OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 24/02408/FUL Full Planning Application

Proposal: Extension to an existing agricultural barn

Location: Redwood Farm Caxton Road Great Gransden

Applicant: Jamie Baker

Grid Ref: 529407 257590

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The application site is located 3km north-east of Great Gransden and 1km south-west of Caxton. The boundary between Huntingdonshire District Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council areas runs along the north and eastern perimeter of the site although the site is entirely within the Huntingdon District Council area.

The wider site at Redwood Farm has developed since the mid 1970's and comprises a pig breeding unit. Redwood Farm is approximately 9.7 hectares in size and includes a residential property, agricultural buildings and open arable land. This application relates to a small section of the site amounting to approx. 430m² (inclusive of the area for BNG).

There are no constraints directly associated with the site which is within Flood Zone 1 and but parts of it does have a 1 in 1000-year risk of surface water flooding as per the 2024 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. There are however some designated heritage assets within the wider environs and these are referenced in the proceeding sections of this report.

Planning permission was granted in 2019 to replace the pig-rearing unit structures with an entirely new piggery comprising eleven new pig houses (19/00198/FUL).

This application seeks permission for the extension of the northernmost barn, which is the grow out building. The extension would add a footprint of 14.8 metres by 15.6 metres with eaves and ridge heights to match the existing. The extension would be constructed of materials to match the existing i.e. plastic-coated sheeting in olive green for the walls and plastic-coated sheeting in goosewing grey for the roof. The extension to the gilt grow out building is required to provide a store for bagged food to be prepared before being fed to the gilts.

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

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

The National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024) (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.

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
LP10: The Countryside
LP11: Design Context
LP12: Design Implementation
LP14: Amenity
LP15: Surface Water
LP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
LP19: Rural Economy
LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
LP34: Heritage Assets and their Settings
LP37: Ground Contamination and Groundwater Pollution

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and Guidance:

Huntingdonshire Design Guide (2017)
Developer Contributions SPD (2011)
Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD (2022)
Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024)
Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD (2024)
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2021)

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

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

7600985OUT - Dwelling and pig unit - Permitted 08.11.1976.

7700190FUL - Mobile Home - Permitted 12.04.1977.

81/00792/FUL - Dwelling - Permitted 17.11.1981. 9001730OUT - Erection of a dwelling - Permitted 12.10.1992.

9500728FUL Variation of time limit condition (ref 90/1730) for the erection of an agricultural dwelling Withdrawn 15.12.1995.

95/01245/REM - Erection of a dwelling - Permitted 24.11.1995.

01/02720/FUL - Erection of an agricultural store - Permitted 15.01.2002.

0300617FUL - Extension to dwelling to provide additional first floor accommodation - Permitted 29.04.2003.

19/00198/FUL Replacement pig rearing unit with new buildings, feed mill and staff facilities building, slurry tank, surface water attenuation pond, hardstanding, landscaping, access improvements and associated infrastructure - Permitted 16.07.2019.

CONSULTATIONS

Great Gransden Parish Council recommend approval.

HDC Ecology Officer - concerns raised - further details in the proceeding sections of this report.

REPRESENTATIONS

None received at the time of determination.

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 a number of adopted neighbourhood plans, however, as stated above, there is not an adopted neighbourhood plan in place for Great Gransden. Therefore, in this case no neighbourhood plans are given weight in the determination of this application.

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:

*The principle of development
*Design, visual amenity, impact upon heritage assets
*Residential amenity
*Highway considerations
*Flood risk
*Biodiversity

*The principle of the development

The proposal is to extend an existing building for storage in connection with the pig operation on the site. The site currently operates as a pig rearing unit, which was established in the 1970's.

Policy LP10 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan states that development in the countryside will be restricted to the limited and specific opportunities as provided for in other policies of the plan. All development in the countryside must seek to use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value, recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and not give rise to noise, odour, obtrusive light or other impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.

Whilst it is acknowledged that this will result in the loss of some land classified as Grade 2 Agricultural Land it should be noted that this is the case for all of the land surrounding the established buildings. Whilst there is some land classed as Grade 3 to the east, from the submitted location plan it appears that this lies outside of the applicant's control. Furthermore, given that this relates to an extension to an existing building this does dictate its siting. It is preferable for it to remain within the group of established units as opposed to standalone. Overall, having regard to the scale of the development, the consideration of the functional use of the land for agricultural purposes in practice (given its location within the confines of the buildings) and the assessment above there is no objection to the loss of the land in this instance. Matters regarding parts b and c are discussed in further detail in the proceeding sections of this report but are considered to be acceptable for the purposes of this assessment.

