OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 24/02062/FUL Full Planning Application

Proposal: Erection of new agricultural livestock building

Location: Houghton Hill Farm Houghton Hill Houghton

Applicant: MR GUY GREEN

Grid Ref: 529472 272672

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The application site at Houghton Hill Farm is occupied by a number of established agricultural buildings and a large area of arable land. The application site is situated to the north of Sawtry Way and is located directly to the east of the built-up area of Houghton. The site is considered to be in the countryside and not within or well related to the built-up area of any settlement listed in HDC's Local Plan to 2036. The site falls within Flood Zone 1 of the Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning and there are no constraints relative to the site.

This application seeks permission for the erection of a new agricultural livestock building.

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 15th May 2019)

LP1: Amount of Development
LP2: Strategy for Development

LP4: Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
LP10: The Countryside
LP11: Design Context
LP12: Design Implementation
LP14: Amenity
LP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
LP19: Rural Economy
LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Huntingdonshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2017):

* Place Making Principles parts 3.7 Building Form and 3.8 Building Detailing

Huntingdonshire Townscape and Landscape Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (2022)

Houghton & Wyton Neighbourhood Development Plan 2018-2036 (2018)

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

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

1100883FUL - Extension to existing industrial unit (Approved)

15/00757/FUL - Proposed industrial building (Approved)

1201066FUL - Erection of new barns following demolition of existing (Approved)

1201987FUL - Extension to existing industrial unit (Approved)

1400722FUL - Demolition of existing agricultural buildings and erection of two agricultural barns (Approved)

1400775FUL - Change of use of barn to dwelling including raising height of roof (Approved)

17/01274/FUL - Application for planning approval for sub-division of existing industrial unit extension into 2 separate additional Light industrial units. (Approved)

19/00851/FUL - Change of Use from B1/B2/B8 to a combination of B1 (offices) and D2 (swimming pool for private swimming school) (Approved)

22/01379/FUL - Erection of 1,714 sq.m. of new industrial space, comprising 16no. 'Starter Units' (Use Classes B2/B8) and associated works, including attenuation basin, vehicle parking and landscaping (Approved)

22/01380/FUL - Erection of 586 sq.m. of new industrial space, comprising 1no. industrial unit (Use Classes B2/B8) and associated works, including vehicle parking and turning provision (Approved)

CONSULTATIONS

Wyton-on-the-Hill Parish Council - No comment received at the time of determination.

Natural England - No objections, considers that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on statutorily protected nature conservation sites or landscapes.

HDC's Environmental Health Officer - States they have no issues to raise.

Cambridgeshire County Council Highways – States that no significant adverse effect is to occur.

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. As mentioned in preceding sections of this report, Houghton and Wyton has an adopted neighbourhood plan (Houghton & Wyton Neighbourhood Development Plan 2018-2036). However, the site falls outside of the built-up area of Houghton and Wyton and as such is not taken into account within the Neighbourhood Plan. 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 in the determination of this application are:

- The Principle of Development
- Design and Visual Amenity
- Residential Amenity
- Vehicle Movement and Highway Safety
- Biodiversity

*The Principle of Development

The site is located to the east of and outside of the built-up area of Houghton and is therefore considered to be within the countryside. As such, Policy LP10 of the Local Plan seeks to limit development within the countryside except where it is permitted through other policies of the Local Plan. One such policy which allows Policy LP10 to be relaxed is Policy LP19 (Rural Economy) and this is discussed in more detail below. Regardless of any relaxations, Policy LP10 states that:

All development in the countryside must:

a. seek to use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value:
i. avoiding the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grade 1 to 3a) where possible, and

ii. avoiding Grade 1 agricultural land unless there are exceptional circumstances where the benefits of the proposal significantly outweigh the loss of land;

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.

In this case, the land is classified as grade 2 agricultural land. Further, a site visit confirmed that part of the application site consisted of areas of hardstanding and as such of no agricultural value. However, it is considered that the loss of any grade 2 agricultural land and any resultant harm caused is outweighed by the benefit to the rural economy that the site provides.

It is also noted that the site is set well back from the main road (the B1090) to the south, and whilst visible from the B1090, due to the existing agricultural use of the surrounding site the proposals would not result in any operations which would be uncharacteristic of the area and would not cause any detrimental harm to the intrinsic character or beauty of the countryside. To add, the site has been operating at scale for a long period of time indicated by the approved applications in preceding sections of this report, and as such the character of the site and surrounding area is already established and the proposals will not result in any considerable impact in this regard.

Whilst part c. is considered in greater detail in subsequent sections of this report, HDC's Environmental Health Officer has been consulted, and states they have no issues to raise in terms of noise or any impacts which would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside. Therefore, the use of the site is not considered to be contrary to Policy LP10 of the Local Plan and is acceptable in this regard.

