OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 25/00406/FUL Full Planning Application

Proposal: Erection of new storage building and extension to existing building to provide office accommodation

Location: The Old Camp Site Molesworth Road Old Weston

Applicant: Sundown Products Ltd

Grid Ref: 509380 277029

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

This application seeks approval for the erection of a new storage building and extension to an existing building to provide office accommodation at Sundown Products Ltd, Molesworth Road, Old Weston.

The proposed storage building would be used for the storage of straw for Sundown Products Ltd, a company who produce straw-based animal feed and bedding. The new building will provide additional covered, secure storage for the straw which is currently being stored outside, leading to unnecessary wastage due to the rain.

The new office space will provide space for approx. 10 staff employed by Sundown and will assist the business by enabling them to operate from a centralised administration and storage base.

The site is located south-west of the settlement of Old Weston and is located within Flood Zone 1. The application site is approximately 115m south of the Grade II* Listed Building of St Swithins Church, Brington Road, Old Weston.

There are no public rights of way through the site, however, several public rights of way lie within or close to the site with the closest being footpath 172/3, which runs north-south to the west of the site.

This application has been accompanied by the following documents:

- Planning Statement;
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment;
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment;
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal;
- Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment;
- BS5837:2012 Arboricultural Report;
- File Note - Priority Habitat Classification Deciduous Woodland.

Officers have scrutinised the plans and have familiarised themselves with the site and surrounding area.

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024) sets out the three objectives - economic, social and environmental - of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable

development. The NPPF 2024 at paragraph 10 provides as follows: 'So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11).'

The NPPF 2024 sets out the Government's planning policies for (amongst other things):

* delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
* building a strong, competitive economy;
* achieving well-designed, beautiful and safe places;
* conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Planning Practice Guidance and the National Design Guide 2021 are also relevant and material considerations.

For full details visit the government website: https://www.gov.uk

PLANNING POLICIES

Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 - adopted May 2019

LP1: Amount of Development
LP2: Strategy for Development
LP4: Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
LP5: Flood Risk
LP6: Waste Water Management
LP10: The Countryside
LP11: Design Context
LP12: Design Implementation
LP14: Amenity
LP15: Surface Water
LP16: Sustainable Travel
LP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
LP31: Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows
LP34: Heritage Assets and their Settings

Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and Guidance:

Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024)
Huntingdonshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document 2017
Developer Contributions SPD 2011
Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD (2022)
Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD 2017

The National Design Guide (2021)

* C1 - Understand and relate well to the site, its local and wider context
* I1 - Respond to existing local character and identity
* I2 - Well-designed, high quality and attractive
* B2 - Appropriate building types and forms
*M3 - Well-considered parking, servicing and utilities infrastructure for all users
* N3 - Support rich and varied biodiversity
* H1 - Healthy, comfortable and safe internal and external environment
* H2 - Well-related to external amenity and public spaces

* H3 - Attention to detail: storage, waste, servicing and utilities

Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

24/80286/COND - Discharge of conds 5 (Landscape Management Plan) and 7 (Biodiversity Method Statement) of 23/00392/FUL - Approved

23/00392/FUL - Erection of new storage building and associated works including access improvements and landscaping - Approved.

18/02543/FUL - Part retrospective change of use of agricultural buildings to storage of animal bedding and feed (Class B8) - Approved.

1101549DEMDET - Demolition of old agricultural building - Approved.

1100583FUL - Extension to existing store to be used for hay, machinery and livestock - Approved.

1000730FUL - Extension to existing grain store and new grain drying equipment - Approved.

CONSULTATIONS

Old Weston Parish Council - No comments received

Cambridgeshire County Council Highway Authority - No objections to the proposal, following the receipt of additional information, subject to the imposition of conditions on any planning permission granted.

Huntingdonshire District Council Environmental Health - No objection to the proposal in regard to environmental health matters.

Huntingdonshire District Council Arboricultural Officer - Objects to the proposed development, noting that it is not essential, does not take account of the trees on site, could be located elsewhere and is against the applicable planning policies.

