# OFFICER REPORT

**Case No:** 25/00397/FUL Full Planning Application

**Proposal:** Proposed reception building

**Location:** Wilsons Orchard Fenside Road Warboys

**Applicant:** Mr D Fabb

**Grid Ref:** 531560 281733

## DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

This application site relates to the commercial premises of Wilsons Orchard, specialising in the farming of straw, hay and in more recent year's livestock. The agricultural holding of 77 hectares includes a farmstead to the north and south of Fenside Road, Warboys.

This application relates to the agricultural compound to the south of Fenside Road which comprises three agricultural barns. The application site itself comprises of hardstanding and gravel and is accessed off an established junction to the south of Fenside Road. The site is considered to be located within the open countryside and not within the built-up area of any settlement listed in HDC's local plan. The site is bound to the north with vegetation albeit the site is not entirely screened due to variations to the vegetation density.

In regard to constraints, the application site is within Flood Zone 1 according to the latest Environment Agency Mapping and the Councils Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024). The site is at low risk from all other sources of flooding. There are no designated ecological or heritage assets within or in proximity to the application site.

The application seeks to erect a 12.2m by 5.6m single storey reception building with an eave hight of 2.5m and a ridge height of 3.25m. The proposed building is of a traditional barn design and would be constructed using a steel frame. The proposed materials include a brick plinth, timber cladding and fibre cement roof. The proposed building comprising of office space, WC facilities and meeting/reception room would provide Wilsons Orchard with an expanded business opportunity.

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

## NATIONAL GUIDANCE

The National Planning Policy Framework (12th 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 10).'

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.

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

**PLANNING POLICIES**
Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (Adopted 15/05/2019)
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
LP31: Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows
LP34: Heritage Assets and their Settings
LP37: Ground Contamination and Groundwater Pollution

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

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and Guidance:
*Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD (2017)
*Huntingdonshire Townscape and Landscape Assessment SPD (2022)
*Developer Contributions SPD (2011)
*Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024)
*Huntingdonshire Tree Guidance Note 3
*Annual Monitoring Report, regarding housing land supply

**PLANNING HISTORY**
The commercial site to the south of Fenside Road has been subject to several planning applications however, the site itself has not been subject to any previous planning applications.

15/00342/PMBPA- Prior notification of change of use agricultural building to a dwelling- Prior Approval Approved 24.04.2025

1300601FUL- Change of use of land for siting mobile home to supervise agricultural business- Permitted 26.09.2013

1200223AGDET- Erection of agricultural store for feed and crops- details not required 11.04.2012

**CONSULTATIONS**
Environmental Health Officer- No objection. Recommends the imposition of a land contamination condition should the development be permitted as this application would be for a reception building proposed to be used for groups of school children who are visiting the farm. Children are considered to be the most vulnerable group with regard to land contamination and a previous study undertaken by Demiter Environmental Ltd* identified a medium risk to transient users of Wilsons Orchard Farm.

Local Highways Authority (CCC Highways)- No objection. No significant adverse effect upon the Public Highway should result from this proposal should it gain benefit of Planning Permission.

Warboys Parish Council-No comment at the time of determination.

**REPRESENTATIONS**
One third party representation received in objection to the application. The third party raised the following matters:
* The application is misleading as the description of the site location is blank
* Proximity to the residential dwelling Long Lott Meadows

* Noise will emanate from the building causing residential amenity impacts for the occupants of Long Lott Meadows
* Privacy concerns given the building would be opposite Long Lott Meadows and the site elevation is higher than Long Lott Meadows
* Noise and lights associated with the building use and vehicle movements to and from the site would impact the recovery of occupants in Long Lott Meadows
* Noise emanating from the building and its use will affect the use and enjoyment of the rear amenity space of Long Lott Meadows
* Insufficient vehicle parking for a proposed classroom of up to 20 students. Insufficient parking could result in on street parking posing a safety risk.
* Request close board fencing to reduce noise and light impacts from the proposed development.
* No proposal for external security lighting.
* Other businesses operating from the farmstead to the north of Fenside Road operational hours are not constrained causing noise during anti-social hours.
* Farm operations as existing cause noise impacts.
* Recommends conditions are imposed to restrict operational hours on the building and its use.

One third-party representation received in support of the proposal raised thing following matters
* Would provide an asset to the local community
* A resource like the one proposed could be incredibly valuable and would provide children with rural experiences and learning opportunities.

