

PLANNING STATEMENT (including community engagement statement)

**ERECTION OF WORKSHOP INCLUDING
ASSOCIATED STORAGE & LANDSCAPING
FOLLOWING DEMOLITION OF EXISTING
BUILDING**

at

GTO House, Floral Mile, Hare Hatch

**PREPARED BY MURRAY PLANNING ASSOCIATES LTD
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1.0 Introduction & Background

Murray Planning Associates has been instructed by GTO Engineering UK Ltd to prepare a Planning Statement (inc. Statement of Community Involvement) to support a full planning application to Wokingham Borough Council (hereafter referred to as 'WBC') for the erection of new workshop including associated office and storage space following demolition of existing out buildings at the Former Mabey Bridge site, Floral Mile, Hare Hatch (hereafter referred to as 'the Site').

This application follows the successful grant of planning permission 193047 and subsequent amendment application 210342 by the applicant for similar proposals on the same site.

The applicants were in the process of preparing to start work on the permitted scheme in 2022 but progress was abruptly halted following the sudden and unexpected passing of the owner and CEO of GTO Engineering UK Ltd.

Naturally, this had a devastating impact on this family run business and time was required to restructure the company. In 2023 the company was sold to new owners, and they are now seeking to obtain a new consent in order that work can quickly take place at the site and GTO can return to stability and progress the long-term vision for the company.

2.0 Supporting Technical Documentation

This Planning Statement is included as part of the planning application submission pack and should be read alongside the supporting information listed below. The scope of technical information submitted with the application has been established through feedback from Officers and consultees as part of the previous application, and more recent discussions with Officers in the lead up to this submission.

- 1APP compliant forms and certificates of ownership;
- Planning Application Drawings, including Site Location Plan, Site Plans (Existing & Proposed), Floor Plans, Elevations and Sections – RIDGE

- Topographical Survey – Survey Solutions;
- Geotechnical & Geo-environmental Report - Terra Firma (Wales) Limited;
- Transport Statement & Travel Plan - i-Transport;
- Arboricultural Survey & Planning Integration Report – Nick Hellis;
- Ecology Appraisal and BNG – Lizard Ecology;
- Flood Risk & Drainage Strategy – GTA Civils Limited;
- Air Quality Assessment – Accon UK;
- Noise Impact Assessment – Accon UK;
- Design and Access Statement – RIDGE; and
- Sustainability and Energy Statement – RIDGE

3.0 Site Description & Context

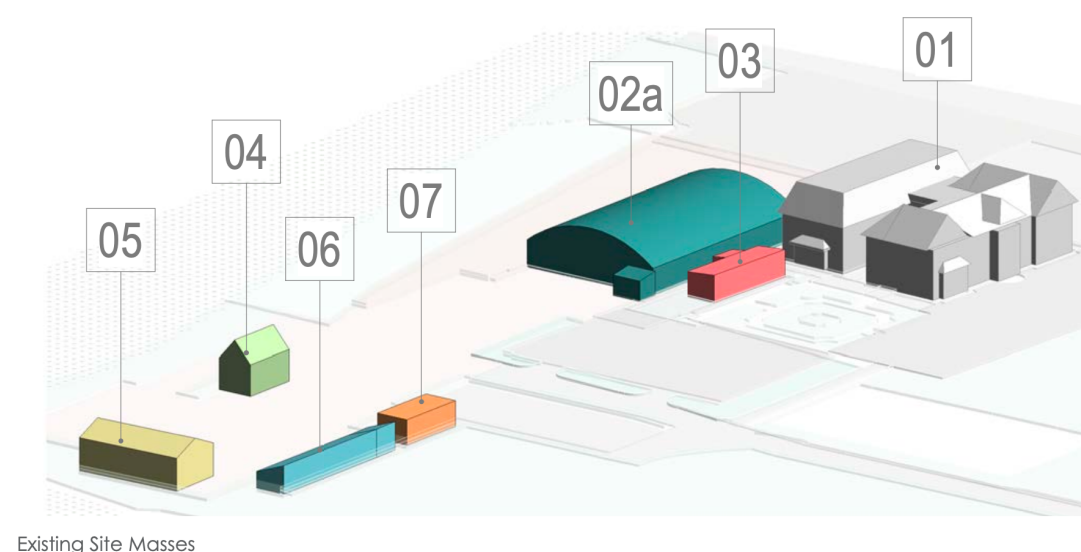
The application site is in the village of Hare Hatch, a formerly rural hamlet which has grown around the A4 road network as a strategic transport route between the larger settlement of Reading and Maidenhead. The site lies immediately to the north of the A4 and close to the junction with the B477, which links to Wargrave and the A327. In terms of local services and facilities, the site is equidistant (2km) from Twyford village centre to the southwest and Wargrave village centre to the northwest.