Huntingdonshire District Council Ecology Officer - Objects to the application. The baseline habitat has been undervalued. The woodland proposed to be felled was identified as Lowland mixed deciduous (a priority habitat under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006) in 23/00392/FUL but has not been included in the BNG Metric submitted with this application, misidentifying it as other woodland: broadleaved which has a lower unit value. As such the development fails to deliver a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain.

A File Note was submitted to address these comments, however, the Ecology Officer has responded maintaining the objection. Whilst satisfactory evidence has been provided that the baseline habitat is other woodland, broadleaved, the applicant hasn't followed the Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy by doing everything possible to first avoid impacts entirely by appropriate design and location selection as required by the NPPF, LP30 of Huntingdonshire' Local Plan to 2036, and BNG good practice principles. Degradation not in accordance with a planning permission has occurred since 01/2020 but has not been accounted for in the baseline and accordingly the habitat enhancement and creation proposals would not provide a 10% uplift. The development therefore fails to comply with Paragraph 6 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and fails to delivers a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain in accordance with Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021).

Huntingdonshire District Council Conservation Officer - No objection. There are no heritage Asses adjacent to the site.

REPRESENTATIONS

Two letters of objection were received during the course of the application. The concerns raised have been summarised below:

- Site/location plan incorrect and misleading
- Disproportionate scale of building and increased visibility of building
- Highway safety - increased vehicle movements
- Loss of trees.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

When determining planning applications, it is necessary to establish what weight should be given to each plan's policies in order to come to a decision. The following legislation, government policy and guidance outline how this should be done.

As set out within the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (Section 38(6)) and the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (Section 70(2)) in dealing with planning applications the Local Planning Authority shall have regard to have provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations. This is reiterated within paragraph 48 of the NPPF (2024). The development plan is defined in Section 38(3)(b) of the 2004 Act as "the development plan documents (taken as a whole) that have been adopted or approved in that area".

In Huntingdonshire the Development Plan consists of:

o Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (2019)
o Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2021)
o Various Neighbourhood Plans

The statutory term 'material considerations' has been broadly construed to include any consideration relevant in the circumstances which bears on the use or development of the land: Cala Homes (South) Ltd v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government & Anor [2011] EWHC 97 (Admin); [2011] 1 P. & C.R. 22, per Lindblom J. Whilst accepting that the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the Development Plan, paragraph 2 confirms that it is a material consideration and significant weight is given to this in determining applications.

The main issues to consider are:

o The Principle of Development
o Design, Visual Amenity and Impact Upon the Character of the Area
o Residential Amenity
o Highway Safety
o Flood Risk and Surface Water
o Biodiversity
o Impact on Trees
o Archaeology

*The Principle of the Development

Policy LP2 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (the Local Plan) sets out the overarching development strategy for Huntingdonshire through the plan period. The main objectives are:

- Concentrate development in locations which provide, or have the potential to provide, the most comprehensive range of services and facilities;
- Direct substantial new development to two strategic expansion locations of sufficient scale to form successful, functioning new communities;
- Provide opportunities for communities to achieve local development aspirations for housing, employment, commercial or community related schemes;
- Support a thriving rural economy;
- Protect the character of existing settlements and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the surrounding countryside;
- Conserve and enhance the historic environment; and
- Provide complementary green infrastructure enhancement and provision to balance recreational and biodiversity needs and to support climate change adaptation.

The site is located outside of any built-up area and is therefore classified as countryside land in accordance with the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036. As such, Policy LP10 (The Countryside) is relevant.

Policy LP10 states that development in the countryside will be restricted to the limited and specific opportunities as provided for in other policies of the Local Plan. This application seeks approval for the erection of a new storage building and the extension to an existing building to provide office accommodation at Sundown Products Ltd, Molesworth Road, Old Weston.

Given the proposal seeks approval for the expansion of an existing rural business (production of straw-based animal feed and bedding), Policy LP19 (Rural Economy) is considered to provide an opportunity for development in a countryside location.

