

Application for Full Planning Permission for the Change of Use of a former agricultural building to a use falling within Class B8 (Storage and Distribution) of the Use Class Order together with alterations to the elevations and formation of additional hardstanding.

Hatch Gate Farm, Lines Road, Hurst, RG10 OSP

Planning Statement

On behalf of Belcher Farms

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Planning Statement has been prepared by Pegasus Group on behalf of Belcher Farms (“the applicant”) to support a full planning application for the change of use of a former agricultural building at Hatch Gate Farm to a storage and distribution use within Class B8 of the Use Class Order. The development proposal also includes works to the elevations of the building and the formation of additional hardstanding to facilitate the use. The use commenced in July 2025 and as such the application is made retrospectively.

Proposed Development

- 1.2. The application seeks full planning permission for the following development proposal:

“Change of use of former agricultural building to a use falling within Class B8 (Storage and Distribution) of the Use Class Order together with alterations to the elevations and the formation of additional hardstanding.”

- 1.3. The proposed development relates to an existing building that was granted planning permission in July 2021 under application 211634. The building was primarily designed for lambing, but was also used for the storage of hay, straw and feed at other times of the year. The building was implemented in accordance with this planning permission.
- 1.4. Following changes to the operation of the farm, which will be detailed below, the building is no longer required for its original purpose. As such, the applicant has sought to diversify operations at Hatch Gate Farm by introducing a storage and distribution use. This utilised an existing access from Dunt Lane and has no impact on the continued operation of the wider farm.
- 1.5. A more detailed description of the development proposals is set out in Section 4 of this Supporting Statement.

The Purpose and Content of the Supporting Statement

- 1.6. This Statement provides a summary overview of the application proposals and identifies the legislative framework within which it should be considered.
- 1.7. **Section 2** provides a description of the site and its surroundings.. The relevant planning history is outlined in **Section 3**. A description of the proposals is set out in **Section 4**. The planning policy framework that is applicable to the application is provided in **Section 5**. **Section 6** then provides an assessment of proposals against the relevant policies and guidance and includes reasoned justification for the development that is being proposed. **Section 7** provides a summary and conclusion.



Submitted Plans and Documentation

1.8. In addition to this supporting statement, together with the required application forms and fee, the application for prior approval is supported by the following plans and supporting information:

- P25-1141_DE_002_B_01 Site Location Plan
- P25-1141_DE_002_B_02 Proposed Block Plan
- P25-1141_DE_002_B_03 Proposed Plans
- P25-1141_DE_002_B_04 Proposed Elevations
- P25-1141TR/KS/AS/JC – Transport Statement Letter (Pegasus Group)

2. Site and Surroundings

- 2.1. Hatch Gate Farm is an established agricultural unit of over 170ha located south of the village of Hurst. The original farmhouse and farm buildings are accessed via Lines Road which includes the primary access to the site; however, the extent of the agricultural unit also includes substantial areas of land to the east of Davis Street and south of Church Hill.
- 2.2. The main agricultural buildings within the site comprise six sheds located within a cattle yard to the south west of the original farm buildings which are primarily used for the accommodation of cattle. A recently approved building located adjacent to but outside of the cattle yard to its north is used for the storage of agricultural machinery and fertilizer storage.
- 2.3. As a result of these developments, the original agricultural buildings are redundant and no longer used as part of the main agricultural operation. The main agricultural buildings for the site are now the barns located in and adjacent to the cattle yard.
- 2.4. The subject building is also located outside of the cattle yard to its west – its previous agricultural use related to lambing, and as such it was required to be separate from the cattle buildings. The building is accessed via an existing track from Dunts Lane to the west.
- 2.5. The site is not subject to any specific landscape or ecological designations and is located entirely within Flood Zone 1. It is not within a Conservation Area, and the closest listed building is Hatch Gate Farm Cottage, located approximately 200m to the north east of the development site.

3. Relevant Planning History

- 3.1. The adjacent cattle yard was originally granted planning permission in September 2015 under application **150544** which granted planning permission for *'Full application for the proposed formation of cattle yard and associated cattle sheds and farm workshop, to be constructed in four phases'*. The application approved the erection of two buildings with the location of three further buildings identified but not considered at this time.
- 3.2. The three further buildings were subsequently approved in May 2016 under applications **160516**, **160517** and **160518**. An application for a further building was submitted under application **181534** and approved in August 2018. The buildings approved under these five applications comprise five cattle sheds and a workshop, all of which are located within the cattle yard.
- 3.3. Application **211634** was approved in July 2021 for a further agricultural building to be located to the west of the cattle yard, which is the subject of this application. This building as approved was primarily designed for lambing, but is also used for the storage of hay, straw and feed at other times of the year.
- 3.4. Finally, application **251293** was approved in June 2025 for the erection of an agricultural building for stage. This application concerned the new building to be located to the north of the cattle yard.

4. The Development Proposals

- 4.1. The proposed development primarily comprises the change of use of the former agricultural building to the west of the cattle yard, approved under planning application **211634**, to a use falling within Class B8 (Storage and Distribution) of the Use Class Order. To facilitate the development, alternations to the elevations of the building are also proposed together with formation of additional hardstanding.