The site lies in the Countryside and Green Belt for planning purposes. However, it includes extensive areas of hardstanding and several buildings which give it a distinctly 'developed' appearance. Therefore, the site is classified as 'previously developed' or 'grey belt' land.

The site was formerly occupied by Mabey Holdings Ltd (hereafter referred to as Mabey) who used the main red brick building, indicated as **No.1** on the plan shown at **fig.1** below, as their Head Quarters and has since been occupied by the applicants (GTO) who similarly use the building as their HQ. Through the course of

the previous applications the applicant has obtained a statutory declaration from Mabey to confirm the historic uses of the buildings on the site. This main HQ building continues to be used for office space under the Class B1 use for management, sales and accounts staff together with other associated facilities such as kitchen and meeting rooms. A large industrial workshop building (**No.2**) is located to the north of the HQ and has been historically used for industrial/repair work for non-mechanical plant of a variety of sizes (Class B2 use). This building is in a poor state of repair and is currently used by the applicants primarily for storage purposes but also for occasional vehicle repair works. Building **No.3** is positioned adjacent to the main HQ office and been used as associated office space (Class B1 use). In addition, there are a group of buildings to the north west of the site (**No. 4, 5, 6 & 7**), including a profile metal Dutch barn, that were historically used by Mabey as a mixture of storage for plant and machinery (Class B8 use) as well as some further office operations in building 4. Since occupying the site the applicants have used building 4 as a staff room (utilising the existing toilet facilities within the structure). Building 5 has been used by the applicants as a machine shop in association with their car restoration business with the operations in this building falling under Class B2 use. Finally, the remaining two units at the site, buildings 6 & 7 have been used by GTO for storage use (B8) when required.

FIG.1 – Existing buildings at the site



As stated above, there are several large buildings on site, including a large two and a half storey office building with ancillary storage and industrial units located centrally.

The northern portion of the site has large areas of concrete hardstanding used predominantly for open storage and a large tarmaced car park. Mabey historically used these open hardstanding areas for storage/depot purposes ancillary to the B8/B2 uses of the various buildings on with site. The southern portion of the site comprises landscaping in the form of formal gardens and a hard surfaced tennis court.

The site has two points of vehicular access as existing. The primary access from the A4 Bath Road is located directly south of the main office building and associated car park. The secondary access links to the B477 Mulberry Hill and extends to the rear of the site.

The site perimeter is defined by a band of mature trees which offer excellent visual containment. Whilst well screened from public vantage points on the A4 and Mulberry Hill, the garden area and associated landscaping in the front of the site provides an attractive environment in contrast with the rear of the site which is dominated by hard surfacing where the majority of business-related activities take place.

In terms of adjoining land uses, the surrounding area is characterised by a mixture of residential and employment uses. To the east of the site is (Wyevale) Garden Centre and Maidenhead Aquatics. The garden centre comprises a single storey modern commercial greenhouse, large areas of hardstanding and an associated tarmaced car park. To the west is a large detached residential property set within a generously landscaped plot. To the immediate south of the site is Festive House, comprising a commercial building set on a wide expanse of hardstanding occupying the entirety of the site. Further to the south there are other commercial properties including Wargrave Nursery. To the north of the site are a series of open agricultural fields extending to the southern edge of the settlement of Wargrave.

4.0 Planning History Summary

A review of online planning records for Wokingham Borough Council has been undertaken and the following applications have been identified for the application site:

Application Reference	Description of development	Decision and associated commentary
07486	Office Extension	This application was refused by WBC but allowed at appeal as the inspector acknowledged that very special circumstances existed to justify a departure from Green Belt policy.
F/2007/0595 (Appeal APP/X0360/A/07/2046324)	Ref: Two storey side extension to an office - for the headquarters building	Application refused but allowed at appeal. The Inspector accepted that the expansion of an established local firm could not be readily and efficiently accommodated elsewhere and gave weight to the economic benefits associated with the development in this respect. These considerations in favour of the development outweighed the harm to the Green Belt.
F/2013/1025	Demolition of Mabey HQ and associated buildings, and proposed erection of 70-bedroom Care Home with 39 parking spaces and vehicular access	The application was refused principally due to the unacceptable scale and massing of the development in the Green Belt. In this case the very special circumstances presented with the application were not considered sufficient to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.
F/2014/2157	Application for temporary planning permission for 3 years to allow the erection of a modular structure for the	Application submitted alongside Ref. F/2014/2768. Both applications were withdrawn pending discussions with WBC regarding a permanent solution.