Policy LP19 states that a proposal for the expansion of an established business within its existing operational site will be supported. As the proposal would be within the existing operational site, the Local Planning Authority are satisfied that the proposed development would be in accordance with Policy LP19 in this regard.

Policy LP10 goes on to state that all development in the countryside must
(a) seek to use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value;
(b) recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; and
(c) not give rise to noise, odour, obtrusive light or other impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.

The existing land that is the subject of this application is classified as Grade 2 agricultural land (Very Good). Some 98% of the district comprises land within Grades 1 to 3, with 15% being Grade 1 and an estimated 77% of land falling within the definition of best and most versatile land.

Policy LP10 clarifies that the best and most versatile land should be avoided where possible. Given there is a limited supply of land of lower grades in the district and the site is on Grade 2 agricultural land, it is considered that the proposed development does not represent an unacceptable loss of agricultural land and any harm that results is very limited.

As discussed in following sections of this report, the Local Planning Authority are satisfied that the proposed development complies with criterion (c) of Policy LP10 of the adopted Local Plan, subject to the imposition of conditions. However, given the unjustified loss of a significant number of mature trees within an established woodland, the proposal is not considered to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and therefore, the proposed development would be contrary to Policy LP10 in this instance.

As such, the proposal is considered to be an unacceptable form of development in a countryside location and therefore, the principle of development in this location is not considered to be acceptable in this instance.

*Design, Visual Amenity and Impact Upon the Character of the Area

The Local Planning Authority is required to ensure that special regard is given to preserving the listed buildings and their settings in relation to Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This is also reflected in Policy LP34 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Policy LP11 of the Local Plan states that a proposal will be supported where it is demonstrated that it responds positively to its context. Policy LP12 states that new development will be expected to be well designed and that a proposal will be supported where it can be demonstrated that it contributes positively to the area's character and identity and successfully integrates with adjoining buildings and landscape. This is also reflected in Policy LP10 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036, the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).

This application seeks approval for the erection of a new storage building and the extension to an existing building to provide office accommodation at Sundown Products Ltd, Molesworth Road, Old Weston. The application site is in close proximity to the Grade II* Listed Building of St Swithins Church, Brington Road, Old Weston.

The proposed storage building would be of a gable-end design, measure 48.7m by 25.4m with an eaves height of 11.2m and a ridge height of 13.7m and would be constructed using matching materials to the existing adjacent building (juniper green steel profile box cladding and natural grey fibre cement roof sheets).

The proposed storage building would be directly adjacent to the storage building recently constructed and approved under planning permission 23/00392/FUL and would be roughly the same dimensions - except for an additional 5.7m in length. The design and appearance of the proposed storage building would match the existing and is therefore considered to be acceptable. While it is noted that the scale of the storage building would be greater than that of the existing, the proposal would be well-related to existing structures on the site and is considered to be commensurate to the scale of the application site.

It is noted that the proposal would result in the loss of a significant number of mature trees to accommodate the proposed storage building. Existing, mature trees between the proposed storage building and the public highway of Molesworth Road would, however, be retained. While the trees are deciduous and the proposal would be visible from the public highway of Moleworth Road, there is a set-back distance of approximately 12.3m and this is not considered uncommon given the countryside location. The use of neutral building colours will help to reduce the visual impact of the development.

The proposed office extension to the existing barn would be of a lean-to design and measure approximately 6.2m in width, 18.3m in length with an eaves height of 5m with the ridge extending to the eaves of the existing building (approximately 6.8m).

The proposed office extension would square-off the existing barn in a matching gable-end design and is considered to be a subservient addition to the main building. Furthermore, the proposed extension would be located on the south-side of the existing building where it would not be visible from any public vantage points, nor be visually prominent.

The proposed extension would be constructed using metal panel walls, corrugated metal sheeting roof and aluminium, double-glazed windows. While the proposed finishing materials would not match those of the existing building, given the proposed use of the extension (office), it would be unreasonable to require the finishing materials to match those of the existing storage building.

Due to the distance between the proposed development and the Grade II* Listed Building, none of the proposed development exceeding the height of existing buildings on site and limited intervisibility due to existing trees, the Local Planning Authority are satisfied that the proposal would not result in harm to the setting of the nearby Listed Building.