**SUMMARY OF ISSUES**

The main matters for consideration are:

- The Principle of Development
- Design, Visual Amenity and the impact upon the Character of the Area
- Impact upon Residential Amenity
- Highways Safety, Parking Provision and Access
- Biodiversity/trees
- Flood Risk
- Other issues

*The Principle of Development

Policy LP10 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (the 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 local plan. Opportunities in the countryside are limited under Policies LP22 Local Services and Community Facilities, LP23 Tourism and Recreation, LP28 Rural Exceptions Housing, LP33 Rural Buildings and LP38 Water Related Development for which these are not applicable to this application. However, Policy LP19 Rural Economy, a policy providing specific opportunities for development in the countryside, is applicable to this application.

Policy LP19 states that proposals for business development in the countryside will only be supported where if fulfils the requirements of categories set out for new business developments and expansion of existing business developments. The policy continues to state that proposals for farm diversification will be supported where it is demonstrated that it is complementary and subsidiary to the ongoing agricultural operations of the farm business, and that it meets criteria e-h. Criteria e-h are as follows:

e. opportunities to reuse existing buildings have been fully explored; and replacement or new build are only proposed where it can be demonstrated that no suitable reuse opportunities are available;
f. any opportunities to make more efficient use of land within the existing site boundary are not suitable for the proposed use;
g. it avoids the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grade 1 to 3a) particularly Grade 1 where possible and should use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value; and
h. the scale, character and siting of the proposal will not have a detrimental impact on its immediate surroundings and the wider landscape.

The accompanying documentation states the proposed building will be used as an opportunity for farm diversification. The proposed building would offer space for small educational groups to experience the cattle on the holding and will also provide a space for customers to visit bulls for sale. Given the proposed building would be used for the more recent business arm of cattle agriculture and the main business of cultivating straw will remain, Officers are satisfied the proposal would be complementary and subsidiary to the ongoing agricultural operations of the farm business.

In regard to criteria f and g, the proposal would be sited on an existing hard surface within the established agricultural compound. The proposal would not result in the loss of agricultural land used for farming crops and the proposal has been efficiently placed within the existing footprint of the compound. The proposal therefore accords with Local Plan Policies LP10 part a and LP 19 pars f and g.

The proposal would have an overall footprint of 68.32m2 and at its tallest point would be 3.25m (ridge). The proposed reception building would be significantly smaller in hight and in floorspace than the agricultural barns on the compound. The single storey building designed with a gable roof and would be constructed brick plinth, timber cladding and fibre cement roof would be of a traditional barn style design and would assimilate well into the countryside landscape. Notwithstanding this, the building would also be partially screened from the public highway by boundary hedgerows, albeit the building would be seen from the site access. Notwithstanding this, the building would not appear to be an anonymous feature within the landscape given its adjacency to the other agricultural buildings within the compound. The proposal is therefore considered to accord with Local Plan Policies LP10 part b, LP 11 and LP12 and LP23 part h.

In regard to criteria e, an email was received from the agent which confirmed there are no other available buildings within the farmstead for this proposed use, given they are used for farming activities and the housing of livestock. The Local Planning Authority are therefore satisfied the application accords with local plan policy LP19 part h.

All development in the countryside shall accord with Local Plan Policy LP10. As detailed above, the proposal accords with criteria a and b of the policy. Criteria c of the policy requires all development proposals in the countryside to not give rise to noise, odour, obtrusive light or other impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others. This is discussed in greater detail in the residential amenity section of this report. The proposal is however, considered to accord with Local Plan Policy LP10.

Farm diversification opportunities for development in the countryside is supported by Local Plan Policy LP19. Furthermore, Policy LP19 states a proposal for the expansion of an established business within its existing operational site will be supported. The proposed erection of the reception building would take place within the existing commercial compound to the south of Fenside Road and would form part of the business's diversification into cattle farming. Therefore, the principle of development is acceptable in regard to Local Plan Policy LP19 and consequently policy LP 10, subject to the following material planning considerations.

*Design, Visual Amenity and the impact upon the Character of the Area
Policies LP11 and LP12 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 state that developments should respond positively to their context, draw inspiration from the key characteristics of its surroundings and contribute positively to the area's character and identity. Furthermore, Local Plan Policy LP10 part b states all development in the countryside must recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

The application site is located in the Fen Margin Character Area whereby it is characterised by a low-lying and well vegetated area with settlements situated on higher land, otherwise the landscape is sparsely populated. Development proposals in the Fen Margins should maintain existing

hedgerows, hedgerow trees and woodlands and create soft edges to built developments which have a visual relationship with the surrounding landscape.

As detailed above the proposed development is considered to be of an appropriate scale, mass, hight and bulk for this countryside setting. The building with a traditional barn style design and sympathetic materials is considered to form a good visual relationship with the surrounding landscape.