	use by GTO Engineering for the service repair and restoration of motor vehicles (B2) use .	
F/2014/2768	Proposed demolition of existing buildings and the erection of a two storey extension to existing office building for the service repair and restoration of motor vehicles (Use Class B2) with ancillary accommodation car parking and landscaping.	Whilst being supportive of retaining the business in the Borough and being mindful of the economic benefits of facilitating a new facility for GTO, WBC Officers expressed concern over the scale of the proposed building in the Green Belt. The application was withdrawn pending discussions with WBC regarding a permanent solution.
170107	Full application for the proposed erection of new service, repair and restoration motor vehicle centre (Use Class B2) with ancillary parking and landscaping following demolition of existing buildings.	The application was refused principally due to the unacceptable scale and massing of the development in the Green Belt. In this case WBC considered the propose design to be too large and of an unacceptable design for that would lead to impact on the openness of the Green Belt.
190063	Full application for the proposed	The application was refused

	erection of restoration motor vehicle building including associated office and storage space, plus change of use of existing buildings with ancillary parking and landscaping following demolition of existing buildings.	principally due to the unacceptable scale and massing of the development in the Green Belt. In this case WBC considered the propose design to be too large and of an unacceptable design for that would lead to impact on the openness of the Green Belt.
193047	Retention of existing OFFICE BUILDING and erection of workshop including associated office and storage following demolition of existing buildings.	Application Permitted
210342	variation of condition application for a lowering of the finished floor level of the proposed new workshop building.	Application Permitted
232543	Full application for the proposed	

	erection of 1no. detached outbuilding following demolition of existing storage shed.	Application Withdrawn
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5.0 Statement of Community Involvement

GTO have been promoting their proposals for new accommodation of the application site since 2014 and this application has been brought forward in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. The SCI details three main principles of engagement: informing, consulting and involving the community. These principles have been integral to GTO's consultation approach throughout the past few years with ongoing communication made between the local community (including parish Council) and the company. Plans have always been presented to the Parish Council during the application period. The Applicant has also made direct contact with the Council's Economic Development Officers.

6.0 The Development Proposals

The proposed development has further simplified the proposals from the previously approved scheme. The proposed development now comprises the demolition of the existing workshop outbuilding located to the rear of the main GTO House (HQ building) and this being replaced by the erection of a new workshop building for the service and restoration of motor vehicles (Class B2 use) with ancillary storage use (Class B8 use).

Layout and scale

The existing and proposed site layouts are shown on submitted plans. This shows the proposed demolition of the old workshop building on site (including the removal of the existing GTO temporary structure). The required floorspace will be provided in the new purpose-built workshop as described above located on the same footprint. Parking and circulation are provided to the front and side (west) of the proposed building as existing. The existing landscaped area to the front of the site will be retained and enhanced through the introduction of additional tree planting and other soft landscaping. Further tree planting is proposed on the eastern and southern site boundaries. The new soft landscaping will both improve existing screening for the site and introduce significant biodiversity enhancements. These will increase the level of privacy for the business which is key requirement of the high value customer base of GTO whilst also further providing a high-quality location for employees of the company to work with significant biodiversity enhancements also included.

Full details of the proposed design can be found within the accompanying Design and Access Statement and on the submitted planning drawings.

7.0 Planning Policy Context

In accordance with Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, development control decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This section sets out the relevant planning policies of the development plan and supplementary planning policy documents to be considered in the determination of this application.

The site is located close to the village of Hare Hatch and within the administrative area of Wokingham Borough Council (WBC). WBC is currently working towards the production of a new Local Plan Update. In the absence of an adopted Local Plan Update, the Development Plan for the purposes of assessing proposals for this site comprises the Wokingham Core Strategy (January 2010) and the Management Development Delivery (MDD) Plan (February 2014). In addition, relevant supplementary guidance is provided in the form of the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (May 2010), Infrastructure and Delivery Contributions SPD (October 2011) and the Borough Design Guide SPD (June 2012). National planning policy is also relevant in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and to a lesser extent the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG).

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

The NPPF was revised at the end of 2024 but continues to promote the presumption in favour of sustainable development at Paragraph 11, which for the purposes of decision-taking means approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay. Paragraph 8 of the NPPF states that there are 3 dimensions to sustainable development: an economic role, a social role, and an environmental role.

Paragraph 85 sets out how policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. **Significant weight** should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, considering both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

At Paragraph 87 the Framework sets out clear advice to decision makers that decisions should enable:

c) the expansion or modernisation of other industries of local, regional or national importance to support economic growth and resilience.

Paragraph 131 states the creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.

Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

Paragraph 142 emphasises the importance of Green Belts with the fundamental aim of policies being the prevention of urban sprawl by keeping the land open.