The site is located within the Northern Wolds Character Area as defined by the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD (2022). The application has been accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).

The LVA states that the landscape character of the area has a Medium Value and Medium Sensitivity to change and the proposed new shed would result in no noticeable deterioration to the adjacent landscape area and make negligible difference to adjacent character areas. The LVIA concludes that the landscape effects overall are 'Neutral to Slight Adverse' with the existing buildings, as well as the proposed building being moderately well contained. The landscape proposals seek to connect the development with the surrounding area and screen the proposal and include new native boundary planting as required under consent 23/00392/FUL, an area of new native woodland adjacent to the B660 and the management of the existing woodland.

However, as previously noted, the proposal would result in the loss of a significant number of mature trees within the established woodland to accommodate the proposed storage building. The existing trees offer a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the site, streetscene of Moleworth Road and the wider countryside and their loss is considered to result in visual harm.
As such, the proposed development is considered to be contrary to Policies LP10, LP11 and LP12 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036, the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

*Residential Amenity

Policy LP14 of the Local Plan to 2036 states a proposal will be supported where a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of the proposed development and maintained for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings.

Given the rural location of the site and the distance to the closest neighbouring residential properties, the proposal is not considered to result in any detrimental impacts on residential amenities.

As such, the proposal is considered to be acceptable with regard to its impact on residential amenity and therefore accords with Policy LP14 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036, the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework in this regard.

*Highway Safety

Policies LP16 and LP17 of the Local Plan to 2036 seeks to ensure that new development incorporates appropriate space for vehicle movements, facilitates access for emergency vehicles and service vehicles and incorporates adequate parking for vehicles and cycles.
The proposed development would be accessed via the existing vehicular access off Molesworth Road. Following receipt of additional information during the course of the application to include access improvement works (in line with those approved under planning permission 23/00392/FUL including a 15m radius kerb), the Local Planning Authority are satisfied the access is suitable for the proposed development.

As a result of the proposal, the number of full-time employees at the site would increase by ten. The submitted site plan shows 11 off-street car parking spaces to be provided as part of this application. It is worth noting that existing off-street car parking spaces have not been shown on the plans. The Local Planning Authority are satisfied that there is adequate space within the site to

provide appropriate off-street car parking and a condition would be imposed on any planning permission granted to secure site wide off-street car parking - both for existing employees and those created by the current proposal.

As such, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of its impact on highway safety and therefore accords with Policy LP17 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and Section 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

*Flood Risk

The site is at the lowest risk of flooding according to the Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2024 and Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning (Flood Zone 1) and the proposal is for minor development. Accordingly the sequential and exceptions tests for flooding nor the submission of a flood risk assessment are considered necessary in this instance in accordance with the NPPF and NPPG.

Given the low flood risk and minor scale of development, officers are satisfied that full details of the surface and foul water drainage can be secured as part of building regulations and other relevant legislative requirements in this instance.

As such, the proposal is considered to be acceptable with regard to its impact on both flood risk and surface water and therefore accords with Policies LP5, LP6 and LP15 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and Section 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

*Biodiversity

Paragraph 187 of the NPPF (2024) states planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. Policy LP30 of the Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity have been investigated and ensure no net loss in biodiversity and provide a net gain where possible, through the planned retention, enhancement and creation of habitats and wildlife features, appropriate to the scale, type, and location of development.

This application has been accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA). The submitted PEA concludes that the proposal would result in the loss of 0.045ha of woodland habitat and potentially impact bats, birds and Great Crested Newts. The PEA includes recommendation measures, including a precautionary working method, bird and bat boxes, and the creation of hibernacula and log piles to provide further suitable habitat for species which the Local Planning Authority consider to be adequate in this instance. Conditions would be imposed on any planning permission granted to secure specific details and ensure development is carried out in accordance with the recommendations.

