regulations, or BS 8300.2009 and is therefore open to challenge under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. In effect, also prevents a wheelchair user from being a City Councillor. I was a frequent attendee of council meetings, in recent years the stairs and chair lift became too much of a challenge preventing me from attending events. A new purpose-built Council Chamber should be accessible to all. The meeting room offered as an alternative will not be a reasonable substitute for a public meeting. Moving from a central position in town would be detrimental as it is out of walking distance and an accessible bus would be needed. A one-stop shop would be needed centrally. Accessible parking required, needs an automated door or canopy and bell call, loop system and clear signage required. No emergency exit shown from office area.
- 6.2 12 nearby addresses notified, site notice posted and advert placed in Cambridge Evening News – 1 letter received from 58 New Barns Avenue:
- Proposal wholly unacceptable;
 - Many of details of application are incorrect such as spellings, design team apparently based in Afghanistan, there are 0 employees and no trees adjacent and no first floor plan;
 - Building much bigger than required;
 - Industrial style building is ugly, undistinguished and unnecessary and inappropriate for its location involving loss of important open space;
 - Adversely impacts on longer distance views of Cathedral and will cause permanent lasting damage to dignity of the cemetery and the setting of the unique “twin” linked chapel buildings at its heart;
 - Contrary to core strategy Policies CS6, EN2 and EN5;
 - Will cause unacceptable impact and harm to nearby residential properties by reason of domineering appearance, scale, massing, materials and traffic;
 - A vehicular access through a recycling centre in the vicinity of a children’s play area is less than ideal;
 - Propose building so large – surplus space will be let commercially with adverse effect on highway safety;
 - No need for roller style doors – PC vehicles less than half that height;
 - 12% roof lights give rise to inefficient energy requirements and light pollution;
 - Functional need understood, but could be met by a building quarter of this size and half its height;
- 6.3 City of Ely Council – No comment made as Council’s planning application.
- 6.4 Conservation officer – This proposal affects a site located within Ely conservation area. These revised plans have taken into account many of the design concerns raised in the previous application. And whilst I still have concerns about this style of building in the proposed location, the applicant has made significant attempts to soften the visual impact of the front elevation of the building. The applicant has advised that the building is required to be this size to accommodate the size of the

machinery. In order to help break up the bland frontage it is proposed to have the office space to the front of the building, in brick. The building has also been set back further in the plot, which will allow for landscaping to the front to help with screening. The finished colours of the materials should be conditioned.

- 6.5 Ely Society – This is a very strange looking building and a strange combination of functions. We feel strongly that the City Council offices should be in the centre of the City.
- 6.6 Environmental health – I do not consider it necessary to require any further investigation or assessments of land contamination through the use of planning conditions and no informative is necessary. The proposed endues, is (in agreement with Section 14) not particularly sensitive to the potential risks posed by land contamination.
- 6.7 Waste Strategy Team Leader – Met with Cllr Brian Ashton & John Yates to discuss proposed changes to the recycling site that would result from the proposal. Following this meeting I have no objection to the proposed changes.

7.0 **THE PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT**

7.1 **East Cambridgeshire Core Strategy 2009**

CS1 Spatial Strategy
CS8 Access
S1 Location of retail and town centre uses
S6 Transport impact
S7 Parking provision
EN2 Design
EN5 Historic conservation

7.2 **Regional Spatial Strategy – East of England Plan**

SS1 Achieving Sustainable Development
ENV6 The Historic Environment
ENV7 Quality in the Built Environment

7.3 **National Planning Policy**

PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development
PPS4 Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth
PPS5 Planning for the Historic Environment

8.0 **PLANNING COMMENTS**

- 8.1 The main issues for consideration of this proposal relate to the principle of the proposal in policy terms; the impact on adjacent residential amenity; and on the character and appearance of the area/conservation area and access arrangements.

- 8.2 The original application for the site, which was withdrawn, was for the workshop, associated offices and ancillary accommodation associated with Ely cemetery. Discussions throughout the application led to amendments to the plans, which took into account many of the design concerns raised by the case officer and the conservation officer. Whilst there were still some concerns with the building, the applicant had made significant attempts to soften the visual impact of the front elevation and justified the size of the proposed building, given its requirement for internal uses and the storage and maintenance of machinery. The amendments proposed office space associated with the cemetery, that would be situated to the front of the building to help break up the otherwise bland frontage. The building would also be set further back into the site, allowing for landscaping to the front to screen the building. Although the applicant sought permission for an office, this was an office that was ancillary to the main use of the building, i.e. cemetery maintenance. The proposal with the amendments, provided a design and siting which were considered acceptable, given its use associated with the cemetery.
- 8.3 During discussions, the applicant decided that the office extension to the front of the proposed building could accommodate the City of Ely Council offices, and a meeting room could be accommodated in the roof space of the workshop. This meant the proposed use of the building had changed significantly and the applicant was required to submit a new application, that is now the subject of this report.