Paragraph 143 states that the Green Belt serves five purposes:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Paragraphs 153-160 guide decision makers when assessing proposals affecting the Green Belt. It confirms that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. Footnote 55 however expands on this statement by providing the following guidance:

"Other than in the case of development on previously developed land or grey belt land, where development is not inappropriate."

Paragraph 155 confirms that (our emphasis in bold):

*"The development of homes, **commercial** and other development in the Green Belt should also **not be regarded as inappropriate** where:*

- a. The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;*
- b. There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;*
- c. The development would be in a sustainable location, with reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework; and*

d. Where applicable the development proposed meets the 'Golden Rules' requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157."

The 2024 NPPF on page 73 explains that:

"For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development."

Paragraphs 161 – 186 provide advice on meeting the challenge of climate change and seeks to avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding by directing development away from areas at highest risk, but where development is necessary, making it safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere.

Paragraph 192 states that development should seek to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity.

Paragraph 196 seeks to ensure that new development is appropriate for its location by preventing unacceptable risks from pollution.

Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010)

The Core Strategy was adopted in January 2012 and sets out the Council's overarching strategy for development in the Borough up to 2026. In the context of adopted Core Strategy, the site is located within open countryside and in the designated Green Belt. The key policies relevant to the proposed development and the site are set out as follows:

Policy CP1 – 'Sustainable Development' states that the construction of new buildings and the redevelopment of existing stock will be supported where the design of buildings and site layouts use energy, water, minerals, materials and other natural resources appropriately, efficiently and with care and take account of the effects of climate change.

Policy CP3 – 'General Policies for Development' states that development should relate positively to the character of the site and surrounding area. Development proposals should provide a functional, accessible and adaptable scheme. Proposals should not have any detrimental impacts on residential amenity, landscape quality and ecological interests

Policy CP6 - 'Managing Travel Demand' states that permission will be granted for development schemes that provide sustainable forms of transport to allow choice in modes of travel. Development sites should be well connected to the existing pedestrian and cycle network; and should be well related to existing public transport opportunities. Proposals should provide appropriate vehicular parking in accordance with the Council's standards.

Policy CP11 - 'Proposals outside Development Limits' (including countryside and Green Belt land) emphasises the need for development to maintain the quality of the environment and states that permission will not be granted outside of the normal limits unless:

- It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside-based enterprises and activities, it

contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and

- It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and
- It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement; or
- In the case of residential extensions, does not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building;

Policy CP12 - 'Green Belt' states that planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Paragraph 4.59 details that one of the key features of Green Belts is their permanence. Paragraph 4.60 of the Core Strategy states that within the borough's Green Belt any proposal that supported.

Management Delivery Development Local Plan (2014)

The Management Delivery Development was adopted in February 2014. It sets out detailed policies to be used in the determination of planning applications. The key planning policies in the Management Delivery Development Local Plan relevant to the proposed development and application site are set out as follows:

Policy CC01 - 'Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development' reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development in the NPPF. Planning applications that accord with the policies in the development plan will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Policy CC04 - 'Sustainable Design and Construction' states that planning permission will only be granted for proposals that provide a high quality sustainably designed and constructed development. The policy seeks BREEAM compliance for all new non-residential proposals for more than 100sqm gross non-residential floorspace. The

policy also requires all new development, including conversions, alterations and extensions, to incorporate suitable waste management facilities including on-site recycling.

Policy CC07 - 'Parking' states that permission will only be granted where the proposals demonstrates how the proposed parking provision standards are met and that the new scheme retains an appropriate overall level of off-street parking.

Policy CC10 - 'Sustainable Drainage' states that all development must ensure that surface water arising from the proposed development is managed sustainably. This must be demonstrated through either a Flood Risk Assessment or a Surface Water Drainage Strategy.

Policy TB01 - 'Development within the Green Belt' states that inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt. There is a presumption against inappropriate development unless very special circumstances can be presented to justify the development in accordance with the NPPF.

Supplementary Planning Policy

Borough Design Guide SPD (2012) - This provides guidance on the design of developments and promotes well designed developments which complement the character of areas to which the applications relate.

Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2010) – This provides clarification and interprets existing policy relating to climate change, energy efficiency, energy conservation measures, renewable energy sources, reducing carbon emissions and inclusion of flood minimisation measures in proposals for new development.

Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule (2015) – Wokingham Borough Council adopted a CIL charging schedule in 2015. GTO's operations are a mixture of Class B1, B2 and B8 use which falls under the 'All other types of development' as a development type in the CIL Charging Schedule. The proposed use therefore has a zero CIL liability.

