

Planning Committee: 26 July 2011

Item Number:

Application No: W 11 / 0691

Town/Parish Council: Kenilworth

Registration Date: 06/06/11

Case Officer: Penny Butler

Expiry Date: 01/08/11

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Yards and buildings at Fernhill Farm, Rouncil Lane, Kenilworth, CV8 1NN

Caravan and vehicle storage in two redundant agricultural buildings and in adjacent yard - change of use. (Retrospective application) FOR Mr A & Mrs G Cockburn

This application is being presented to Committee because the applicant is a former District Councillor, and also because of the number of letters of support received, and the recommendation is to refuse.

SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS

Kenilworth Town Council: This comment supersedes the 'no reason to object' comment released inadvertently.

The applicant is a member of this Council. When the application was presented for consideration all Members present declared a personal interest.

Accordingly, the item could not be considered and no comment upon the application is made.

Public response: 33 letter of support received. There is a significant need for caravan storage use in the area. Many caravans cannot be stored at residential properties due to covenants, or wishing to preserve the visual appearance of residential areas, and some residents would need to sell their caravans if they could not be stored here. The site provides well planned, safe, secure storage with safe vehicular access. It provides electronically secure access and is covered by unobtrusive CCTV. No harm to neighbouring people or uses. Minimal visual harm and not visible from roads. Represents farm diversification and enables the use of redundant agricultural buildings, preventing their deterioration. Supports the local Broad Lane Caravans business. Holds a Silver Caravan Storage Site Owners' Association (CaSSOA) Award. Many customers have used the site for many years.

Broad Lane Leisure have also written in support. They have had a good working relationship with the site for many years and have referred many of their customers requiring secure storage to Fernhill Farm. Such storage is very difficult to find.

Caravan Storage Site Owners' Association (CaSSOA): The applicants have been members of CaSSOA since 2005 and hold a Silver Award, and to qualify must provide safe and secure storage facilities. Caravan insurers increasingly

instruct owners to seek secure storage, and restrictive covenants have created an exodus of caravans having to relocate to secure storage. Even in the current financial climate, caravan and motor home sales are increasing dramatically, with increases of 37% and 25% in 2009-10. The size of caravans is also increasing, leading to a further increase in the storage required. Secure storage is a major factor in reducing caravan theft. The proposal will contribute to farm diversification.

WCC Ecology: No ecological concerns.

RELEVANT POLICIES

- RAP9 - Farm Diversification (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- Planning Policy Guidance 2 : Green Belts
- DP1 - Layout and Design (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DP2 - Amenity (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DP3 - Natural and Historic Environment and Landscape (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DP6 - Access (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DP7 - Traffic Generation (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DAP3 - Protecting Nature Conservation and Geology (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- RAP6 - Directing New Employment (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DP14 - Crime Prevention (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)

PLANNING HISTORY

There have been four applications for extensions to the farmhouse, and two for farm buildings (one being for the re-use of a farm building, which was withdrawn). A certificate of existing lawful development for the use of one field to the north-west of the farm complex was agreed earlier this year (W11/0039).

KEY ISSUES

The Site and its Location

The site lies behind (to the north of) the farm complex and to the south of a public footpath, and consists of a small yard and two adjacent former agricultural barns. The yard measures about 50m by 25m and has a stone chip surfaced central access way with parking areas each side. The barns are a typical metal framed and clad construction and form part of the farm complex. Both the barns and the yard are accessed through the farm yard, and along with the farm dwelling to the south, are accessed off a long private drive leading from Rouncil Lane. A field to the north-west of the complex, which adjoins the application site, is also used for caravan storage and has the benefit of a certificate of lawful use.

Details of the Development

This is a retrospective application for the use of the yard and two barns for the storage of caravans and vehicles. The site appears to be in full occupancy,

mostly made up of caravans and motor homes, with a very small number of cars.

