

Parish: LONG MELFORD

Location: Rodbridge Car Centre

Proposal: Erection of car showroom and workshop (retention of)

Applicant: Rodbridge Car Centre

Case Officer: Graham Chamberlain

Date for Determination: 17/11/09

This application has been reported to the Development Committee as it is a departure from Local Plan Policy CR01.

THE SITE

1. Rodbridge Car Centre is located on Sudbury Road between Long Melford and Sudbury. The site is approximately one mile to the south of the village centre with the centre of Sudbury being a further two miles further to the south.
2. A workshop, which was situated on the north boundary adjacent to Borley Road and Sudbury Road was destroyed by a fire in December 2006.
3. Currently the site is used for car and camper/commercial van sales and has been well established for some 16 years just outside Long Melford.
4. The entire site falls into a Special Landscape Area. Part of the site falls within an area of Archaeological interest. The location of the building is outside the Long Melford Built up Area Boundary (BUAB). However, part of the site is within the BUAB.
5. The site is flat but elevated above the road. To the south and west is an agricultural field with the Rodbridge picnic site on the western side of this. To the north and east is residential development within the settlement of Rodbridge Corner. The surrounding buildings are predominantly of a simple character and appearance.

THE PROPOSAL

6. The application is for the erection of a car show room, workshop and office. The building would incorporate the workshop and show room on the ground floor with offices within the roof space (light would be provided by roof lights). The applicant started to construct the garage showroom and workshop in 2007 building in a different location to that approved (works have stopped pending the outcome of the submitted application). It is understood this was due to an error between the applicant and architect.
7. The proposal varies from application B/07/02098 in that the location of the building is now different. The design scale and materials proposed are the same. The building as now proposed would be located 12m further south than approved, within the agricultural field.

8. The dimensions of the building are as follows,

Height - 8.2m
Width - 24.8m
Depth - 15.8m
Floor Area - 383sqm
Footprint - 320sqm

RELEVANT HISTORY

9. B/07/02098 - Erection of garage showroom and workshop with office accommodation on first floor. This was approved under delegated authority. The only difference between this application and B/07/01345 is that the eaves height of the MOT testing section of the building was increased (ridge stayed the same) to meet government standards for MOT testing stations. Roof lights were added to the front elevation to provide for offices on a first floor.
10. B/07/01345 - Erection of garage, showroom and workshop. - this was approved by the development control committee in November 2007. The application now presented to Committee is broadly the same, apart from the changes made under application B/07/02098.

Other History

11. 2003 – Erection of portacabin for use as office in connection with existing car sales business.
12. 2002 – Change of use of agricultural land to form extended car sales area with construction of new vehicular access (as amended by details received 17.12.01)
13. 2001 – Continued use of agricultural land to form extension to existing Car sales area.
14. 1990 – Planning permission granted for continued use of the old forge area in connection with the adjoining car centre. Existing access on to the Borley Road to be closed.

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

15. **PPS1** (Delivering Sustainable Development)
16. **PPS7** (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas)

PLANNING POLICIES

17. The Development Plan comprises the East of England Plan, adopted 2008, saved policies in the Suffolk Structure Plan, adopted 2001, and the Babergh Local Plan (Alteration No. 2) adopted 2006. The following policies are relevant to this proposal:

East of England Plan - 2008

- **ENV7** (Quality in the Built Environment)
- **SS1** (Achieving Sustainable Development)

Babergh Local Plan (Alteration No.2) 2006

- **EM01** (Employment related development)
- **EM20** (Expansion of existing employment sites)
- **CR04** (Development in Special Landscape Areas)
- **CR07** (Landscaping of development in the countryside)
- **CR08** (Hedgerows)
- **CN01** (New development design)

The relevant documents can be viewed via the internet. Please see Page 4 for details.

CONSULTATIONS

18. Long Melford Parish Council - Recommends approval.
19. Local Highway Authority – No objection.
20. Environment Agency - advised on good practice - this has been included as a condition.
21. County Archaeologist - No objection, no mitigation required.
22. BDC Contaminated Land Officer - No objection.
23. BDC Countryside and Landscape Officer - The building would appear isolated in the landscape, it should be located closer to existing structures. However given the extant permission an objection can not be sustained. A landscaping scheme including tree planting should be conditioned.