There are 2 ESPL's for Great Crested Newts within 2km of the site located 600m and 800m north-east of the site. There are also four ponds within 500m of the site which are considered connected to the site. The woodland on site can provide suitable foraging and refuge habitat for amphibians, however, due to the size and presence of similar woodland habitat in the vicinity, the site is not assessed to provide a significant resource for amphibians. Previous great crested newt surveys found no presence within 500m of the site. The proposal is likely to result in the loss or significant disturbance of 0.045 ha of suitable great crested newt habitat. This is below the 0.5ha threshold and therefore it is considered that a License is not required and suitable mitigation through the submission of a robust method statement can be conditioned.

As well as the above (and separate from the requirements of LP30) qualifying new development is subject to Biodiversity Net Gain legislation pursuant to the Environment Act 2021. This means that

a 10% statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) would be required, following the hierarchy of onsite provision; mixture of on-site and off-site provision; and the last resort of statutory biodiversity credits unless it can be demonstrated that the development would be exempt.

The application has been accompanied by an assessment and metric which concludes that as a result of off-site habitat woodland planting, the proposal would result in a biodiversity net gain of 10.18%.

Huntingdonshire District Council's Ecology Officer has been consulted on the application and considers that whilst the presence of dead and dying trees may be undesirable in a highly manicured urban environment, their presence is hugely beneficial to a woodland ecosystem, especially a former plantation. They provide habitats for niches for amphibians, small mammals, fungi, lichens, mosses, and invertebrates (e.g., beetles, wood-boring insects), holes and cavities as nesting sites for woodpeckers, owls, and bats, improves soil structure and fertility, supporting regeneration of understory plants and structural diversity. Some of these will fall naturally, opening up the canopy, adding additional age classes of trees and open spaces for ground flora.

The BNG condition assessment reflects this with habitat condition scoring more highly the greater the percentage of survey plots containing deadwood. This is recognised by the submitted BNG baseline and enhancement condition assessments (P. 20 and 22, BNG Assessment) which propose an increased condition score partly on the basis of higher levels of retained deadwood, highlighting its value. As such, this does not constitute sufficient reason to fell the trees, but reinforces the opposite, that they are of high value to the woodland, they will increase in value as they age and should be retained along with the rest of the woodland.

For this reason, the proposed woodland enhancement criteria A, J and L would all occur within the natural process of woodland regeneration, and enhancement measures would fail to provide additionality (where proposed conservation outcomes are demonstrably new and additional and would not have resulted without intervention) within the 30 period. The woodland would reach a good condition in the BNG condition assessment regardless of management intervention. Enhancements under BNG must provide additionality in line with good practice guidelines.

Degradation not in accordance with a planning permission has occurred since 01/2020 but has not been accounted for in the baseline and accordingly the habitat enhancement and creation proposals would not provide a 10% uplift. The development therefore fails to comply with Paragraph 6 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and fails to delivers a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain in accordance with Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021).

Therefore the application doesn't follow the Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy by doing everything possible to first avoid impacts entirely by appropriate design and location selection as required by the NPPF, LP30 of Huntingdonshire' Local Plan to 2036, and BNG good practice principles.

The submitted Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment also does not appear to make reference to the office extension. The description of the proposal only refers to the erection of a new straw shed (referred to as "the proposed development") and under Appendix 4 the Post Development Habitat Plan doesn't show the office extension as 'Building'. Accordingly it is not considered to accurately reflect the full proposal.

In the absence of an accurate biodiversity matrix, that takes into account the baseline biodiversity value prior to site clearance, the application fails to demonstrate the baseline biodiversity has been correctly assessed in accordance with Paragraph 6 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and that a 10% biodiversity net gain can be achieved. Consequently, the application is contrary to Local Plan Policy LP30 and Section 15 of the NPPF.

*Impact on Trees

Policy LP31 of the adopted Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 states that a proposal will only be supported where it seeks to conserve and enhance any existing tree, woodland, hedge or hedgerow of value that would be affected by the proposed development. Loss, threat or damage to any tree, woodland, hedge or hedgerow of visual, heritage or nature conservation value will only be acceptable where it is addressed firstly by seeking to avoid the impact, then to minimise the impact and finally where appropriate to including mitigation measures; or there are sound arboricultural reasons to support the proposal.