8.0 Development Assessment

This section provides a summary assessment of the application against the main planning policy considerations and any other material considerations that are relevant to the proposed development. These matters are listed below and dealt with under these subheadings.

- Principle of development;
- Layout and design;
- Conformity with adjoining land uses;
- Economic benefits; and
- Technical consideration
 - Highways
 - Sustainability
 - Flood Risk & Drainage
 - Ground Conditions
 - Ecology
 - Arboriculture

Principle of development

The proposals seek to make effective use of previously developed land (classified as Grey Belt land as per the latest version of the NPPF) and provides several positive economic benefits, including 1) retention of employment for specialised and local skilled labour; and 2) generation of local economic growth and inward investment. The application site is located within the Countryside and Green Belt in planning policy terms, and as such it is subject to policies which look to prevent inappropriate development. However, neither designation – Countryside nor Green Belt designation – constitutes a complete moratorium on new development in these areas. Indeed, the NPPF was recently updated in December 2024 and specifically amended policy guidance relating to the Green Belt and how development proposals within these areas should be classified and assessed. In this context, the NPPF states that Local

Planning Authorities should ensure substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt including harm to its openness. However, footnote 55 clarifies this should be the case "*other than in the case of development on previously developed land or grey belt land, where development is not inappropriate.*"

This footnote clearly states that development on Grey Belt or previously developed land (PDL) is **not** inappropriate. Through previous applications it has been clear common ground between the Local Planning Authority (LPA) and the Appellant that much of the Site constitutes PDL within the Green Belt. When assessing the application site against *Annex 2: Glossary* of the latest NPPF, it clarifies what constitutes Grey Belt for the purposes of plan and decision-making. Land in the Green Belt comprising PDL and sites which do not strongly contribute to any of the purposes of (a), (b) or (d) in Paragraph 143. The site's contribution to these three purposes is looked at below:

Purpose (a) is to prevent urban sprawl

Response: The site is PDL and the proposed development will not extend any hard surfacing or development outside these existing built up areas. The proposals also seek to replace an existing large structure on site, positioning the new building on the same footprint resulting in no additional/new urban sprawl in the area. As such, it is not considered the site strongly contributes to this purpose.

Purpose (b) is to prevent neighbouring towns merging

Response: The site is PDL and is part of a ribbon of developed land that runs adjacent to Bath Road on both sides. Development in the area is made up of several different use classes the many sites accommodate far greater densities of developed than the application site. All new development will be contained to the boundaries of the existing site. As such, the development would not lead to any merging of neighbouring towns and is not considered the site strongly contributes to this purpose.

Purpose (d) looks to preserve the setting/special character of historic towns

Response: The site is PDL and not located within or near to an historic town. As such, the development does not strongly contribute to this purpose.

The site is PDL and does not contribute to the three listed purposes of the Green Belt and therefore classifies as Grey Belt Land.

The proposed building would provide 10124 m³ of mixed-use floor space to meet the operational needs of the applicant. The new building will replace the existing workshop outbuilding which had a volume of 8298 m³ which is to be demolished and is located to the rear of the main HQ building.

Historically GTO have expressed a need for improved facilities to be created at the site and for a dedicated workshop and car storage space to be created in order that a permanent solution can be built to replace the existing marquee temporary workspace. As set out in the applicant's business statement (which accompanies this application), GTO is a successful and growing company and now has a longstanding connection to the application site and the Borough. The new owners are ready to start construction on a replacement building immediately and have specifically designed the unit to cater for the exact needs of the business to ensure the long term success of GTO.

The proposals result in a relatively modest 22% increase in built form at the site.

The proposed replacement building will amount to a minimal increase in existing built form at the site, replacing the existing poor quality outbuilding sited behind the main HQ and create a simple but functional replacement on the site.

In addition, the development will be enhanced by a comprehensive landscaping scheme. Consequently, portions of the Green Belt will revert to its open and natural form. Therefore, the proposal will, on balance, improve the perception of openness of the Green Belt by significantly enhance the visual amenity of the site at a more localised level.

The simple architectural style of the proposed building is low profile (4.9m), similar to that approved through application 193047 and lower than the existing structure it will replace (which currently stands at 6.2m). The extensive soft landscaping proposed will further enhance the visual quality of the site considerably improving the character of the area.