REPRESENTATIONS

24. None received.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Principle

25. The development proposed is in the countryside outside the existing employment site. The previously approved scheme B/07/02098 had been part within the field and part within the employment site of Rodbridge cars (but still in the countryside). The proposal is contrary to Policy CR01 in that it is not one of the developments listed which are considered to be acceptable in principle. However Policy EM20 states that proposals for the expansion/extension of an existing employment site will be permitted provided there is no material conflict with residential and environmental amenity and highway safety. Therefore it can be argued that to some extent the two policies (CR01 and EM20) are in conflict in relation to this case.
26. Planning Policy Statement 7 directs new development in rural areas to service centres and towns. Part of the Rodbridge site is within the Long Melford BUAB (northern section). The proposed building is, however, outside the BUAB.
27. Although the proposal is contrary to Policy CR01 it does comply with the principles set out in Policy CR20. On balance, Officers are of the opinion that in principle of the scheme can be supported as the site is an existing employment site and part of it is within the BUAB. Therefore the assessment moves on to consider and weight any harm that may be caused by the scheme.

Environmental Amenity (Design, Impact on Special Landscape Area

28. When considering the impact of the proposal as now submitted, it is highly significant that the applicant has a fall back position. The same building has approval to be erected 12m to the north. Therefore the key assessment is whether the new location proposed would have an adverse impact when the approved scheme was found not to. This fall back position is material.
29. The proposed materials are unaltered from that approved, as is the scale and form. The floor space and proposed use has been approved. Therefore the only consideration is whether the new location would be materially harmful to the countryside, Special Landscape Area or street scene.
30. The encroachment into the field is still comparatively slight adding an additional 564sqm to the Rodbridge Car Centre site. The field is 33,817sqm in size. The scale of intrusion into the field is not therefore, considered to be harmful to the countryside/landscape character.
31. The buildings appearance in the new location would have a very similar impact to that already approved. In long distance views from the south, west and north it will be very difficult to identify that the building is not in its approved location. It will be possible to identify this from outside the site, standing on the footpath on the east side of the building; however it will not be harmful as the impact will be the same as the approved scheme, as the building will be no closer to the road. The building will still 'read' as a rural outbuilding with black boarding and a pan tiled roof. This echo's other rural buildings in the vicinity, such as at Guildhall Farm to the east of the site. Consequently, Officers have concluded that the alteration in the position of the building will not have a materially greater impact on the street scene, landscape (including landscape character) or countryside than the approved scheme.
32. It is recommended that a landscaping condition is added so that the impact can be softened. The Countryside and Landscape Officer has recommended that trees and a new hedgerow are planted to define the field edge and soften the impact of the building.
33. The proposal therefore complies with this element of Policy CR20 in that there is no harm to environmental amenity.

Residential amenity

34. The building will be moved further away from the properties to the north and no closer to properties to the east. There are no properties to the south and west. The use and scale is unaltered. Therefore there will be no material increase in impact on neighbours. Conditions have been recommended below limiting the hours of work and prohibiting work outside the building; these replicate a condition on the 2007 planning permissions. The proposal therefore complies with this element of Policy CR20.

Highway safety

35. The Local Highway Authority has commented indicating that there is an under provision of parking. Twenty nine spaces are required for staff and customers following the construction of the building as well as a parking and loading space for a 16.5m lorry. The applicant has indicated that there are four existing spaces with four proposed.
36. The parking provision would be the same as that approved under B/07/01345. The Local Highway Authority raised no objections to this application. Given that this consent is still extant, it would be unreasonable to now raise this as a reason for refusal, even though there is a shortage of parking.

Other Considerations

37. Impact on Agriculture - The indicative agricultural land classification map shows the land to be Grade 3. This falls as being the best and most versatile agricultural land. The amount of land which would be lost is slight, therefore Officers are of the opinion that a reason for refusal based on this would be difficult to sustain. The proposed field boundary would also be a sharp, 90 degree angle. It would have been better for a smoother edge to the site as this would have allowed greater planting and would have made farming the field easier. However the sharp 90 degree angle to the boundary treatment was approved under B/07/01345.
38. Pollution - A condition recommended by the Environment Agency has been added so that ground water and surface water run off is not polluted by the MOT testing centre. The building will also have a special oil tank and an oil separator.

REASONS FOR APPROVAL

39. Subject to the attached conditions, the development will have no adverse impact on residential and environmental amenity, highway safety, the Special Landscape Area, countryside character, or the viability of an agricultural unit. The proposal therefore complies with saved Policies EM20 and EM01 of the Babergh District Local Plan Alt 2 (2006).

RECOMMENDATION

- (1) Grant planning permission subject to the following conditions:
 - Landscaping to be agreed (including tree planting)
 - Pollution control as recommended by the EA
 - Materials used to be as submitted
 - Control of outdoor lighting
 - Hours of operation to be controlled (7am to 7pm)
 - No outdoor work on vehicles