Change of Use to B8

- 4.2. As has been set out above, the building was granted planning permission in July 2021 as an agricultural building primarily designed for lambing but could also be used for storage at other times of year when it was not used for its primary purpose.
- 4.3. The building was implemented and used for its approved purpose, including the lambing seasons of 2022, 2023 and 2024. However, lambs were mainly kept off-site on land leased by the applicants, and as of 2025 the tenancies were ended and they no longer have access to the land. As a result there has been a drastic downscaling in the lambing operation at Hatch Gate Farm, the result of which is then building is no longer required for lambing. In addition, the cattle operation has also been downscaled – although not to the same extent – the result of which is that the building is no longer required for the storage of feed.
- 4.4. As a result of this downscaling, the building was vacated and no longer had a use with it being unsuitable for cattle farming and storage available elsewhere. Rather than remove the building – which, as a relatively new, modern building would not be a cost-effective strategy for a farming business – the decision was taken to diversify operations at Hatch Gate Farm and lease the building to a commercial business that would not interfere with farming operations. A B8 storage and distribution use is ideal in this respect, as such businesses require the floorspace that former agricultural buildings can provide but are not ‘industrial’ uses that could conflict with farming operations.
- 4.5. The proposed use is separate from the farm in the sense that it is not enclosed within the cattle yard and is fenced from the adjacent fields. It is only accessible via an existing access from Dunts Lane, which although was an access used to serve the lambing operation, is not an access utilised to access the cattle yard, and as such there is no conflict with agricultural vehicles.
- 4.6. The change of use took place to enable operations to begin in July 2025. The building is occupied by Five Rivers Distribution, a logistics company that handles the storage and transportation of goods from the building. The operation typically involves the drivers setting off from the site on Monday with deliveries scheduled all around the country, and they return on Friday. The operation involves seven vehicles, the largest of which is an articulated lorry.
- 4.7. Aside from the drivers, two members of staff are employed by the company and based at the site, a security manager and a warehouse manager.

Elevational Alterations

- 4.8. As approved, the building was constructed with open sides to all elevations which were required for lambing operations and did not prevent it from being used for the storage of hay, straw and feed at times when it was not used for lambing. However, as it is now used for the storage of goods before they are transported to their destination, an open-sided building is no longer appropriate and as such the elevations have now been filled in with green profiled metal sheeting to reflect other buildings on the site with a concrete slab at ground level as a flood resilience measure.
- 4.9. No other alterations to the building are proposed. The height, width and depth of the building remain as approved as does its roof design and profile.

Hardstanding

- 4.10. As approved, the building was set in an area of hardstanding which projected west, east and south of the building. This effectively formed an extension of the existing yard although the building was kept separate from the cattle yard. The approved development included approximately 3,060m² of hardstanding.
- 4.11. In order to facilitate HGV access to the building together with areas for turning and reversing for the vehicles to be loaded, an additional area of hardstanding has been constructed to the west of the building, which links to the existing farm access track prior to exiting the site.
- 4.12. The area of hardstanding around the building now measures at 2,800m². Whilst this is a smaller figure than that approved, this is due to an area to the east of the building measuring 985m² remaining in agricultural use as part of the cattle yard. The development has resulted in an increase of 725m² of hardstanding (i.e., 2,800 + 985 – 3,060) although it should also be acknowledged that prior to the development the land was used for external agricultural storage and was not open grassland.
- 4.13. The hardstanding drains into the adjacent field which is under the ownership of the applicant, and as such does not have any flood risk implications.

5. Planning Policy Framework

- 5.1. This section identifies the key relevant planning matters contained within the Development Plan and other material planning considerations pertinent to the determination of the planning application.
- 5.2. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that all planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The current adopted Development Plan for Wokingham relevant to the site consists of the Core Strategy (2010) and the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014).
- 5.3. The Council has been preparing a Local Plan Update which was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in February 2025. Part 1 examination hearings took place in November 2025 with Part 2 hearings commencing in March 2026. As policies within this plan have not yet been subject to examination it is not considered that they should be given any more than limited weight at this stage, although relevant policies can be referenced where these may be indicative of a direction of travel that is relevant to the development.
- 5.4. However, the adopted Development Plan retains primacy in respect of the assessment of these proposals at this stage, although emerging policy may have relevant to the development particularly if there is a proposed change in policy that may affect the assessment. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is also a material consideration in the determination of the planning application.
- 5.5. The site is within the parish of St Nicholas Hurst, which does not have a made or emerging Neighbourhood Plan that would be material to the assessment of the development.
- 5.6. The policies and sections of the adopted and emerging Development Plan documents and the NPPF that are considered relevant to the development are set out below.

Core Strategy

- 5.7. The Core Strategy was adopted in January 2010 and provides the strategic planning policy framework for Wokingham until 2026. It contains the spatial vision and policies to promote sustainable development in the Borough and guide planning decisions.
- 5.8. From the policies map that sits alongside the Core Strategy it can be seen that the application site lies outside the settlement boundary. The site is not allocated for residential or any other form of development. It is therefore regarded as 'countryside' in planning policy terms.
- 5.9. The policies map also shows that the site is not located within a Conservation Area, and there are no landscape, ecology or other heritage designations that directly affect the site. The site is located within Flood Zone 1 (the zone with the lowest probability of flooding).

5.10. **Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development)** sets a number of over-arching principles regarding development proposals in the Borough. Planning Permission will be granted for development proposals that:

- *Maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment.*
- *Ensure the provision of adequate drainage.*
- *Avoid areas of best and most versatile agricultural land.*
- *Avoid areas where pollution (including noise) may impact the amenity of future occupants.*
- *Avoid increasing (and where possible reduce) risks of or from all forms of flooding (including groundwater).*
- *Provide attractive, functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable schemes.*
- *Demonstrate how they support opportunities for reducing the need to travel, particularly by private car in line with CP6.*

5.11. The supporting text to the policy highlights that development should enhance the overall sustainability of the area through minimising impact on the environment. It is important that proposals do not harm this or adversely affect the quality of life of residents, workers and visitors.

5.12. **Policy CP3 (General Principles of Development)** sets a number of general principles for development which proposals are expected to follow. The following list sets out those considered relevant to the development. Planning permission will be granted for proposals that:

- *Are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life.*
- *Provide a functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable scheme.*
- *Have no detrimental impact upon important ecological, heritage, landscape (including river valleys) or geological features or water courses.*
- *Use the full potential of the site and contribute to the support for complementary facilities and uses.*
- *Contribute to a sense of place in the buildings and places themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings (especially existing dwellings) including the use of appropriate landscaping.*

- ***Provide for a framework of open space in secure community use achieving at least 4.65ha/1,000 population provision together with recreational/sporting facilities in addition to private amenity space.***

5.13. **Policy CP9 (Scale and Location of Development Proposals)** states that the scale of development proposals in the Borough must reflect the existing or proposed levels of facilities and services at or in the location.