One such Policy which permits the relaxation of LP10 is LP19 (Rural Economy) which details that a proposal for the expansion of an established business within its existing operational site will be supported. A rural business is one which has a legitimate reason to be located in the countryside, including but not limited to agriculture.

In this case, the submitted supporting letter details the proposed use of the building for purposes to support the rural enterprise. As such, it contributes to a prosperous rural economy in accordance with Policy LP19 and requires no further justification given its location within the established operational site.

Overall, the proposed development is considered to be essential operational development associated with the existing rural agricultural enterprise and it would contribute to a prosperous rural economy. The principle of the extension is therefore acceptable on this site and accords with Policies LP10 and LP19 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan and the NPPF, subject to addressing all other material considerations.

*Design, visual amenity, impact upon heritage assets

Policies LP11 and LP12 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan state, amongst other matters, that proposals will be supported where it is demonstrated that it responds positively to its context and has drawn inspiration from the key characteristics of its surroundings, including natural, historic and built environment, contributes positively to the character and identity of the area and successfully integrates with adjoining buildings, the routes and spaces between buildings, topography and landscape.

The proposal comprises an extension to an existing agricultural building. The site accommodates a significant number of large-scale farm buildings but the site is set well back from the highway boundary and land levels and landscaping have successfully assimilated the site into the rural environment. The proposed extension would have a modest footprint and would not be unduly prominent when viewed from adjacent vantage points. With eaves and ridge heights to match and with matching materials, the proposal would not be visually dominant or prominent.

In terms of impact on heritage assets, whilst, as detailed above there are no such constraints directly associated with the site it is acknowledged that the site is within the setting of some heritage assets. Under the application decided under reference number 19/00198/FUL (which was for a redevelopment of the site) reference were given to these, in particular to the Grade ll* Listed

St Andrews Church and Grade II Church Farmhouse (both of which lie outside of the HDC authority area). The Conservation Area has a greater degree of separation from the development site. The location of the Listed Buildings outside of HDC control does not afford a lesser degree of interest in protection of these from the LPA.

Section 66 of the Planning (LBCA) Act 1990 states that in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Para. 212 of the NPPF sets out that 'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance'.

Para. 213 states that 'Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification'

Local Plan policy LP34 aligns with the statutory provisions and NPPF advice.

In this case it should be acknowledged that no harm was considered to be caused in the wider development of the site (approved under ref 19/00198/FUL). Both of the Listed Buildings referenced are in excess of 430m north-east of the application site. Whilst this will result in a modest extension to an established building, given the setting within the existing operational site and the scale of the buildings which surround it, it is not considered that this (along with the degree of separation and other factors detailed in the preceding sections of this report) would result in any harm to the Listed Buildings and the overall impacts are considered to be neutral.

Overall, the scheme is considered acceptable in relation to design, visual amenity and heritage impacts and accords with Policies LP2, LP11, LP12 and LP34 of the Local Plan to 2036, the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the provisions of the NPPF (2024).

*Residential amenity

Policy LP14 of the Local Plan states that 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.

The proposed extension would be modest compared to the scale of the existing buildings and would be used to support the current agricultural operation. The extension would be used for storage and would not result in any undue harm to amenity. There are no nearby neighbouring properties.

Overall, having regard to the above matters, it is considered that the development would not be harmful to the residential amenities of occupants of neighbouring properties and is therefore in accordance with Policy LP14 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan.

*Highway safety and parking

The proposal comprises the erection of an extension to the group of existing buildings. It would be used for ancillary storage and would not generate a material increase in vehicular movement to and from the site or require additional parking. As such, the development is considered to accord with Policy LP17 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan.

*Flood risk

The application site lies within Flood Zone 1 as per the most recent Environment Agency Flood Risk Maps and Data. It is noted that the extension is located in an area which has a partial 1 in 1000-year risk of surface water flooding as per the 2024 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. The NPPF (2024) requires consideration to all forms of flooding (both present and in the future) and details that a sequential risk-based approach should be followed. However, in this case, the scheme relates to a non-residential extension of less than 250m² and thus below the threshold for a sequential test to be applied.