As detailed above, the application site is considered to be Grey belt land. Paragraph 155 of the NPPF states that development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should also not be regarded as inappropriate where:

a. The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;

Response: The proposals, as previously assessed, will utilise grey belt land and would not undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt in the area. The proposals will be entirely contained to existing PDL on the site and will replace an existing building with a lower profile structure in the same location.

b. There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;

Response: The NPPF and (relevant footnote 56) do not specifically provide example guidance for commercial developments (only for housing and Traveller sites) but Stantec undertook an Employment Land Needs (ELN) Review for Wokingham Borough Council in March 2023. The report confirmed that:

"The Borough's emerging Plan proposes to continue to deliver new floorspace to foster economic growth through intensification redevelopment, with limited allocation of new land."

and concluded that regarding industrial land:

The shift to positive demand for industrial floorspace is reflected in all the past trend data. Job change has been positive and low vacancy is a feature of the Thames Valley market, worker space densities are high, and there have been very few industrial losses with none in the pipeline. Indeed, the evidence is that existing industrial sites are being recycled for more intensive industrial use in accordance with policy. To avoid constraining the industrial market and planning positively, it is therefore sensible to plan for positive industrial growth.

4. Recommendation – identify a need for industrial land of a minimum 18 ha, but an aspiration for 53 ha

The review takes a cautious approach to assessment, understanding the changes to work patterns and commercial development needs following the pandemic. However, the LPA's emerging Local Plan is committed to foster economic growth and champions redevelopment on existing sites with limited allocation of new land. In its conclusion, the ELN Review clearly states there is an identified need for a minimum of 18 ha of new industrial land with advice to plan positively for industrial growth and aspire for providing up to 53 ha.

The Review provides evidence that a demonstrable need for new commercial development exists in the area. Although only small scale, the proposals will help to deliver and contribute to this identified and unmet need.

In addition, the applicants have also provided a detailed business report which accompanies this application and highlights the need for the development so that GTO as company can continue to operate and grow. Indeed, GTO for the past number of years have been working on site from a temporary marquee structure that will need to be removed imminently. Once this is taken down there will be a demonstrable need for this floorspace to be replaced for the company to survive. These company and site-specific circumstances, taken together with the recommendations of the 2023 Employment Land Needs Review that more new industrial land will be required in the future, mean the proposals meet with this criterion.

c. The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework; and

Response: The application site is in a sustainable location with good connection to public transport and the town of Wargrave within a mile (19min) walk. Safe access for pedestrians to Wargrave can be made via the existing pavement network along Membury Hill and then School Hill with the main high-street offering a wide range of shops, cafes and services. Criterion c) for this new national guidance specifically places emphasis on paragraphs 110 and 115 of the Framework.

Paragraph 110 explains:

"Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This can help to reduce congestion and emissions, and improve air quality and public health. However, opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision-making."

The guidance explains that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas and this should be factored into any decision-making process for proposed development. The submitted sustainable Travel Plan contains full details relating to how the company will promote use of sustainable modes of transport and previous applications have been assessed by the LPA's Highways Department and these proposals were found sound.

Paragraph 115 states:

In assessing sites that may be allocated for development in plans, or specific applications for development, it should be ensured that:

a) sustainable transport modes are prioritised taking account of the vision for the site, the type of development and its location;

- b) safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users;*
- c) the design of streets, parking areas, other transport elements and the content of associated standards reflects current national guidance, including the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code; and*
- d) any significant impacts from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree through a vision-led approach.*

This specific section of the Framework has been amended through the 2024 update. In particular a) provides guidance that sustainable transport modes should be assessed based on site location, development type and the overall vision for the site. As such, the application proposals are considered to align with this criterion as the proposed Travel Plan includes specific sustainable transport measures that are tailored to the type of development, its location and the vision the owners of GTO have clearly set out for the future growth of their business. The proposed development maintains a safe and suitable access to the site to align with criterion b). It is considered Criterion c) and d) are not relevant for the scale and type of development proposed.

In conclusion, the proposals will comply with criterion c. as set out in paragraph 155 of the NPPF.

d. Where applicable the development proposed meets the 'Golden Rules' requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157 below.

The 'Golden Rules' relate to development involving the provision of housing. As such the criterion is not relevant to this application.

The proposals are considered to align with the guidance set out in of Paragraph 155 of the NPPF which confirms commercial development (and other forms) should not be regarded as inappropriate where they involve utilising of PDL and grey belt when assessed alongside the other three criterion set out in the guidance.

Furthermore, the application site is located on a site well screened from the surrounding roads and will be barely visible from the public domain. Indeed, much of

the the existing vegetation located along the southern boundary for the site and facing the public realm comprises evergreen species and as such these trees and bushes provide year-round screening for the site. Setting aside the Green Belt issues, the proposals also deliver significant design and landscaping improvements, albeit only appreciable from within the application site. Finally, the applicant has a need for the proposed accommodation to allow their business to operate and continue to be a success in the longer term. The economic benefits of the proposed development in terms of employment retention and growth together with increased inward investment are material considerations which also weigh heavily in favour of the application.