5.14. **Policy CP11 (Proposals outside Development Limits)** states that in order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside the development limits will not normally be permitted. A list of exceptions is given, of which the following are relevant to the proposals:

'1) 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 if, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and

2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and

3) It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement..."

5.15. The supporting text to the policy sets out that *"Restricting development outside of development limits also helps protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the borough's environment...Preventing the proliferation of development away from existing development limits is important, as they are not generally well located for existing services and facilities. Proposals for development, which would be an increase over what currently exists (outside development limits) are likely to lead to increased use of the private car as they are poorly served by other transport modes..."*

Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDD)

5.16. The MDD was adopted in February 2014, building on the WCS and including more detailed policies for development in the Borough. The following policies are considered relevant to the consideration of this application.

5.17. **Policy CC09 (Development and Flood Risk)** states that all sources of flood risk, including historic flooding, must be taken into account at all stages and to the appropriate degree at all levels in the planning application process to avoid inappropriate development in all areas at risk of flooding. Development proposals in Flood Zones 2 and 3 must take into account the vulnerability of the development. New development in areas of flood risk will be supported where it can be demonstrated that the development will be safe for its lifetime, taking into account the vulnerability of its users, not increase flood risk in any form elsewhere and, where possible, reduce flood risk overall and incorporate flood resilient and resistant measures into

the design. A flood risk assessment is required for proposals in areas of known historic flooding.

- 5.18. **Policy TB21 (Landscape Character)** states that proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment. Proposals shall retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

Emerging Local Plan Update

- 5.19. **Draft Policy SS2 (Spatial Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy)** includes descriptions of the type of development expected within of all four tiers of the settlement hierarchy (Major Settlement, Modest Settlement, Minor Settlement and Countryside). In respect of Countryside, it is stated:

"The countryside is defined as the area beyond the settlements defined in the settlement hierarchy. Except for the specific allocations identified in this plan, the countryside is not a location where additional development is planned, although limited types of development to support local needs and the rural economy will be supported in accordance with Policy H4 and Policy H5."

- 5.20. Policies H4 and H5 relate to residential development and are not relevant to this proposal.

- 5.21. **Draft Policy SS5 (Development in the Countryside)** sets out that the countryside will be recognised for its intrinsic character and beauty, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services, in accordance with national policy. Development proposals in the countryside will in general only be supported for certain types of development which include:

"c) Development which supports the rural economy and equestrian uses in accordance with Policy ER3: Supporting the rural economy and Policy DH7: Equestrian Development."

- 5.22. All development proposals in the countryside must take a landscape led approach to development in accordance with Policy NE5: Landscape and design and, where applicable:

"a) Contribute to and enhance the local, natural and historic environment;

b) Be of a scale, nature and location within the countryside that is appropriate with regard to its use;

c) Be sited and designed to minimise visual impact;

d) Not lead to the physical, visual or perceived coalescence of existing settlements either individually or cumulatively;

e) Not lead to isolated new dwellings;

f) Not lead to the need for additional new buildings;

g) Maximise opportunities to make the location more sustainable;

h) Have no unacceptable adverse impacts on highway safety or have a severe residual cumulative impact on network capacity; and

i) Maximise opportunities to improve public access to the countryside.

5.23. **Draft Policy ER3 (Supporting the rural economy)** states that development proposals that contribute towards supporting a prosperous rural economy will be encouraged. Development proposals for economic development in the countryside will only be supported where:

“a) There is a genuine need to support an existing or new rural business or enterprise;

b) The scale and nature of the proposed development is appropriate to its rural location;

c) The reuse or adaption of existing buildings has been incorporated into the development, and where appropriate buildings which are derelict or offer no opportunity for beneficial use have been removed;

d) Any conversions, buildings or structures are of a high quality design that is of a scale which is proportionate to its use and reflects and respects the character of the rural setting;

e) There would be no significant adverse impacts to the amenity of nearby residents, including through odour, noise, lighting or operations;

f) Environmental improvements are incorporated into the design of the development, for example additional landscaping and biodiversity enhancements; and

g) Any traffic generated would not be inappropriate for the rural road network.”

5.24. Policy ER3 also contains a section of farm diversification, stating:

“Development proposals for farm diversification must be accompanied by a comprehensive whole farm diversification plan, which establishes how the proposed changes will assist in retaining the viability of a farm and its agricultural enterprise.”

5.25. **Draft Policy NE5 (Landscape and Design)** states that development proposals will be supported where they adopt a landscape led approach, and should respond to the distinctive characters set out in the Landscape Character Assessments, which provide an understanding of valued characteristics, features and quality of local landscape character areas.

NPPF

- 5.26. **Paragraph 88** supports a prosperous rural economy, supporting the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, and the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. **Paragraph 89** acknowledges that planning decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations not well served by Public Transport.
- 5.27. **Paragraph 116** states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.
- 5.28. **Paragraph 170** states that inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk. Where development is necessary in such areas, the development should be made safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere.
- 5.29. **Paragraph 181** states that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere. Site specific flood risk assessments should support applications where appropriate. These should be provided for all development in Flood Zones 2 and 3, and in Flood Zone 1 for proposals involving sites of 1 hectare or more.
- 5.30. **Paragraph 187(b) and (d)** state that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and by minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity.

6. Assessment

- 6.1. This section of the Planning Statement sets out the main planning considerations for this application. The main issues for consideration are considered to be the principle of the development in the countryside, the impact of the development on the character and appearance of the area and the landscape, the impact of the development on highway safety and flood risk. Ecological, heritage, and residential amenity effects also need to be considered.