Policy

- 8.4 The City of Ely Council offices and meeting room are classified as a town centre use in Planning Policy Statement 4 – Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth (PPS4) and Policy S1 of the Core Strategy. The existing offices are located in the town centre, on Market Street, which is classified in the Core Strategy as secondary shopping frontage and located adjacent to East Cambridgeshire District Council offices, shops and the bus stops, which serve the city centre.
- 8.5 The proposed site is located outside the town centre. PPS4 and Policy S1 of the Core Strategy require all in centre options to be thoroughly assessed before less central sites are considered. It would also have to be demonstrated that there were no town centre sites that could accommodate the proposed development. The applicant has advised that there are no other sites either affordable or available, which offer the space capacity that is provided by the proposed site. However, no evidence of this, or any of the research carried out, has been submitted with the application. It does not appear that a comprehensive sequential approach has been followed that leads to the selection of this site, in accordance with national and local policy.
- 8.6 PPS4 states that when the sequential test is carried out by the applicant they should:
- ensure that sites are assessed for their availability, suitability and viability;
 - ensure that all in-centre options have been thoroughly assessed before less central sites are considered;
 - ensure that where it has been demonstrated that there are no town centre sites to accommodate a proposed development, preference is given to

edge of centre locations which are well connected to the centre by means of easy pedestrian access;

- ensure that in considering sites in or on the edge of existing centres, developers and operators have demonstrated flexibility in terms of:
 - scale: reducing the floorspace of their development;
 - format: more innovative site layouts and store configurations such as multi-storey developments with smaller footprints;
 - car parking provision, reduced or reconfigured car parking areas.

8.7 The applicant would also need to demonstrate that there would be no adverse effect on the vitality and viability of the centre of Ely. No information has been submitted which demonstrates this. Its current location can clearly be linked to shared trips, and the functions and purpose of the City Council would usually be considered as an appropriate, and indeed necessary, addition to a vibrant city centre.

8.8 The development would also need to be accessible by a choice of means of transport (including public transport, walking and cycling). The existing site is located in the town centre and is easily accessible by a choice of transport, especially as it is located adjacent to the city centre bus stops. The proposed site is situated adjacent to a residential area and would not be as easily accessible as the existing site.

Residential Amenity

8.9 Due to the siting of the building in relation to neighbouring dwellings it would not create an adverse impact on residential amenity. The proposed building would be set back considerably from the road and it would not be overbearing or create any overlooking of neighbouring dwellings.

Character and Appearance of Area / Conservation Area

8.10 The conservation officer raised concerns over design and appearance from the start and the revised plans take into account a number of the comments/objections raised by the conservation and case officer. Significant attempts have been made to soften the appearance of the building and a number of amendments have been made since the original plans were submitted, as discussed previously. However, the design remains essentially utilitarian, as befits its initial purpose for grounds maintenance. It would be more appropriate for a public building, such as it is now intended to be, to exhibit a more interesting and welcoming street façade.

Other Issues

8.11 The applicant has advised that a building of this size is required for machinery in association with the cemetery and roller style doors are also required. A first floor plan of the building was submitted as part of the application, which clearly shows the proposed meeting room.

- 8.12 The Access Group raised a number of objections and concerns. Following these comments the applicant has agreed to provide a lift within the new premises and to work with the Access Group on the recommendations that they have suggested.

Summary

- 8.13 The proposed building and site were originally considered acceptable for a building associated with, and ancillary to, the cemetery. However, the proposed City of Ely Council offices and meeting room would not be ancillary to the cemetery and are classified as a town centre use in PPS4 and Policy S1. The applicant has not demonstrated that all the centre options have been thoroughly assessed and that there are no town centre sites that could accommodate the proposed development, that there would be no adverse effect on the vitality and viability of the centre of Ely, and that the proposal would be accessible by a choice of means of transport. The design also remains essentially utilitarian, as befits its initial purpose for grounds maintenance. It would be more appropriate for a public building, such as it is now intended to be, to exhibit a more interesting and welcoming street façade.

9.0 RECOMMENDATION - Refuse

- 1 The proposed City of Ely Council offices and meeting room are classified as a town centre use. The applicant has not demonstrated that all the centre options have been thoroughly assessed and that there are no town centre sites to accommodate the proposed development, that there would be no adverse effect on the vitality and viability of the centre of Ely and that the proposal would be accessible by a choice of means of transport. The design also remains essentially utilitarian, as befits its initial purpose for grounds maintenance. It would be more appropriate for a public building, such as it is now intended to be, to exhibit a more interesting and welcoming street façade. As such, the proposal fails to comply with Policy S1, EN2 and EN5 of the East Cambridgeshire Core Strategy 2009 and Planning Policy Statement 4 - Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth.

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 – Additional information from applicant

<u>Background Documents</u>	<u>Location(s)</u>	<u>Contact Officer(s)</u>
Application file 10/01037/FUL	Rebecca Saunt Room No. 011 The Grange	Rebecca Saunt Planning Officer 01353 665555
PPS4	Ely	rebecca.saunt@eastcamb.gov.uk