Layout and design

Location: When considering the design, the location for the new building will be positioned in the same location as that previously approved through application 193047 (behind the existing GTO HQ). This placement ensures the reception and administrative building remained the key feature on entering the site, with the workshop buildings in closer proximity than at present to allow for better relationships between the various departments within the company. Here any new built form could be serviced from the yard areas, whilst allowing clients and visitors a convenient opportunity to view the workshops.

Form and Scale: The form of the new building is simple in design, similar again to the previously approved scheme. It would be subservient to the main HQ building but allow for the sufficient internal heights to allow for cars to be raised on ramps and high-level racking for the car parts division. The width of the building was driven by the requirement to allow for a run of service bays for the servicing of cars, with a central roadway like that in a car park to allow for manoeuvring the cars in and out. Overall, the areas of storage, workshop etc are similar to that currently being used by GTO within the existing temporary structure on site.

Character and Materials: This scheme looks to create a modern building that embodies the character of traditional small-scale factories and workshops. The North and East Elevations are to the rear agricultural facing context of the site. These

façades are generally shielded by trees with surrounding hard standing forming circulation for logistic vehicles. Aesthetically these façades are proposed to be 'clean' and functional, predominantly formed of black cladding and brick. Thoughtfully placed glazing provides the workshop with natural light, views out to the surrounding greenery, and the ability to see incoming deliveries.

The South elevation forms a backdrop to the existing garden. Much of this elevation will be obstructed from view upon entry to GTO house. The addition of planting along the South of the garden reveals the elevation upon entering the garden. The circulation of the site means that the West elevation will predominantly be experienced in isolation framed through the extrusion of the building outline. The facade materiality takes cues from the existing site; predominantly brick with black detailing in the form of glazing mullions and doors.

In summary, the proposed development delivers a high-quality layout and design taking the opportunity to significantly improve the character and appearance of the site and its contribution to the wider Green Belt and Countryside. The existing out building to be demolished is of low-quality design, poor physical condition and replacing this with a high-quality development and a comprehensive landscaping scheme represents a significant improvement over the existing situation. The height and scale of the proposed building is appropriate for the site relative to its setting and context. The building is set lower than the height of the existing HQ building and is set behind this structure to the rear of the site to further reduce the perception of bulk. As with the previously approved scheme, the proposed development is fully in accordance with the NPPF, Core Strategy policies CP1 and CP3 and the Borough Design Guide.

Conformity with adjoining land uses and protection of residential amenity

The application site is not considered to be sensitive in this respect due to the nature of the adjoining land uses. Setting aside the fact that the site benefits from a high level of visual containment, there are no neighbouring uses to the north of the site which backs onto open countryside. Immediately to the east of the site is the large commercial garden centre and it is considered that the proposed use will operate in a way that would not have an adverse impact on the garden centre. All the business

operations will be carried out within the proposed building which is well removed from site boundaries to the south, east and west. There is a small industrial building to the south of the site which is not a sensitive land use and will not be adversely affected by the proposed development. There is a detached residential property to the west of the site but this is circa 100m from the proposed building and as such it is considered that there will be no adverse impact on the amenities of this property, particularly given the previous use of the site. The Environmental Health Team also raised no objection to any previous scheme.

Economic benefits

The 'economic role' of the NPPF places great emphasis on ensuring that the planning system supports sustainable economic growth. In this respect GTO Engineering are at the forefront of a niche high value market and the company has an excellent opportunity to expand and grow their business in the local area. Due to the nature of their business, they require modern facilities at their premises in a high-quality location with good transport links. Further, it is important that their workforce is provided with facilities that are safe and comfortable to work in.

The site is a previously developed (grey belt) site that is covered by extensive areas of hardstanding having previously been used for a combination of office and industrial uses with associated storage. The proposed use would make best use of an existing developed site and allow the company to remain in the Borough and to continue to make a positive contribution to the local economy. The proposal would also provide sufficient floorspace to enable the business to grow from the site.

GTO have been based within Wokingham for nearly 20 years, employing several local people in skilled roles. The company has no desire to leave the Borough and to the contrary it sees its future in Wokingham.

Technical considerations

Highways – A full Transport Statement and associated Travel Plan have been produced by i-Transport to accompany the planning application. Currently the site has two access points from the A4 Bath road and B477 Mumbery Hill.

The proposals also include motorcycle and cycle parking provision in accordance with the Highway Authority's parking standards. The accompanying Travel Plan Statement identifies opportunities for effective promotion and delivery of sustainable transport initiatives e.g. walking, cycling, car sharing and public transport to reduce the demand for travel by less sustainable modes and a series of local improvements have been identified to promote non-car travel as part of the Sustainable Transport Strategy.