Principle of the Development

- 6.2. Core Strategy Policy CP11 concerns proposals outside the development limits (including the countryside) and as such is relevant to the determination of proposals at Hatch Gate Farm. Policy CP11 relates to development proposals specifically outside the development limits, including the countryside. The policy restricts development in such areas unless it comprises a sustainable rural or recreational enterprise. Such development can be *'contained within suitably located buildings that are appropriate for conversion.'*
- 6.3. The proposed B8 use is not strictly a rural or recreational enterprise, and as such it is not strictly in accordance with Policy CP11 in this regard. Neither does the farm diversification relate to the wider agricultural use of the site in respect of Policy CP11 requiring proposals outside the development limits to contribute to rural enterprises within the Borough, and we are not making a case that the development is necessary to keep Hatch Gate Farm financially viable.
- 6.4. What is proposed makes an efficient and complementary use of a redundant, but still relatively modern, agricultural building that is no longer required for its originally intended purpose. As has been set out, the building was originally proposed, designed and implemented primarily for the purposes of lambing, and was used as such for the lambing seasons in 2022, 2023 and 2024. However, the lambs were mainly kept off-site on land leased by the applicants, and in 2025 these tenancies were ended. The applicants therefore no longer had access to the land they used for lambing, nor is any other land available locally for this purpose.
- 6.5. As such there has been a necessary drastic downscaling in the lambing operation at Hatch Gate Farm, the result of which is then building is no longer required for lambing. In addition, the cattle operation has also been downscaled – although not to the same extent – the result of which is that the building is no longer required for the storage of feed. As a result of this, the building – which was designed for the purpose of lambing – is redundant in respect of the agricultural business.
- 6.6. Demolishing the building – which was only constructed in 2021 – would not be cost effective for the business, nor is leaving it vacant on the land. As such, the decision was taken to lease the building out to an alternative occupier as a way of diversifying the agricultural business and making it more financially resilient by providing an alternative income stream.

- 6.7. Whilst the proposal is linked to the wider agricultural use in the sense that it is operated by the applicant as part of their business, and it provides a viable use for the building now that the lambing use has ceased, we are not attempting to demonstrate that either the B8 use is a rural enterprise, nor that the applicant is reliant on this use for the viability of the wider business (although it clearly assists the financial resilience of the agricultural business). This is because Paragraph 88 of the NPPF is clear in its support for the sustainable growth and expansion of **all types of business** in rural areas and does not restrict this to rural businesses in the way that Policy CP11 does. Paragraph 88 is so clear in its support for the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses which suggests that diversifying away from rural businesses is what is supported by the policy.
- 6.8. As such, it is our view that Policy CP11 is not consistent with the NPPF in the context of this proposal as it places restrictions on what are considered appropriate uses in the countryside that are not reflected in national policy, nor does national policy require any sort of viability exercise in order to justify farm diversification proposals. As per Paragraph 232 of the NPPF, the conflict with Policy CP11(1) on the basis of this not being a rural enterprise should be given minimal weight.
- 6.9. The support for all types of businesses in rural areas from national policy means that it is not necessary for the proposed use to be related to the agricultural use, nor is it necessary to demonstrate that the development is necessary to keep Hatch Gate Farm financially viable. The support within the NPPF for the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas through the conversion of buildings and for the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses and on sites beyond existing settlements that is given by Paragraphs 88 and 89 of the NPPF is sufficient to determine that the proposed use is acceptable in the countryside as a matter of principle.
- 6.10. It is acknowledged that the suitability and location of the existing building is also relevant to this consideration and will be assessed below, the purpose of this section is to address the principle of the proposed use in a countryside location.
- 6.11. Our assessment is consistent with that taken by a Planning Inspector at a site within the Borough at Newlands Farm, and this appeal decision¹ has been included at Appendix 1. Whilst this site is within a different part of the Borough, it has the same countryside designation as Hatch Gate Farm. This proposal was for the change of use of agricultural buildings to General Industrial Use under Use Class B2, with the erection of two additional constructions.
- 6.12. Paragraph 16 of this appeal decision highlighted that it was common ground that the uses would not be for a rural or recreational enterprise which contributed to a conclusion at Paragraph 18 that the appeal site would not be suitable for the development proposed, having regard to the locational and accessibility requirements of the Core Strategy, including Policy CP11. However, Paragraph 19 then highlighted the support for a prosperous rural economy

¹ Reference APP/X0360/W/20/3252447

within Paragraphs 83 and 84 of the NPPF² and Paragraph 20 acknowledges that that NPPF *'establishes a more sympathetic approach to the location of economic activities in rural areas'* and finds that the NPPF lends considerable support to the proposal. Substantial weight is attached to this matter, which is consistent with our view above. Paragraph 21 concludes that material considerations indicate a decision contrary to the development plan.