The site is a group of agricultural buildings located within a small copse of trees. The proposal will require the removal of a number of trees from the site to facilitate the proposed buildings.

Given the number of trees within the application site and the number of trees to be removed as a result of the proposed development, an Arboricultural Impact Assessment and a BS5837:2012 Report have been submitted.

The submitted report concludes that the proposal would result in the loss of three Field Maple trees, four Oak trees, 17 Corsican Pine trees, 19 Ash trees and eight Sycamore trees - totalling the loss of 51 mature trees. The existing woodland has been established for at least 35 years and comprises a good diversity of trees that are of visual and nature conservation value.

The tree survey concludes that the trees are all 'Category B' trees which should be retained wherever possible in planning considerations. The applicant has stated that they are of poor form, and that there are a number of dead or dying trees within the group, however the Arboricultural Officer has argued that this is not the case. A number of dead trees would be perfectly normal for a woodland as less healthy trees decline, and gaps in the crown are filled by surrounding trees. The Tree Survey states that the trees are all in 'fair' structural condition and vitality.

The Arboricultural Officer has also queried why the trees have a reduced life expectancy of 20 years as all of the species listed other than Ash will have a significantly longer lifespan than that, so it appears the applicant is trying to downgrade the trees under consideration. It is also considered that the Tree Survey does not provide any in-depth information regarding the condition of the individual trees, just grouped information and guesstimated average Stem Diameters.

In addition, the tree report doesn't appear to include the office extension. The aerial plan in Section 5 only shows the proposed build as the yellow rectangle of the proposed storage building and does not include the office extension. It is therefore not clear whether the proposed car parking shown on the Site Plan involves the removal of additional trees to those shown in the report.

Accordingly, the application does not include adequate justification for the loss of a significant number of mature trees, simply noting that the woodland is of a plantation form. While it is noted that replacement trees are proposed off-site to the north-east to compensate for the loss, the loss of the existing, mature trees is not considered to be justified and would not be in accordance with Policy LP31 of the adopted Local Plan.

Overall, the proposed development would result in the unjustified loss of a significant number of mature trees within the established woodland. As such, the proposed development is considered to be contrary to Policy LP31 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and Section 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

* Archaeology

Part of the application area lies within the boundary of a former WWII airfield which once contained the quarters for officers, airmen, sergeants and barracks blocks. There were originally five Nissen Huts recorded here, 2 of which have subsequently been removed, the remaining 3 lie to the west

of the existing storage building. There is therefore a potential for discovering further buildings or other remains related to activity from this period.

To the immediate west of the application site are the remains of a deserted settlement thought to be Late Saxon/ Early Medieval in date. Further evidence of medieval activity lies to the north of the site in the form of the 13th century grade II* listed church of St Swithins and various pottery findspots and further evidence of deserted settlement. It is likely that deposits of a similar date may also survive within the site.

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on site as part of the previous application (23/00392/FUL) which did find some archaeology although it was of a low significance. No further comments have been received from Archaeology on this application and therefore the proposal is considered acceptable in this regard.

*Conclusion

Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

On balance, while it is recognised that the proposal would result in some public benefits by supporting an existing and established local business it is considered that the proposed development would result in the unjustified loss of a significant number of mature trees within an established woodland that would harm the beauty and character of the countryside. The application also fails to demonstrate the baseline biodiversity has been correctly assessed in accordance with Paragraph 6 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and that a 10% biodiversity net gain can be achieved. As such, the proposal is considered to be contrary to Policies LP10, LP11, LP12, LP30 and LP31 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and Sections 12 and 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework in this regard.

Taking national and local planning policies into account, and having regard for all relevant material considerations, it is concluded that the proposed development is contrary to policy and not acceptable. There are no overriding material considerations that indicate that permission should be granted in this instance. Therefore, it is recommended that the application be refused.

CONTACT OFFICER:
Enquiries about this report to **Jennifer Wallis**