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Rutland County Council

Catmose,
Oakham,
Rutland
LE15 6HP

Application:	2016/0335/FUL	ITEM 3	
Proposal:	Single and double storey extension to existing café/restaurant.		
Address:	Country Lounge Cafe And Bar, Glaston Road, Morcott, Rutland,		
Applicant:	Mr Freeman	Parish	Morcott
Agent:	Mr Mark Hives, Hives Associates Limited	Ward	Martinsthorpe
Reason for presenting to Committee:	In view of circumstances delegated powers have not been exercised.		
Date of Committee:	30 August 2016		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Some extension of an existing commercial facility can be acceptable within the rural area, as one of the limited exceptions to the normal restraint on countryside development in the Development Plan. However, the bulk, design and materials of the current proposal would have a discordant impact on the character of the countryside. The application is accordingly recommended for refusal.

RECOMMENDATION

REFUSAL, for the following reason:

1. The form, design and materials for the proposed single and two-storey extensions would result in an elongated building with conflicting architectural styles, in this prominent location within the open countryside. In particular, the non-matching gable features on the western elevation would be a discordant feature when viewed from the west. The design fails to achieve the good design required by the National Planning Policy Framework. The proposed extensions would therefore be detrimental to the character of this part of the open countryside, and would fail to maintain or improve either the immediate environment or its local distinctiveness. As such the proposal is contrary to Policy CS19 of the adopted Rutland Core Strategy (2011), to Policy SP15 of the adopted Rutland Site Allocations and Policies Development Plan Document (2014), and to Paragraph 64 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2012).

Site & Surroundings

1. The application site is the former Little Chef premises at the west of Morcott, now operating as the Country Lounge Café & Bar. It is in an open countryside location, outside the Planned Limits to Development of the village.
2. The property is on the northern side of the A47, set back from the highway and located between a garage / filling station / shop and a Redwings Hotel. A shared access is used by all three facilities. The character of the immediate area is commercial, with a mixture of building styles.

Proposal

3. The application proposes a substantial single and double storey side extension to the café/bar, to provide additional kitchen and dining areas on the ground floor with staff accommodation on the first floor.
4. Development has already commenced on site, with the basic structure of the extension now in place.

Relevant Planning History

5. None relevant

Planning Guidance and Policy

National Planning Policy Framework

Section 7: Requiring Good Design

(Particular emphasis on paragraphs 56, 57, 60, and 64)

56. The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people.

57. It is important to plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings, public and private spaces and wider area development schemes.

60. Planning policies and decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes and they should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles. It is, however, proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness.

64. Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.

The Rutland Core Strategy (2011)

- CS1 Sustainable Development Principles
- CS4 Location of Development
- CS15 Tourism
- CS16 The Rural Economy
- CS19 Promoting Good Design

Site Allocations and Policies DPD (2014)

- SP7 Non-Residential Development in the Countryside
- SP15 Design and Amenity

Consultations

6. Morcott Parish Council
No objections

Neighbour Representations

7. None received

Planning Assessment

8. The main issues are:
 - Principle of development

- Design, and impact on the character of the countryside
- Enforcement action

9. Other miscellaneous issues are addressed together at the end of the report.

Principle of development

10. Development Plan Policies impose severe restraint on new development in the countryside, in the interests of sustainability and to ensure that the existing rural character is protected.

11. Firstly, Core Strategy Policy CS4 (Location of Development) directs new development into the towns and larger villages, and then specifies that:

“Development in the Countryside will be strictly limited to that which has an essential need to be located in the countryside and will be restricted to particular types of development to support the rural economy and meet affordable housing needs”

12. Core Strategy Policy CS16 (The Rural Economy) identifies particular forms of development that are considered appropriate in the rural area. This includes the expansion of existing businesses provided the scale is appropriate to its location, and provided that the scheme maintains the immediate environment and local distinctiveness. Consideration must also be given to Policy CS15 (Tourism) which encourages new tourism facilities in the towns and villages but limits new tourism development in the countryside to that which utilises existing historic buildings only.

13. Policy SP7 of the Site Allocations and Policies DPD also identifies detailed forms of development that are appropriate in the countryside. This includes: “...visitors facilities for which the countryside is the only appropriate location”, “roadside services required for public safety purposes”, and “small scale extensions to.....an existing use appropriate to the countryside”.

14. Given that the existing café/bar is an established business in the rural area and that it forms part of a cluster of roadside and visitor facilities (including the adjacent hotel and garage / filling station / shop, the principle of some extension to the premises can be accepted. Critically, it is an expansion of an existing rural business, with linkages to the adjacent roadside facilities on this strategic route (A47). For example, its catering and leisure facilities are available to guests staying at the adjacent hotel. This conclusion is offered despite Policy CS15 (Tourism) only supporting tourism development in the rural area if within existing historic buildings.

15. However, these policies are also clear that such development in the countryside must be of an appropriate scale and must maintain both the immediate environment and local distinctiveness. This is addressed below.