- 6.13. This appeal decision is a significant material consideration that should be afforded substantial weight in the consideration of the current proposals. Although it was for a different use than that currently proposed, B2 uses would have potentially considerably more impact than the B8 use that is proposed and were in no way related to the previous agricultural use of the buildings. As with the current proposals, this development utilised redundant agricultural buildings and also proposed two sizeable extensions, and the development as a whole is clearly a more substantial and intense operation than what is proposed at Hatch Gate Farm. In allowing this appeal, no reference was made to any requirement for it to be demonstrated that the development was necessary to keep Newlands Farm financially viable, even though the wider site remains in agricultural use.
- 6.14. Taking all of the above into account, it is concluded that the proposed change of use of a previous agricultural building to Use Class B8 is appropriate development within the countryside. Whilst it may not be a rural enterprise as is required by Policy CP11, it has previously been established that this is not a requirement of national policy therefore this element of CP11 should be given limited weight. Nor is it necessary to demonstrate that the development is required to ensure that Hatch Gate Farm remains financially viable, although the provision of an additional income stream does assist with ensuring the financial resilience of the agricultural business.
- 6.15. The accessibility of the location is also relevant in terms of the principle of the development due to the reference within Paragraph 88 to the 'sustainable growth and expansion...' and that Paragraph 89 allows for sites to meet local business needs that may be found beyond existing settlements, in locations not well served by public transport.
- 6.16. Hatch Gate Farm is outside of the settlement boundary, and although it is closely related to existing settlements at Hurst and Winnersh, employees travelling to the site will likely be reliant on private cars and by the very nature of B8 uses, there will be related HGV movements to and from the site.
- 6.17. The Newlands Farm appeal decision also assists with consideration of this matter, as in this instance the site was considered to have restricted accessibility resulting in visitors and employees relying heavily on the private car (Paragraph 17). However, Paragraph 88 (then Paragraph 84) of the NPPF was acknowledged, and the considerable support from the NPPF for such development was found to carry greater weight.

² Now Paragraphs 88 and 89

- 6.18. The proposal is therefore considered to comprise the sustainable expansion of a business in a rural area through the conversion of buildings and the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses which has string support from Paragraph 88(a) and 88(b) of the NPPF, which has been previously found to attract substantial weight. It therefore represents sustainable development in accordance with the Core Strategy and the NPPF and is therefore acceptable in principle.
- 6.19. In respect of emerging policy, Draft Policy appears to maintain the position of Policy CP11 in that support is given to rural businesses only, rather than all types of businesses as set out in the NPPF. Furthermore, the farm diversification element of the policy is far more onerous than the NPPF, effectively amounting to a financial viability exercise. It is considered that, as with Policy CP11, this policy places more restrictions on such development than the NPPF does. As the policy has not been subject to examination, limited weight should be given to the policy in any regard, however the applicant needs to make their position clear in respect of the consistency of this policy with the NPPF.

Impact on the rural character and appearance of the countryside

- 6.20. Whilst Policy CP11 is not consistent with the NPPF in terms of appropriate uses in the countryside, it also requires that proposals do not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings, and that development is located in suitably located buildings that are appropriate for conversion. Paragraph 88 of the NPPF also makes reference to business development being realised through the conversion of existing buildings.
- 6.21. The building that is the subject of the application was originally constructed as an agricultural building and was used primarily for lambing however as set out above it is no longer required for this purpose. The building was subsequently converted to accommodate a B8 storage and distribution use to ensure that the building remains utilised and cost-effective for the farm business. Given that the farming business requires the use of HGVs and involves both a large amount of storage and movement, it is not considered that the nature of the use is very different from the previous use.
- 6.22. Externally, the only change is that the elevations have been filled in to ensure that the building is suitable for the current use. The height, volume and design of the building are unchanged from that approved. Whilst this is a visual change, it is not considered that the alteration is perceptible and through the use of similar materials it retains the appearance of an agricultural building. The use is best appreciated internally, which does not have any impact on the character and appearance of the area.
- 6.23. The building is closely related to the cattle yard buildings to the east, and in itself has not resulted in any encroachment or expansion away from the original buildings. The use is situated in a suitably located building that was appropriate for conversion.
- 6.24. It is, however, acknowledged that the additional hardstanding that is required for access and turning has expanded further away from the building, however as noted above there is in fact

a reduction in hardstanding associated with the building due to some of the previously associated hardstanding being retained for agricultural use. Whilst there has been an increase in hardstanding overall, this is not considered to be excessive, taking into account the size of Harch Gate Farm and the large elements of existing hardstanding that are associated with the agricultural use, in particular within the cattle yard.

- 6.25. It is therefore considered that the development is in keeping with the character of the site as an agricultural farming business and is not overly different in its nature to the previous and established uses at the site. The development is therefore considered to be sympathetic to the character and appearance of the area and as such is in accordance with policy.

Impact on Landscape

- 6.26. The site is located within Area C2 – Hurst River Terrace, as identified by the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment. This summarises the area to be a relatively flat lowland agricultural landscape, with large arable fields and a strong connection to the river valley. A network of rural roads connects farms and small settlements. Key characteristics include a network of water features, a simple arable landscape and a regular pattern of river terrace farmsteads along the rural lanes, with many having large scale modern agricultural buildings which are prominent in the landscape.
- 6.27. The landscape is described to be in moderate condition, with the rural settlement pattern and openness of the rural landscape intact. However, there has been a loss of hedgerows and field amalgamation, linear development along roads has occurred and an increase in traffic has led to the creation of informal passing places on the rural road network, and increased disturbance due to motorway noise.
- 6.28. Key issues include the effect on trees, hedgerow loss, lack of species-rich grassland in the area due to increasingly intensive grassland management, demand for residential development, increased traffic on rural lanes, prominent large scale modern agricultural buildings and increased levels in background traffic noise in the south of the area from the M4 and A329(M). In terms of landscape strategy, the key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the open views overlooking the adjacent floodplain of the River Loddon.
- 6.29. A number of landscape guidelines are also made, which include the conservation and management of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, conserve and manage wetlands and resist the infilling of ponds and drainage ditches, maintaining and enhancing the character of rural lanes and maintaining views to the wooded backdrop of the Loddon Valley. Detracting tall or large structures should be avoided.
- 6.30. In respect of the proposed development, although the building is sizeable it is existing, and any impact on landscape character through its change of use is minimal. Furthermore, the development does not result in any loss of trees, hedgerows or require field amalgamation or the infilling of any ditches. Traffic will be discussed below; however, the development has not resulted in a significant increase in traffic over and above that associated with the agricultural use. As noted by the assessment, the site did not contain any species-rich grassland and the

area of grass where the additional hardstanding has been laid was previously intensely farmed.

