

REPORT TO THE NORTHERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	31 October 2012		
Application Number	N/12/03017/S73A		
Site Address	2 Gibb Cottages, Castle Combe, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN14 7NQ		
Proposal	Change of Use From Existing First Floor From Storage to Tourist Accommodation (Retrospective)		
Applicant	Mr R Neale		
Town/Parish Council	Castle Combe		
Electoral Division	By Brook	Unitary Member	Cllr Jane Scott OBE
Grid Ref	384305 178293		
Type of application	Retrospective		
Case Officer	Chris Marsh	01249 706657	chris.marsh@wiltshire.gov.uk

Reason for the application being considered by Committee

The application has been called to Committee by Cllr Scott in order to consider the impact on the proposal on the environment

1. Purpose of Report

To consider the above application and to recommend that planning permission be REFUSED.

The proposal is supported by the Parish Council.

2. Main Issues

The main issues in considering the application are:

- Principle of development under the existing and emerging development plan
- Impact on the character and appearance of the area and AONB
- Impact on the local economy
- Impact on highway safety

3. Site Description

No.2 Gibb Cottages is the central of a terrace of three modest dwellings located adjacent to the B in open countryside approximately one mile North of Castle Combe. The site is located within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is, for the most part, surrounded by agricultural land. To the southwest of the residential curtilage of no.2 is a modern timber-clad barn/workshop, with a separate vehicular access from the adjacent land and pedestrian access from the rear garden of the dwelling. The building is one-and-a-half storeys in scale and approximately 17.5m in length, with large timber double doors at intervals along its northwest elevation, and external steps to the first floor from its southwest end. Four rooflights have been installed into the southeast plane of the roof, which is otherwise finished in weathered double roman tiles. To the immediate southwest of the building is a gravelled parking area sufficient in size to accommodate two vehicles, and the area parallel to the northwest frontage is also used for this purpose. The area to the North and West of the building is now rather domestic in appearance; laid to lawn, with a surrounding gravelled vehicular track.

In line with the original permission for the erection of the building (see planning history, below), the ground floor remains in use for the business run by the occupant of no.2 Gibb Cottages and could be termed a mixture of workshop, office and storage space. Above, the first floor has been converted into a self-contained unit, which is intended for use as a holiday let independent of the main dwelling. The accommodation is set out on a linear arrangement comprising (from southwest to northeast) living space, kitchen, double bedroom and en suite bathroom.

4. Relevant Planning History		
Application Number	Proposal	Decision
N/08/02609/COU	Change of Use of First Floor of Outbuildings to Tourist Accommodation	Refused
N/06/02640/FUL	Erection Of External Staircase, Insertion Of Doorway and Increase Height of Existing Workshop	Permission
N/05/00807/FUL	Erection of Workshop and Storage Building	Permission
N/05/00005/FUL	Erection of Workshop and Storage Building to Replace Existing Stables	Withdrawn

5. Proposal

The application seeks to change the use of the upper floor of the building from B8 (storage), as originally permitted, to tourist accommodation only. No details on when or for how long at a time the accommodation is to be available have been put forward by the applicant. There are no further changes to the fabric of the building proposed, given that the internal arrangement is already adequate to serve the proposed purpose. The ground floor space is proposed to remain as B1 (light industrial/office) and B8 use as per the original permission.

6. Consultations

Castle Combe Parish Council – support, however noting some concern in respect of the mixture of uses proposed

Highways Officer – objects on grounds of the increased use of an inadequate access

7. Publicity

The application was advertised by site notice and press advert.

Three letters of support received.

Summary of key relevant points raised:

- Lack of harm to rural environment and residential amenity
- Contribution to rural economy

8. Planning Considerations

Principle of development

The proposal is considered incompatible with principles of tourism development as set out under the current policy framework. It is notable that Policy TM1 of the North Wiltshire Local Plan has not been saved and is therefore irrelevant. The relevant policies, RLT9 of the adopted Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan and Core Policy 39 of the emerging Wiltshire Core Strategy are unequivocal in their approach to tourism development and form the basis of the recommendation.

Both policies stipulate that holiday let-type accommodation should be focused on the existing settlements, where it is well connected to local shops and services. Exceptions to this approach may be found where there is particular justification, such as proximity to a specific tourist attraction and/or shortfall of alternative accommodation, for example. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this is the case in this instance.

Impact on the character and appearance of the area and AONB

The proposal does not seek any further alterations to the building and, conversion already having taken place, is only noticeably evident from the installation of rooflights in the southeast roof plane. Conversion of the building itself, therefore, is unlikely to significantly alter local character.

However, it is reasonable to expect some degree of outdoor amenity space to be associated, however informally, with the accommodation. The impact of increased activity and domestication of the surrounding space is a relevant consideration, and it is likely that this effect, which has already occurred to some extent, would be perpetuated if this application were successful, to the detriment of its rural setting and the character of the AONB.

Impact on the local economy

Given the remote location of the site, there is little to suggest that tourist accommodation at the site would bring any meaningful economic benefit to the immediate local area. Alternative accommodation around Castle Combe, a significant attraction, is available, with at least 36 hotels and B&Bs within 5 miles of the village and a hotel within 500m of the site itself.

The proposal relates to the change of use of business floor space; the original application for a workshop/storage building having been justified as an exception to planning policy and regarded as B1/B8 use, subject to a personal tie. It is considered that in fact the proposal could be detrimental to the local economy by undermining the viability of the existing business, both through the physical loss of space and through incompatibility of uses in respect of nuisance and amenity.

Impact on Highway Safety

The previous application for a similar scheme was refused in part due to a highways objection, owing to the limited visibility at the access junction with the main road and therefore the increased use of an inadequate access. Since the time of that application, it is suggested that the owners of the adjacent property, Woodbury House, have cut back the hedge that previously obstructed views northwards from the junction, improving visibility. However, as the aforementioned hedge and associated land is in the control of neither the applicant nor the Local Authority, this cannot be considered a permanent and material improvement to the situation, and its maintenance cannot be secured by condition. For this reason, the previous highways objection still stands.

Conclusion

It is considered that the proposed conversion constitutes inappropriate development in this location, and is incompatible with the relevant planning policy considerations relating to the distribution of tourist accommodation. The loss of the commercial floor space on the grounds of which the building was originally permitted is considered unacceptable, and could render the occupant local business unviable. The inevitable domestication of the adjacent land would further erode the rural character of the site, to the detriment of the wider AONB.

Concerns raised at the refusal of the previous application, in respect of inadequacy of access to the site, have been withdrawn by the Highways Officer in acknowledgement of the improvement works that have been undertaken to the verge to the northeast of Gibb Cottages. However, the location of the site for these purposes remains inherently unsustainable, and this is a relevant consideration.

Regard has been paid to the content of the National Planning Policy Framework, in particular Section 3 '*Supporting a prosperous rural economy*'. This document places an emphasis on sustainable rural tourism supporting local business and communities, and also development generating local employment. As the proposal satisfies neither of these criteria, it is considered that the application fails to justify the material harm in which the proposed development would result, as set out above.

9. Recommendation

Planning Permission be REFUSED for the following reason:

The proposed development, by reason of its location, siting, and associated amenity space will harm the character and appearance of the site and the rural setting of the AONB. The proposal represents an unjustified new development in the open countryside at the expense of a local business. Tourist accommodation in this inherently unsustainable location will also lead to the increased use of an inadequate access, to the detriment of highway safety. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy RLT9 of the adopted Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan, Policies C3, NE4 and BD2 of the adopted North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011 and Core Policy 39 of the emerging Wiltshire Core Strategy.