It is acknowledged that third parties requested that close board fencing is erected to reduce noise and light impacts associated with the development. Notwithstanding this, 1.8m high close board fencing is not considered an appropriate boundary treatment in this countryside setting. As detailed in the preceding section of this report, Officers are satisfied noise and light impacts from the proposed development are mitigated by the design, existing landscaping, separation distances and conditions restricting the use of the building.

Overall, the proposal is considered to respond positively to its context within the surrounding built form, contributes positively to the areas character and identity and recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The proposal is therefore considered to accord with Policies LP10 part b, LP11 and LP12 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

*Impact on 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. Additionally, Policy LP10 part c states all development proposals in the countryside to not give rise to noise, odour, obtrusive light or other impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.

In regard to residential amenity, one of the main matters to establish is the volume of use of the proposed building and the operational hours. Emails from the agent confirm the business has already been providing educational visits over the past two years. Educational visits take place 2-3 mornings or afternoons per week during school hours, comprise of 10-15 children guided with teachers and arrive on 1-2 minibuses. The applicants have also clarified the building would occasionally be use for local children to come and visit during lambing and calving time. The use of the building would primarily be used for educational purposes during term time and school hours however, the building would also be used outside of these hours for office use ancillary to the farm operations.

Whilst the proposal does not seek to intensify this existing and established use, it would however provide an opportunity to separate the agricultural functions which take place at the main farmyard (north of Fenside Road) with the farm diversification functions to the south of Fenside Road.

The closest and only neighbours to the application site is the residential dwelling known as Long Lot Farm. Long Lot Farm is located on the north side of Fen Road and the rear elevation of the dwelling is 43m from the application site.

Officers acknowledge third party representations which raised concerns in regard to privacy, light and noise impacts and each consideration shall be addressed in turn.

Privacy
The proposed building would be single storey. One opening on the building servicing the classroom would be located on the northern elevation and one window servicing the western elevation would service the office.

It is acknowledged the site is located at a slightly higher elevation than the road and the adjacent neighbours. The proposed building would not be sited directly opposite Long Lot Farm but diagonally from the residential dwelling.

To the north of the application site is an established hedgerow with sporadic trees, albeit sparce in places, and within the applicant's control. Officers visited the site and noted the hedgerow has been enhanced with saplings which shall take some to establish to offer screening. It is also noted that the rear amenity space of Long Lot farm is also screened from Fenside Road by a well-established hedgerow. It is however acknowledged, that during the autumn/winter months screening would be less effective however, both hedges lining Fenside Road are approximately 3m deep, offering a total of 6m in depth.

Notwithstanding this, Officers are satisfied the proposed reception building by virtue of its single storey design, separation distance from neighbours and hedgerow boundary treatments would not result in any unacceptable harm to the occupants Long Lot Farm, in regard to privacy.

Noise and Light Impacts

It is noted that third parties raised concerns that the proposed development would cause residential amenity harm by virtue of the noise and lights associated with the building use and vehicle movements to and from the site.

No external lighting is proposed as part of the development. Given the site is in the countryside and adjacent to a hedgerow which offers foraging opportunities for bats, should the development be permitted a condition restricting the use of external lighting can be imposed on the development, unless otherwise approved by the Local Planning Authority.

The application site is located within a cluster of agricultural buildings both to the south and north of Fenside Road. Long Lot Farm is located adjacent to these building used for agricultural use and is not considered an isolated dwelling in the countryside. Furthermore, the applicants have stated the farmstead have already been providing an educational service for approximately 2 years albeit, using the existing facilities and buildings at the farmstead. By the very nature of the existing agricultural use, noise and light impacts are anticipated and the proposal is not considered to significantly extenuate this existing environment.

It is noted an opening hour condition had been imposed on the temporary building to the north of Fenside Road, and within the ownership control of Wilsons Orchard, in the interest of protecting residential amenity (see condition 5 of application ref 060283FUL).

Whilst the existing use of the farm in regard to traffic generation, noise and light impacts cannot be controlled by this application, a condition can be imposed on the proposed building to restrict its use in the interest of protecting residential amenity and the character of the countryside. Officers are therefore satisfied a condition would be sufficient in protecting the countryside and adjacent neighbours from noise and light impacts.

Additionally, the Environmental Health Officer was consulted as part of the application. The Officer raised no concerns to the proposal in regard to light and noise impacts associated with the proposed development.