- 6.31. Furthermore, it is clear from the assessment that views over the River Loddon are the key aspect to be conserved. There is no intervisibility between the site and the river, which is approximately 1.5km to the west of the site, and as such the development does not have any impact on these views. Finally, as the site is in close proximity to the A329(M), noise from the motorway is prominent at the site.
- 6.32. Although no additional landscaping has been included with the proposed development at present, the applicant is happy to install additional landscaping on the boundary to soften the impact of the proposals if this is required to make the development acceptable. Such details can be secured by a suitably worded condition.
- 6.33. As such, it is not considered that the development has had a detrimental impact on landscape character.

Residential Amenity

- 6.34. The physical changes to the site in respect of the alterations to the building and the laying of hardstanding have resulted in minimal impacts on the amenities of neighbouring residents.
- 6.35. With regards to the use itself, the only noise generating impact of a B8 use is vehicle movements, and as set out below these are very similar –both in respect of frequency and type of vehicle – to the movements associated with the previous agricultural use of the building. In any event, the number of movements associated with the use are not excessive and do not amount to an unacceptable level of noise and disturbance. If there was a concern that these could increase, the number of movements per day/week could be controlled by condition.

Traffic and Highway Safety

- 6.36. The application is accompanied by a Transport Statement Letter in respect of the proposals which has been prepared by Pegasus Group. This confirms that the previous use included approximately 12 HGV movements (24 two-way movements) per week, equating to between one and two (three to four two-way) movements per day.
- 6.37. In respect of the proposals, approximately five HGV (10 two-way) movements per day could potentially be associated with the site, equating to 35 trips per week (70 two-way). However, as set out above, in reality this is not how the operation works and the vehicle movements only regularly occur on Mondays and Fridays. If all vehicles arrived and departed the site within the same hour, which is considered very robust and unlikely to occur in reality, this would equate to one trip every six minutes on average.
- 6.38. The letter confirms that Dunt Lane is wide enough for an HGV and a car to pass, and it is estimated that it would take an HGV 22 seconds to access the site from the B3030 via Dunt

Lane. The propensity for two HGVs to meet on this short section is therefore considered to be very low. An existing access onto Dunt Lane will be used, which is considered to be suitable.

- 6.39. As such, the development would not result in a significant increase of traffic in comparison to the previous use, nor would it result in any concerns in respect of highway safety.

Ecological Impacts and BNG

- 6.40. The conversion of the building has not had any ecological impact. This is a modern building constructed in 2021 and does not contain any features that could be used as habitat.
- 6.41. The additional hard surface was laid over grassland; however, this was intensely farmed grassland that in later years was used for the storage of agricultural machinery. It was not habitat. As such, no habitat has been impacted by the proposed development, and Biodiversity Net Gain is not required.

Flooding and Drainage

- 6.42. The site is within Flood Zone 1 (the flood zone with the least risk of flooding) and the site is less than 1ha in area. A Flood Risk Assessment is therefore not required for the application. In any event, the change of use of an existing building in flood zone 1 would not result in any increase in flood risk.
- 6.43. In respect of surface water, as detailed on the below aerial photograph the area of additional hardstanding does not include any areas at risk of surface water flooding. Rainwater drains from the surface into the adjacent field to the north, which is part of the wider Hatch Gate Farm.



Heritage Impacts

- 6.44. Although the site is within relatively close proximity to listed buildings to the east and west, it is not considered that the development would result in any impact on their setting. The site is not within a Conservation Area.

Agricultural Land

- 6.45. The development does not comprise the significant development of agricultural land.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1. The application concerns the change of use of an existing former agricultural building to a use falling within Class B8 of the Use Class Order together with elevational alterations to the building and the laying of additional hardstanding. The development has already taken place and the application is retrospective.
- 7.2. Whilst the proposal does not comply with Core Strategy Policy CP11 as it is not strictly a rural enterprise, this policy is considered to be out of step with national planning policy for the reason that it places greater restrictions on what are acceptable and appropriate uses within the countryside. National policy is clear in that all types of business are appropriate in principle in rural areas, and there is no need for schemes involving farm diversification to demonstrate that the farm is reliant on them for their continued viability. These principles have been established via an appeal decision within Wokingham Borough at Newlands Farm. Conflict with Policy CP11(1) should therefore be given minimal weight.
- 7.3. The development has not resulted in an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area, the landscape or residential amenity. It has not had an ecological impact, is not within an area of flood risk and the highways and heritage impacts of the development are acceptable.
- 7.4. As such, the proposed development accords with Core Strategy Policies CP1, CP3, CP6 and CP9, MDDL Policies CCO1, CCO2, CCO3 and TB21, the Landscape Character Assessment and the NPPF. The development is also in accordance with the parts of Core Strategy Policy CP11 that are not inconsistent with the NPPF. As such, Wokingham Borough Council are respectfully requested to **approve** the application, thereby granting retrospective planning permission for the development.



APPENDIX 1: APPEAL DECISION APP/XO360/W/20/3252447



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 November 2020

by Martin Chandler BSc MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 January 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/20/3252447

Newlands Farm, New Bath Road, Twyford RG10 9RY

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Belcher Farms against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 191788, dated 1 July 2019, was refused by notice dated 14 November 2019.
 - The development proposed is retrospective change of use of buildings and land from agricultural use to general industrial use (Class B2) and erection of two additional constructions.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the change of use of buildings and land from agricultural use to general industrial use (Class B2) and erection of two additional constructions at Newlands Farm, New Bath Road, Twyford RG10 9RY, in accordance with application Ref: 191788, dated 1 July 2019 and subject to the conditions in the attached schedule.

