

COLTISHALL

Government revives its plan for RAF site prison

Plans to build a 500-strong Category C prison on part of the former airbase at RAF Coltishall have been put back on track by government officials.

Council officers in north Norfolk have received a second planning application for the Scottow prison in the last few days. The heavyweight application has not been fully checked through, so is not yet available for public viewing.

The Ministry of Justice has been forced into making the new application to convert the old airmen's quarters into cells after making a mistake or mistakes in the original application, prompting a judicial review from prospective eco-town developer Richard Davies.

Council officers said the second application will see the process of consultation begin again, meaning people who want to object or support the plan will have to write letters again and parish councils will have to resubmit their views.

If the process mirrors the pace of the original application, it will be three months before permission is given for

By ED FOSS

building work to start on the prison – if it is indeed granted.

Allied with an estimated six-month build, this will mean the Scottow plan, held up by the government as one of its key quick fix solutions to ease pressure on prison places, would be delivered late summer 2009 at the very earliest – and only for the first small tranche of prisoners.

The new application, alongside news last week that the RAF Coltishall eco-town project has been officially taken off a 12-site government shortlist, will reignite the debate about what should happen to the remainder of the site.

The former base covers 630 acres, all in the ownership of the Ministry of Justice, but the prison would cover an area of less than 30 acres.

Paul Thomas, of the Coltishall Eco Town Action Group (Cetag), said that having the eco-town plans removed from the shortlist was “only half the battle”.

“What happens now on that site

Prospective eco-town developer Richard Davies successfully challenged the first application, with his legal team highlighting a series of 16 errors in the documentation. However North Norfolk District Council has only conceded to one of these reasons, the lack of a flood risk assessment. Although this impasse appears to still exist, meaning the quashing order has not been made, it has not prevented the second application being lodged. Although agreement in principle

remains extremely important,” said Mr Thomas.

“The land needs to go for a better use in the future, our preference is for a greenfield use, with the existing buildings used for small and medium enterprises, in keeping with the site's history.”

David Hayman, coordinator of the task force trying to regenerate the former base, said he intended to “get things going again” as the group was

exists to have the first application quashed because of the flood risk assessment issue, the new application may have taken into account several of the issues raised by Mr Davies' legal team.

That will only become evident when the second application is made available for public viewing. Mr Davies' initial judicial review documents also seek the payment of his costs from both North Norfolk and Broadland District Councils.

now largely inactive.

“The first thing to do is get the group back together again, assess where we are and revisit some of the work we did a couple of years ago, when we looked at the plusses and minuses of potential suggestions for the land.”

The first of those meetings would probably be held in December of January, said Mr Hayman, according to how busy key people were.

HOLT

Sir Menzies attends annual dinner date

Former Liberal Democrat leader Sir Menzies Campbell was in Norfolk at the weekend to address a party dinner.

Sir Menzies, who also visited the county in 2006 during his time in the top role, spoke at the annual dinner of the North Norfolk and Great Yarmouth Liberal Democrats, held on Friday night at the Pinewood Park Leisure Club, near Holt.

Focussing on his international affairs experience, Sir Menzies spoke about the implications of Barack Obama's election to the US presidency.

He discussed both the spectacular change it represented from the days of coloured segregation across the US and also how significant the challenges ahead would be for the president elect.

The need to progress a settlement between Israel and Palestine, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and how to tackle the question of Iran featured in Sir Menzies' speech.

North Norfolk MP Norman Lamb, at one stage Sir Menzies' chief of staff, also addressed the dinner.

Mr Lamb said: “My main topic was to focus on the need to rebuild people's trust in politics and the political process. There is a responsibility on those of us in elected positions to demonstrate why we should be trusted and people have every reason to have lost trust.

“I am not broadly optimistic that trust will be rebuilt, but this last week has shown us a hint of optimism which we can share on the back of the Obama win.”

COSTESSEY

Fairground man taken to hospital

A man has been left with serious injuries after a fairground ride collapsed on him.

The worker was dismantling one of the rides at the Norfolk Showground, Costessey, after a fireworks display on Saturday when a three-tonne piece of machinery fell on him.

Police, paramedics and the fire brigade attended the scene at about 12.20am yesterday and he was taken to the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital with head injuries.

The Health and Safety Executive could now investigate the incident as it was an industrial accident.

Pictures: ANDY DARNELL

WOOD GREEN

Clay goes from garden to house in eco scheme

A dozen volunteers took up an invite to “get plastered” at the weekend during the construction of an eco-friendly building project.

Work started last month to construct a cottage extension at Wood Green, near Long Stratton, out of locally sourced straw bales, which were transported by horse and cart.

The environmentally-friendly project continued on Saturday as clay that was dug out of Helen Baczkowska's garden at the start of the building work was used to plaster the inside of the new room at her 19th-century clay lump home.

Clay was mixed with chopped-up straw and sand using foot power before being thrown against the walls of the extension as part of the project coordinated by Tom Mackeown of eco-building firm Designer Stubble.

Twelve people with an interest in green building schemes got stuck in at the weekend in a bid to get the project finished by Christmas. Mr Mackeown said: “It was a continuation of the building project, but, more importantly, we have saved a colossal amount of energy by not having to transport any materials on to the site and doing almost all the work by hand. It is fantastic.”



GETTING STUCK IN: Tom Mackeown, below left, shows Geoff Frost how to plaster with clay over straw bales



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