As mentioned previously, Policy LP10 restricts development in the countryside to limited and specific opportunities. Opportunities in the countryside are limited under a number of policies which are not considered relevant to this application. However, Policy LP19 (Rural Economy) must be considered as this provides specific opportunity for development within the countryside. Policy LP19 states that a proposal for the expansion of an established rural business on land outside of its existing operational site in the open countryside will be supported where it demonstrates that:

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.

Part e., f. and g. of Policy LP19 are not considered wholly relevant in this case, as preceding sections of this report have established that the development would not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land, with the expansion of the existing established business taking place within its existing operational site and partially on existing hardstanding surfaces that contain no agricultural value. Taking into account part h., it is considered that the proposal would not have a detrimental effect on its immediate surroundings and wider landscape and will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections of this report. Overall, it is considered that the development broadly accords with the aims of Policy LP19 of the Local Plan to 2036.

Overall, the development is considered to accord with Local Plan Policies LP10 and LP19 and is acceptable in principle subject to compliance with other material planning considerations and conditions.

*Design and Visual Amenity

The application site at Houghton Hill Farm is occupied by a mix of building structures which provide the functionality of an agricultural farm, and the adjacent agricultural buildings are used for the purposes of livestock storage, in particular cattle. The proposed agricultural livestock building is in keeping with the adjacent buildings which help to form the built environment of the existing farm, and will help to enable better management of livestock within the application site. In terms of the design of the proposed agricultural building, this is to measure 17.9 metres in width and 41 metres in length. The proposed roof is of a pitched design, with a maximum height of 5.6 metres with eaves at 3.6 metres. Taking into account the form of the proposed building, it is considered acceptable in terms of scale and design and will not have a detrimental impact upon the character or appearance of the application site, nor will it negatively impact the wider area. This is supported by the proposed use of materials which reflect the appearance of a traditional agricultural building and relate well to the adjacent livestock buildings on the wider application site, successfully integrating the development within the area.

Overall, taking the above factors into consideration, the proposed development is considered to be acceptable with regard to design and visual amenity and would not have a significantly detrimental impact upon the character or appearance of the area. It therefore accords with Policies LP11 and LP12 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 in this regard.

*Residential Amenity

Given the location of the proposed agricultural livestock building alongside the scale being in keeping with the existing livestock buildings, and having regard to the proximity and separation to any adjacent neighbours or dwellings, it is not considered that there would be any unacceptable material impacts in terms of overbearing or loss of light, nor would there be any issues regarding loss of privacy or overlooking.

Overall, taking these factors into account, the development is considered acceptable in terms of overshadowing, overbearing impact, overlooking, loss of privacy, loss of light and would not have a significant impact upon residential amenity and therefore accords with Policy LP14 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 in this regard.

*Vehicle Movement and Highway Safety

Due to the nature of the application of the erection of a new agricultural building which may result in the increased movement of vehicles in and out of the site, Cambridgeshire County Council's Highway Authority was consulted. They have determined that no significant adverse effect upon the highway will result from this proposal, with the access from B1090 Sawtry Way being adequate for agricultural use.

Having considered the proposal and the above comments made by the Local Highways Authority, the development is acceptable with regard to vehicle movement and will not be detrimental to highway safety in the locality. It therefore accords with Policy LP17 of the Local Plan.

*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 proposals will also be subject to Biodiversity Net Gain Legislation pursuant to the Environment Act 2021. This means that a 10% statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is required.

The application is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal which concludes that the site could be developed with minimal biodiversity impacts subject to mitigation measures being implemented, with no additional surveys required. The proposed measures are considered acceptable and can be secured by condition. Further to this, a condition will be imposed that any external lighting must first be approved by the Local Planning Authority in order to prevent any impacts on nocturnal species.

In terms of BNG, it is determined that 10% BNG can be achieved by off-site provision (but in land still within the ownership of the applicant to the north west of the site). HDC's Ecology Officer has been consulted and initially raised concerns that the area proposed for BNG extended the red line and no ecological survey had been carried out on this section of land. This has since been rectified, with the area proposed for BNG outside of the red line but within the blue line ownership of the applicant. Further to this, the Ecology Officer has questioned if the proposed measures could be realised over the required 30-year period.

Given the above, Officers have had to take a view on this matter. It remains that the applicant has the benefit of a substantial section of land to the north west of the site, and that the submitted metric headlines that in excess of 13% BNG can be achieved. This is in excess of the 10% required and so reasonably off-sets any anomalies in the submission. The provision of BNG will be secured by condition which also ensures that a contingency plan is in place if the required 10% BNG cannot be achieved.

Therefore, on balance, the scheme is considered to be acceptable with regard to biodiversity impacts and broadly accords with Policy LP30 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Conclusion

The proposed development is considered to be compliant with the relevant national and local policy as it:

* Is of an appropriate scale and design
* 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;
* Would not have a detrimental impact on vehicle movement and highway safety;
* Is acceptable with regards to the impact on biodiversity;
* There are no other material planning considerations which lead to the conclusion that the proposal is unacceptable.

Taking national and local planning policies into account, and having regard for all relevant material considerations, 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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