Procedural Matters

2. In allowing the appeal, I have removed the word 'retrospective' from the description because it is not an act of development.
3. The appeal site is located within Flood Zones 2 and 3. Accordingly, planning permission was refused in part due to concerns in relation to flood risk. However, the appeal has been accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment and both the Environment Agency and the Council have since confirmed that their previous objections on this matter no longer stand. Based on the evidence before me, I have no reason to disagree with these conclusions and consequently, I have assessed the appeal on this basis.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - i) the effect of the proposal on highway safety;
 - ii) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area; and
 - iii) whether the appeal site is suitable for the development proposed, having regard to the locational and accessibility requirements of local policy.

Reasons

Highway safety

5. The original application was not accompanied by specific evidence in relation to highway matters. Accordingly, the Council's officer report and subsequent refusal reason on this matter related to a number of concerns. However, the appeal has been supplemented by a document titled 'Written Representation on Traffic and Transportation Issues' (TTI). In response, the Council have since confirmed that their concerns now relate to the following matters: parking provision; cycle parking; and specific concerns in relation to the junction between Loddon Drive and New Bath Road.
6. Having regard to parking provision, it is noted that to achieve the required 40 spaces, these would be smaller bays than required by the Council. Despite this, the suggested bays would remain usable and due to the extensive hardstanding on the site, I am satisfied that the appeal site would make suitable provision for car parking. I also note that concerns in relation to cycle parking could be resolved through the use of a suitably worded planning condition and based on the evidence before me, I have no reason to disagree.
7. The access driveway to the appeal site is located off New Bath Road, a main arterial road between Reading and Maidenhead with a 60mph speed limit. The TTI document provides detailed evidence in relation to visibility and access arrangements. It confirms that good visibility can be achieved in both directions, a matter supported by my own observations on site. Vehicle tracking drawings within the TTI also confirm that large vehicles can adequately enter and exit the site. It is noted that turning right into the site would require vehicles to enter an existing area of hatching on the road, however, no evidence has been submitted to confirm that this would be harmful to highway safety or that it would impact upon existing traffic movements.
8. The evidence submitted does not provide a specific plan showing the junction geometries or modelling for all time periods. However, no compelling evidence has been submitted to confirm why this information is necessary, or what it would add to the assessment of the appeal. In the absence of substantive evidence in relation to this point, and on the basis of the evidence that is before me, I have no reason to consider that the junction would not operate in a satisfactory and safe manner, including in relation to pedestrian movements.
9. Accordingly, for the reasons identified above, I conclude that the proposal would not harm highway safety. It would therefore comply with Policies CP1, and CP6 of the Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework, Adopted Core Strategy, Development Plan Document (2010) (CS), Policy CC07 of the Wokingham Borough Development Plan, Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014) (MDD) and Policy P3 of the Borough Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document (2012) (SPD). Taken together, these seek amongst other things, sustainable development which does not cause highway problems, and which provides appropriate parking.

Character and appearance

10. Based on the evidence before me, the buildings on the appeal site were approved for an agricultural use and as a consequence, have an agricultural

form and appearance. The proposal would introduce some additional modest built form however, this would be sympathetic in form and appearance to the existing buildings. Accordingly, I am satisfied that this element would not harm the character and appearance of the area.

11. The proposed use would not primarily be agricultural in nature and as observed on site, it introduces large elements of external storage. This includes shipping containers, skips, timber, and large vehicles. In addition, large areas of the site are given over to hardstanding for associated car parking and vehicular movements. The result of this is that the site coverage of the proposed use is more expansive, and as a consequence, visually very different to the authorised agricultural use. Despite this, through the use of palisade fencing, the storage areas are contained and generally relate well to the buildings with which they are associated.
12. As acknowledged by the Council, the appeal site is well screened from New Bath Road due to the presence of a dense belt of mature trees between the site and the adjacent highway. Accordingly, when viewed from the east, south, and west, the appeal site and its associated buildings and external storage have no effect on the character and appearance of the area.
13. The site coverage can be better appreciated when viewed from the north, particularly from Loddon Drive and the associated public footpath. However, when viewed from this area, the site is seen against the backdrop of the mature trees and the surrounding countryside. Due to the scale of the proposed use and the low-lying nature of the site coverage, in the context of the mature landscaping and established countryside, I find that the site is subordinate to the verdant surroundings. Accordingly, I am satisfied that the proposed use would not demonstrate an excessive encroachment or expansion into the countryside. Instead, it would represent a well-contained use that would not detract from the surrounding openness.
14. Consequently, I conclude that the proposal would not harm the character and appearance of the surrounding area. It would therefore accord with Policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the CS, Policies CC03 and TB21 of the MDD, and Policies RD1, NR1, NR2, NR9, NR10, NR12 and P2 of the SPD. Taken together, these seek amongst other things, sustainable development which does not lead to excessive encroachment from original buildings, and which protect landscape character.

Suitability

15. The appeal site is located beyond any settlement boundaries and consequently, it is located within the countryside. Policy CP11 relates to proposals outside development limits with an aim to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. Amongst other things, the policy requires such proposals to contribute to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough.
16. The proposal would seek to introduce a general industrial use (Use Class B2) across the site, and it is common ground between the parties that it would not be for a rural or recreational enterprise. Accordingly, in this regard, the proposed use would conflict with the requirements of Policy CP11 of the CS.

17. In relation to accessibility, based on the evidence before me, the site is located 550m from the nearest bus stop, and approximately 1km from other bus stops which offer a more frequent service. Additionally, the site is removed from other services for employees, and over 2km from the Twyford Railway Station. The combination of these distances is such that employees at the site and any visitors would be highly reliant upon the private motor vehicle for journeys to and from the site. The distance to the Railway Station would be cyclable, and I accept that such travel choices are not uncommon. However, it would introduce a barrier that could discourage use of the train, and simply because it is a journey that could be carried out on a bike, this does not result in the site being highly accessible. Accordingly, based on the evidence before me, I find that the location of the site and its restricted accessibility would result in visitors and employees relying heavily on the private motor vehicle to access the site.
18. As a consequence, having regard to the locational and accessibility requirements of the CS, I conclude that the appeal site would not be suitable for the development proposed. It would therefore fail to comply with Policies CP1, CP6, CP9 and CP11, which taken together seek amongst other things, sustainable development in the countryside, and in locations which minimise the distance people need to travel.