Overall, given that this is an extension to an existing building which dictates its siting, its scale and the low vulnerability classification of its use it is considered to be acceptable in respect of its approach to flooding. Matters regarding surface water will be dealt with at the building regulations stages but once again, given the reasons above alongside the permeability of the surrounding land it is not considered that significant harm will occur as a result.

Overall, the scheme is considered to be acceptable with regard to flooding and surface water matters and therefore accords with Policies LP5 and LP15 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Biodiversity

Policy LP30 if the Local Plan requires a development to ensure no net loss of biodiversity and achieve a net gain where possible. The scheme would also be subject to Biodiversity Net Gain legislation (BNG).

The application has been supported by a biodiversity checklist, a preliminary ecological appraisal and a biodiversity net gain assessment.

When the much larger site re-development occurred in 2019, this was supported by an Ecological Assessment (Green Environmental Consultants - Sept 2018). This concluded that there were ponds in 3 locations - Caxton Ponds 300m from the site, Hardwicke Farm over 300m from the site and an isolated pond some 215m to the east. Great Crested Newts (GCN's) are generally found throughout Cambridgeshire, including the two ponds furthest from the site. Habitat Suitability Indices were derived for a pond and water courses within 250m and the brook and ditch were tested for GCN DNA which were negative. As a result, GCN's were considered unlikely to be present on site at that time. This assessment also concluded that if any GCN's did use the closest pond, they would have to survive crossing a road an arable field and a watercourse running along the site boundary. Therefore, the likelihood of GCN's using the site was remote when the wider site redevelopment was approved.

A subsequent Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA) was prepared by Brown & Co to support the current application for the proposed agricultural extension to one of the buildings constructed as part of a much wider site redevelopment in 2019. The results of this sampling for GCN's indicate that this pond tested positive for breeding GCN'S. As GCN's may potentially be impacted by the proposed works, the PEA recommends that a Non-licensed Method Statement (NLMS) should be produced to discharge risks to this species. The NLMS will outline appropriate mitigation and protection measures to be employed during the project phases.

The applicants in their supporting statement set out that the required NLMS could be secured as a pre-commencement condition to any approved scheme. This will allow statutory consultees the opportunity to consider the acceptability of details of the submitted NLMS at the discharge of condition stage. This is considered to be the most appropriate course of action given that fact that a much wider site redevelopment proposal has been permitted recently in the same locality as the current extension. On this basis the proposal is considered to be acceptable regarding potential impacts on GCN's.

Further to the above, the PEA also suggests mitigation measures and advises that enhancements are suggested at section 4.3.1 of the PEA. This section of the PEA does not appear to have been provided with the application. However, notwithstanding this, it is considered that mitigation (including the NLMS) and enhancement details can be secured by way of a Biodiversity Method Statement and this can be secured by condition.

In terms of BNG, the proposals detail that a section of poor condition modified grassland will be lost due to the erection of the extension and the retained grassland will be elevated to good condition thus achieving in excess of 10% BNG in line with the legislation. Under normal circumstances the LPA would seek to condition this to secure the long-term monitoring of the enhancements. However, there is scope for the LPA to assess (for small sites) on a case-by-case basis. In this instance, whilst HDC's Ecology Officer has raised concerns regarding if this BNG can realistically be achieved and maintained (given the working environment) , on balance, given the relatively small scale of the site and level of enhancement alongside the clear benefits of the scheme (outlined in the preceding sections of this report), it is not considered necessary to implement the full force of such a condition or seek further amendments. A compliance condition will be added to secure the provision of the BNG which is considered acceptable in this instance.

Overall, subject to condition it is considered that the scheme can be realised in broad accordance with Policy LP30 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Conclusion

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

The proposed development is considered to be compliant with the relevant national and local policy as the extension is acceptable in principle, would be visually acceptable, would not be harmful to heritage assets and would not be harmful in terms of residential amenity, highway safety, flood risk or ecology.

Having regard to all relevant material considerations the proposed development is considered to comply with Policies LP2, LP5, LP10, LP11, LP12, LP14, LP15, LP19, LP30, and LP34 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and consequently, it is recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

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CONTACT OFFICER:
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