Assessment

Caravan storage is not an acceptable form of development within the green belt, according to PPG2, and as such is considered to represent inappropriate development in the green belt. Paragraph 3.4 of PPG2 does allow for uses of the land which "maintain openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt". The proposal would not, in my opinion, constitute such a use as the caravans and vehicles represent a significant visual intrusion into the landscape which reduce openness, thus constituting an undesirable encroachment into the green belt. Inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the green belt, and the PPG states that it is for the applicant to show why permission should be granted, and that "very special circumstances" must be demonstrated to outweigh the harm caused by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm.

The applicant makes the following case. This is a low impact use which has not been a cause for complain as it is 500m from Rouncil Lane and not overlooked by anyone. Soil bunds and ditches surround a screened, secure and defined area in order to deter theft. The case is also made that there is no impact on the open nature of the green belt or the amenity of the area. There is a huge demand for this type of facility in Warwick District which cannot be met on brown field land, and the use supports outdoor recreation and leisure in the countryside. The fact that caravans do not blend in with open countryside, means that sites like this (and the nearby Broad Lane Caravans) are preferable and affordable locations for caravan storage. The area of storage with lawful use is grassed and elderly and infirm customers find it difficult to manoeuvre their caravans on this surface. The owners therefore always try to move these customers onto the hard standing in the yard of the application site where they find manoeuvring much easier. They also point out that WDC Planning Officers have been visiting the storage site for over 18 years. Last year the applicants voluntarily entered into discussions to formalise this established business which provides employment and meets a demand in the area.

The storage of vehicles within the two barns is not objectionable, and would comply with green belt guidance since this utilises existing buildings and would not have any visual impact upon openness. No detailed evidence has been submitted to demonstrate that the use contributes towards the viability of the farm holding but is assumed, and on this basis would comply with the farm diversification policy in the Local Plan.

The open storage of vehicles within the yard to the immediate north of the barns has a limited visual impact. It is only viewable from the north and east, since along the western boundary is a tall thick hedge blocking views in this direction. Views from the east are across the authorised storage use on the adjoining field. Views from the north (and public footpath) are very limited, since the northern boundary is the narrowest part of the yard at 10m wide and views from the east are only possible from a short distance, since longer views are blocked by trees.

I conclude that the visual impact would be significant, in that openness would be substantially reduced, but that this impact would be limited to a small area.

In accordance with PPG2, this visual harm to the green belt, and the harm by reason of inappropriateness, must be clearly outweighed by the demonstration of very special circumstances. I note the case put forward by the applicant. Demand for the use has been clearly demonstrated by the level of support received and I agree that the visual harm is quite limited. The secure nature of the site would comply with Policy DP14. I also note that the amount of storage proposed in addition to the existing use is small, and that it would provide easier access for less able customers. However, I am not convinced that there is a clear need for this use to be located on this site, aside from the fact that the use has already commenced and is adjacent to an existing use. There is no evidence to show that this site is the only one available for this use, as there may be other sites outside, or inside, of the green belt that are more suitable. The circumstances put forward by the applicant make a positive case for the use, but I do not consider these constitute circumstances so special that the harm caused to the green belt is clearly outweighed, in accordance with PPG2.

The site is about 4km from Kenilworth but most journeys would be expected to be made by car, regardless of the location, due to the nature of the use. In sustainability terms it would be preferable for the site to be located closer to the town, and although this would be unlikely to have a significant impact on vehicle movements it would reduce travel distances. The access point from the highway is satisfactory.

RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE, subject to the refusal reasons listed below.

REFUSAL REASONS

- 1 The site is situated within the Green Belt and Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 states that, within the Green Belt, the rural character of the area will be retained and protected. It also contains a general presumption against "inappropriate" development in Green Belt areas and lists specific forms of development which can be permitted in appropriate circumstances. The proposed development does not fall within any of the categories listed in the Guidance and, in the Planning Authority's view, very special circumstances sufficient to justify departing from this Guidance have not been demonstrated.