16. As a related matter, the proposed staff accommodation at first floor level can be regarded as an ancillary facility to the main use as a café/bar. The principle of such accommodation need not be considered further.

Design, and impact on the character of the countryside

17. The existing building has a rectangular footprint, oriented east-west. It is primarily one-and-a-half storey, with asymmetric gable ends at the east and west. There is a further one-and-a-half storey element at the rear with an asymmetric gable end facing northwards. An additional single-storey element with a primarily flat roof, extends along the entire front elevation.

18. The building is not of any architectural merit and it has not been well served by past extensions either in design or the use of materials. The current application with an approximately 65% increase in floorspace provides the only remaining opportunity to improve its design and visual impact, in accordance with the Council's design policies. The NPPF policies set out earlier in this report are of key importance.
19. In detail, the current proposal involves:
 - A single storey side extension at the west of the main one-and-a-half storey part of the building. It maintains the same height as the existing one-and-a-half storey area, but incorporates a symmetric gable end.
 - An additional two storey side extension at the rear of, and parallel with, the proposed single storey side extension. It also incorporates a new west facing gable end, but with higher eaves and a low pitched roof.
20. The front of the proposed single storey side extension incorporates glazed bifold doors, in keeping with the existing single storey part of the front elevation. It also includes a row of five rooflights. The rear elevation incorporates a series of five glazed bifold doors at first floor level. These serve the staff accommodation and all open onto a new balcony and external staircase. The proposed west elevation incorporates the two non-matching gable ends described above. The eastern elevation is unchanged.
21. Materials on the existing main building include a mix of red bricks and brown hanging wall tiles, under concrete roof tiles. The single storey area at the front incorporates a mix of red brick, light brown render and concrete roof tiles, in addition to the glazed bifold doors.
22. The application site is set back from the road frontage, and the proposed side extensions are then set back from the main front elevation of the existing building. However, the site is clearly visible across the open roadside frontage and these extensions would appear elongated when viewed from the public vantage points at the front. The building is prominent to the public in using not just the facility itself but also the adjacent hotel and filling station. This is an important site in the Rutland context. It is on a primary route across the county. It is something of a gateway site to the county as it will be used by current and potential visitors. It may well be the first place in the county that visitors stop at or choose to stay. Its impact will therefore be important for the visitor experience. The existing facility lacks a Rutland distinctiveness either in design form or in the use of materials. The poor past design has resulted in a go anywhere building that is harmful to the Rutland countryside.
23. The proposed range of rooflights on the front elevation of the single storey side extension would appear out-of-keeping with the existing building. The non-matching gable features on the western elevation would also be visible from public areas at the front and would add further to the discordant impact of these proposals.
24. A recommendation of refusal is warranted, because of the combined impact of the bulk and design of these proposals on the front and side elevations of the building. However, the elongated nature of the proposed rear elevation, and its extensive first floor fenestration and its utilitarian metal balcony whilst less visible would be seen from parts of the hotel car park. It is symptomatic of a poor design.
25. With regard to materials, the current application provides an opportunity to address the mixture of types and colours on the existing building. The proposed use of render on much of the new single-storey extension would continue the use of materials that are not in the local vernacular as would the use of timber cladding on some of the front elevation of the single storey extension, and on most of its side gable end. Furthermore, the submitted plans indicate that the gable end of the proposed two-storey extension would be brickwork. A good design approach here would have used materials that respected

the Rutland tradition and started an approach to rationalise the poor and disparate materials currently in use.

26. The proposed use of concrete roof tiles is unfortunate and the application does not say which of the 2 types of current tile will be matched. The opportunity exists to design an extension that use roofing materials that are consistent with Rutland traditions.
27. In total, the elongated bulk of the proposed extensions, the non-matching gable features on the west elevation, and the proposed mix of finishing materials all create a discordant visual impact that fails to improve the existing building, is out of keeping with the immediate area and also inappropriate within the wider countryside. It is acknowledged that this cluster of roadside facilities, including the hotel and filling station, is not making a positive contribution to the rural character, but development plan policy requires that new development takes the opportunity to improve current deficiencies, not add further to any discordant visual impact.
28. This design analysis is consistent with pre-application advice given in February of this year, albeit based on the more limited information submitted at that stage.

Enforcement Action

29. Development has already commenced on site, with the structure of the extensions now in place. This is unauthorised and, if members accept the recommendation of refusal, there will be a need to potentially consider enforcement action at a subsequent meeting. This is why delegated powers have not been exercised as design is a subjective issue and it would have compromised Members subsequent consideration of enforcement action.

Miscellaneous

30. There are no concerns regarding access and parking, and no other issues raised by this application. The site is not in a Conservation Area, is not adjacent to any listed buildings and is not subject to any ecological or archaeological interests. The loss of two small trees at the west of the site is acceptable, given that better quality trees would be retained at the rear.