Overall, subject to conditions it is considered the development is acceptable in terms of overshadowing, overlooking, overbearing impact, loss of privacy and would not have a significant detrimental impact upon residential amenity and the character of the countryside. The proposal is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policies LP 10 part C and LP14 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Highways Safety, Parking Provision and Access

Policy 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 proposal seeks to use the existing and established access off Fenside Road. Given the proposal would intensify the use of this junction the Local Highways Authority was consulted as part of the application. The Highways Officer raised no objection to using the existing access of Fenside Road to service the proposed building. The Highways Officer also noted parking and turning has not been shown on the submitted plans, but it appears that there is sufficient space within the site for visitors' vehicles including minibuses or small coaches.

The submitted block plan and application form indicates two vehicle parking spaces are proposed as part of the development proposal. Additional information provided by email stated that during each educational visit 1-2 minibuses would arrive. The quantum of parking proposed would therefore be sufficient for the proposed use of the building. Furthermore, an area of hardstanding to the west of the building is within the red line boundary and would offer an area for vehicles to rotate.

It is acknowledged by Officers that the proposal includes a classroom which may increase the demand for parking over the two vehicle parking spaces proposed. It is however noted that the commercial compound to the south of Fenside Road is owned by the applicant. In the rare event that there was not sufficient parking within the application site, the wider compound would provide a hard surface for additional vehicles to park. It is therefore unlikely that parking would overspill out onto the public highway. Furthermore, the Local Highways Authority raised no objection to the proposal in the interests of highways safety.

It is also considered that HDC does not have a parking policy stipulating the number of vehicle parking spaces required to the use of a proposed building. Given the above, officers are satisfied two vehicle parking spaces is sufficient for the proposed use.

As this application seeks to erect a reception building to be used for groups of school children who are visiting a working agricultural farm, consideration shall be paid for potential pedestrian and agricultural vehicle conflicts. The applicants have clarified that by moving the educational use to the south of Fenside Road separates the main bulk of agricultural functions which take place at the main farmyard (north of Fenside Road) with the farm diversification functions. The applicants also clarified no agricultural vehicle movements would take place during educational visits. Officers are therefore satisfied the proposed use of the building would pose limited risk to visitors to the site.

Whilst third party objections raised in respect of highways safety have been considered, Officers and the Local Highway Authority considers there would not be any unacceptable highway safety issue or parking issues. The proposed development is therefore considered to accord with Policy LP17 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Biodiversity/Trees
Policy LP30 of the Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity have been investigated. Policy LP30 of the Local Plan to 2036 also requires development proposals to ensure no net loss in biodiversity and provide a net gain in biodiversity where possible. Furthermore, Policy LP31 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals to demonstrate that the potential for adverse impacts on trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows has been investigated and 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.

Given the proposal is on an established commercial site with existing hard surfaces and the proposal does not intend to make alterations to the established hedgerow to the northern boundary of the site it is considered the proposal would not result in the loss of trees or biodiversity. The proposal therefore complies with Local Plan Policies LP30 and LP31.

It is noted that as of the 2nd April 2024, mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) is applicable on small sites as per paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)). In this instance, the application would not impact a priority habitat and impacts less than

25 square metres (5m by 5m) of on-site habitat?and 5 metres of on-site linear habitats. It is on this basis the development proposal is exempt for mandatory biodiversity net gain.

*Flood Risk and Drainage
National guidance and Policy LP5 of the Local Plan seek to steer new development to areas at lowest risk of flooding and advises this should be done through application of the Sequential Test, and if appropriate the Exceptions Test (as set out in paragraphs 172-179 of the NPPF (2024)). The site is located within Flood Zone 1 and less than 1 hectare and therefore, a flood risk assessment is not required for this proposal.

The submitted application form states surface water would be disposed of through soakaways and foul water would be discharged into a package treatment plant. As the proposed development is minor and is at a low risk of flooding, Officers are satisfied that drainage details can be secured as part of building regulations and other relevant legislative requirements.

Overall, the proposal is considered to be acceptable with regard to its impact on both flood risk and water drainage 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 in this regard.

Conclusion:
The proposed development is considered to be compliant with relevant national and local planning policy as:
* Is acceptable in terms of principle of development
* Would not have a harmful impact upon the character and appearance of the area;
* Would not have a significantly detrimental impact upon the amenity of neighbours;
* Is acceptable with regard to parking provision and would not be detrimental to highway safety;
* Is acceptable in regard to biodiversity.

Having regard to applicable national and local planning policies, and having taken all relevant material considerations into account, it is therefore recommended that planning permission should be granted.

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**CONTACT OFFICER:**
Enquiries about this report to **Charlotte Dew**