Planning Balance

19. The re-use of the buildings would enable the growth and expansion of businesses within the rural area with the consequence of providing employment at the site. Accordingly, the proposal would generate economic and social benefits. The Framework seeks to support a prosperous rural economy and Paragraph 83 confirms that policies should enable the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas. Paragraph 84 also confirms that policies and decisions should recognise that sites in rural areas may have to be found beyond existing settlements and in locations that are not well served by public transport.
20. Accordingly, the Framework establishes a more sympathetic approach to the location of economic activities in rural areas, acknowledging that in certain circumstances, less desirable sites from a locational point of view need not be discouraged. Despite the locational and accessibility shortcomings identified above, I find that the Framework lends considerable support to the proposal and consequently, I attach substantial weight to this matter. Moreover, having regard to the Framework, the approach within the CS is not entirely consistent with up-to-date national policy. Consequently, I find that this reduces the weight that I attach to the relevant policies in the CS and the conclusions identified above.
21. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) requires decisions to be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The support provided by the Framework is a significant material consideration to which I attach substantial weight. Accordingly, despite the reservations in relation to the location and accessibility of the appeal site, based on the evidence before me, I find that material considerations indicate a decision contrary to the development plan.

Other Matters and Conditions

22. The ongoing use runs contrary to existing conditions on the authorised use. However, the proposal seeks permission for an alternative use and consequently, I have determined it on its own merits. I also note the concerns in relation to flood risk. However, based on the evidence before me, the Environment Agency have suitably scrutinised the proposal and I have no reason to disagree with their findings.
23. The proposal will generate noise, however, in the context of the existing traffic noise and the authorised use, I have no reason to conclude that this will be to a harmful level. In addition, I have no compelling evidence before me to suggest that the proposal will increase the risk of fly-tipping. In any event, this is a matter that would be controlled outside of the planning system.
24. The proposal would result in a minor loss of agricultural land. In this regard, I note the requirements of Paragraph 170 of the Framework, but I am satisfied that the economic and other benefits of the proposal would suitably compensate for the small loss.
25. In light of my findings set out above, condition 1 is necessary to establish the approved drawings and condition 2 is necessary in the interests of reducing flood risk. Conditions 3, 4 and 5 are necessary in the interests of highway safety and to promote alternative means of travel to and from the site.
26. Condition 6 is necessary to ensure a suitable landscaping scheme and condition 7 is necessary to ensure appropriate bin storage facilities are provided across the site. Finally, condition 8 is necessary to ensure that the storage uses remain sensitive to the site.
27. Where appropriate, a trigger has been used to require information to be submitted within one month of this decision. This is because the use is ongoing and therefore the submission of necessary information should not be unduly delayed. I have also not attached a condition to control the hours of use at the site. This is because I am satisfied that the site is suitably removed from neighbouring properties so as to not cause unacceptable levels of noise.

Conclusion

28. For the reasons identified above, the appeal should be allowed and planning permission be granted.

Martin Chandler

INSPECTOR

SCHEDULE OF CONDITIONS

- 1) This permission is in respect of the unnumbered and undated Site Location Plan and the plans numbered P19-0392_02 Rev A and P19-0392_03 Rev A, dated 12 August 2019 and received by the Local Planning Authority on 3 September 2019 and the site plan numbered P19-0392_01 Rev A, dated 12 August 2019 and received on 10 September 2019. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details unless other minor variations are agreed in writing after the date of this permission and before implementation with the Local Planning Authority.
- 2) The development shall be carried out in accordance with the submitted flood risk assessment, reference 48087/4001, prepared by Stantec and dated May 2020 and drawing 48087/4001/002, Newland Farm Floodplain Storage Analysis, dated 12 May 2020. The mitigation measures shall be fully implemented within 3 months of the date of this permission and subsequently in accordance with the scheme's timing/phasing arrangements. The measures detailed above shall be retained and maintained thereafter throughout the lifetime of the development.
- 3) Within one month of the date of this planning permission, details of secure and covered bicycle storage for staff and visitors shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The cycle storage shall be implemented in accordance with such details as may be approved within one month of the date of the agreement of the cycle details and shall be permanently retained in the approved form for the parking of bicycles and used for no other purpose.
- 4) Within one month of the date of this planning permission, the parking and turning space shall be provided in accordance with the approved plans numbered P19-0392, Figure 6, dated 23 April 2020. The vehicle parking and turning space shall be retained and maintained in accordance with the approved details and shall remain available for the parking of vehicles at all times and the turning space shall not be used for any other purpose other than vehicle turning.
- 5) Within one month of the date of this planning permission, the visibility splays shown on the approved drawing number P19-0392, Figures 2 and 3, dated 20 April 2020 shall be formed and maintained cleared of any obstruction exceeding 0.6m in height at all times.
- 6) Within one month of the date of this planning permission, a scheme of landscaping enhancements along the northern and eastern boundaries of the site shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. It shall specify species, planting sizes, spacing, numbers and locations trees/shrubs to be planted as well as existing trees or shrubs.

Planting shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details in the first planting and seeding seasons following the occupation of the building(s). Any trees or plants which, within a period of 5 years from the date of the planting (or within a period of 5 years of the occupation of the buildings in the case of retained trees and shrubs) die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species or otherwise as approved in writing by the local planning authority.

- 7) Within one month of the date of this planning permission, details of bin storage facilities and collection arrangements shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The bin storage shall be permanently so-retained and used for no purpose other than the temporary storage of refuse and recyclable materials.
- 8) No materials, plant, machinery, containers or equipment shall be stored on the site outside buildings except where specified on a plan that is first submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority within one month of the date of this planning permission.

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)
Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

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