Overall, during the peaks and the daily flow, the impact of the traffic generated by the proposed development on the local highway network surrounding the site will be minimal. It should also be noted that the highways authority did not object to previous schemes.

Sustainability – The Sustainable Design and Construction SPD was adopted in May 2010. It provides clarification and interprets existing policy relating to climate change, energy efficiency, energy conservation measures, renewable energy sources, reducing carbon emissions and inclusion of flood minimisation measures in proposals for new development.

The proposed development has been designed to meet the relevant policy standards with regards to sustainable construction and energy. Further information is contained within the Sustainability Statement submitted with this application.

Flood Risk & Drainage – A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and drainage strategy has been undertaken by GTA Civils Limited which demonstrates that the proposed development is acceptable with regards to flood risk. In addition, the proposed development would not result in the increase of flood risk elsewhere.

The application site is located within Flood Zone 1 and as such is appropriate for commercial development in accordance with the NPPF. Flood Zone 1 'Low Probability' of river or sea flooding. The proposals include below ground accommodation that will be constructed with waterproof concrete and this factored into the drainage calculations in the FRA.

As the site overlies an aquifer and groundwater source protection zone, 'deep trap' gullies are to be installed in the car park area. An oil separator will be sited immediately downstream of any area proposed for vehicle wash-down.

Ecology – A detailed Ecological Appraisal of the site has been undertaken by Clarke Webb Ecology Limited. Initial walkover surveys undertaken in 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018/19 and 2023 identified some of the buildings on site as having potential for bats and as such further roost and bat activity surveys were recommended if these were to be removed. Whilst the site was also identified as having some potential for nesting birds, the appraisal considered the site to have no potential for other protected species including badgers, reptiles and Great Crested Newts.

The applicants have since undertaken further on-site assessment work by ecologists and this includes an additional Phase 1 and Phase 2 bat report undertaken in May 2024 which accompanies this application. It concluded that Since the front section of GTO house will not be affected by the proposed works and the loft space is separate from the extension, no further surveys were recommended or completed for this area of the house despite the confirmed roost. The works will be to the rear of the extension and will not disturb the roof or loft of the original GTO House building.

Further to above, the ecologists have undertaken a detailed Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment for the site and have worked closely with the consultancy team to ensure the proposed soft landscaping scheme provide significant biodiversity enhancement.

Arboriculture – An Arboricultural Survey has been undertaken by Nick Hellis in support of the planning application. The proposals amount to a minimal impact and

scope exists for extensive new tree planting as part of a comprehensive landscape strategy for site which can be conditioned with a planning permission.

The retained trees do not cause any significant conflicts in terms of the proposed works and ongoing operations of the site with the development in place. The retained trees will all be protected in accordance with current standards and guidance.

9.0 Conclusions

Murray Planning Associates has been instructed by GTO Engineering UK Ltd to prepare a Planning Statement (inc. Statement of Community Involvement) to support a full planning application to Wokingham Borough Council for the erection of a new workshop following demolition of existing outbuilding at the Former Mabey site, Floral Mile, Hare Hatch.

This application follows a previously approved application for a similar development. In this respect the proposals represent a sensitively designed scheme which is appropriate for the site whilst meeting the development needs of the applicant.

The applicants are keen to remain working within Wokingham Borough. Following an extensive site search, with the assistance of the Council's Economic Development Officer in the early stages, the company has invested in the application site as a suitable location to meet their specific operational requirements. No other alternative sites within the borough or the surrounding area (within suitable commuting distance for existing workforce) meet these specific needs.

The site is previously developed (Grey Belt) land with hardstanding spread across the site. The proposed development is necessary to meet the business needs of the applicant and to ensure the business can continue to be a success and contribute to the local economy.

There will be only a minimal increase in built form on the site and an existing poor quality/unusable outbuilding will be replaced.

GTO are market leaders in their field and as such their growth in Wokingham will undoubtedly bring with it significant job creation and inward investment. These economic benefits should be afforded significant weight when considering the proposed development.

In summary, the proposed development follows a previously approved application for a similar development. These proposals result in a building slightly larger in size but retaining the fundamental design principals that were considered acceptable in the last scheme. Since the previous applications were submitted at the site National Policy has been updated and revised. The new government has, through the revisions made to the Framework, comprehensively designated that PDL in the Green Belt on sites which do not strongly contribute to the fundamental purposes of this designation should be classified as 'grey belt' and development on this land should not be unduly restricted or considered inappropriate. As such, it is considered the proposals constitute a modest development on grey belt land and are not inappropriate development.

The development accords with both local and national planning policy and, for the reasons set out in this planning submission, it is respectfully requested that planning permission is granted.