OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 25/00489/FUL Full Planning Application

Proposal: **Erection of an agricultural building for free range egg production with associated feed bins, linked egg packing and storage building, linked manure trailer store, hardstandings and access track.**

Location: **Land South East Of Wood Farm Vicarage Road Waresley**

Applicant: **Mr Charles Mear**

Grid Ref: **525676 254085**

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The application site is Wood Farm, Waresley. The site is operated as a free-range egg production business with hens, egg laying units and ancillary works such as egg packaging for retail taking place on the site.

The site is not within a Conservation Area and there are no Listed Buildings or trees subject to Preservation Orders in the immediate vicinity. Waresley Wood and Gamlingay Wood Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lie approx. 414m north-east and 790m south-west respectively. The site is within Flood Zone 1 as per the most recent Environment Agency Flood Risk Maps and Data.

This application seeks permission for the erection of an agricultural building to provide a free-range egg unit in order to accord with modern techniques. Also included is the provision of feed bins, egg packing and storage building, manure trailer store (all linked to and north of the building) as well as hard surfacing and soft landscaping.

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
LP3: Green Infrastructure
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
LP31: Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows
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

24/00541/AGDET - Extension to poultry building (details not required)

24/00772/AGDET - Extension to poultry building (details not required)

CONSULTATIONS

Waresley Parish Council - No objections.

HDC Ecology Officer (informal consultation) - No objections subject to condition.

HDC Environmental Health Team - No objections.

HDC Operations (Waste) Team - No representations received at the time of determination.

HDC Urban Design Team - No objections subject to conditions.

HDC Economic Development Team - No representations received at the time of determination.

HDC Landscapes Officer - No representations received at the time of determination.

HDC Arboricultural Officer - No objections.

Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) Highways - No objections.

CCC Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) - No objection subject to condition (following revised detail).

CCC Minerals and Waste Team - No issues noted.

CCC Rights of Way Team - No objections - informative note required.

CCC Historic Environment Team - No objections.

Anglian Water - No objections.

Middle Level Commissioners - No representations received at the time of determination.

Environment Agency - No objections subject to condition.

UK Power Networks - Neutral response - informative note required.

Health and Safety Executive - No representations received at the time of determination.

Natural England (N.E) - Neutral comment - 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, there is not an adopted neighbourhood plan in place for Waresley. 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 (including impact on the countryside)
*Design and visual amenity
*Residential amenity
*Highway and access considerations
*Flood risk
*Biodiversity
*Other matters

*The principle of the development

The application site lies within the open countryside where development is required to be assessed against Local Plan Policy LP10. Development is restricted in these rural locations unless permitted via other local plan policies. In this case, there is some relaxation under Policy LP19 (Rural Economy) which is discussed in further detail later in this report. In all cases, Policy LP10 states that all development in the countryside must avoid the irreversible loss of the most versatile and high value agricultural land, recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and avoid the introduction of noise, odour, intrusive light and other factors which could affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.

In this case, the land in question is grade 2 land and so whilst not land of the highest value it does make some contribution to the overall value of the area. Officers also note that there is land of lower value (including unclassified land) within the application site. However, it should be acknowledged that the proposed use of the land would still fall within an agricultural classification. Whilst the erection of a building and the ancillary works would result in the loss of the land the siting (in relation to the operational area of the site) somewhat dictates its siting and this is arguably the most convenient location. Whist the loss of the land is regrettable, when taking an 'on balance' decision against the merits of supporting an established rural building this relatively minor harm and loss is outweighed by the benefits.

In terms of other matters, the proposed building, whilst of an extensive footprint is limited in height and appears typical of a building of this nature and use. The proposed materials and proposed planting (which will be secured by condition) assist in softening its appearance. However, it cannot be considered that such a structure would be uncharacteristic within an operational rural business. HDC's Urban Desing Team have also been consulted and raise no objections. They do observe that there is some lack of clarity on proposed boundary treatments and that levels details should be secured by condition in order to ensure that the development is assimilated into the landscape. Officers opine with this view and this will be secured by condition.

When considering associated implications of development (noise, odour etc) it should be noted that Environmental Health and the Environment Agency have been consulted and raise no objections. Whilst there is a public bridleway passing through the operational site, it is not considered that the proposed building or operations would be uncharacteristic of this rural location and would not cause a level of harm which would justify a refusal. A condition shall be attached to secure details of any external lighting for both these and biodiversity purposes.

As referenced above, Local Plan Policy LP19 considers the rural economy and supports the expansion of an established rural business within its operational site. The policy details that a rural business is one which has a legitimate reason to be located in the countryside such as agriculture, horses, horticulture or forestry.

In this case, there is an established building to the north of the proposed site operating as a free-range egg unit which as per the Design and Access Statement will allow the business to operate within modern guidelines in accordance with the British Egg Industry Councils Lion Code of Practice, and in accordance with the RSPCA Freedom Foods. Whilst the proposed location is an arable field, hens are free roaming at various points within the site and a site visit confirms the

character and extent of the operations. Whilst this could be considered to be 'on the edge' of the operational site, Officers are satisfied that given the established and retained use of the site and the close links to the existing building and operations that no further justification is required as to the siting of the building and ancillary works and it complies with Policy LP19 in this regard.

One further point to note is that the development site is located within the South-East Claylands Landscape Character Area as defined within the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD (2022), This states that development should:

* Promote increased planting and soft landscaping around the edges of the towns to screen visually intrusive development; particularly through planting of tree and woodland belts.

* Avoid ribbon development to conserve the form of historic villages.

* Ensure preservation and interpretation of historic features remaining within the landscape.

* Carefully consider the siting and scale of new farm buildings to minimise their impact on the countryside.

* Protect tall hedgerows and hedgerow trees as these are a distinctive feature of the central area.

In this case, as can be seen, this is not wholly relevant to the development proposed. Soft landscaping is proposed and this will be secured by condition. The scale and siting of the proposed building (within the operational site and setting of the existing buildings) is also welcomed as is the design and material finish which will support its integration into the landscape.

Overall, having regard to the above assessment, subject to conditions, the development is considered to be acceptable with regard to the requirements of Policies LP3, LP10 and LP19 and is acceptable in principle subject to compliance with all other material planning considerations and conditions.

*Design and visual amenity

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.

In this case, the general scale and appearance of the building has been discussed above. There are no overriding concerns when the scale, design, layout and material finish are considered. The decommissioned building will be retained for storage and the agent has confirmed that the extension permitted under prior approval 24/00772/AGDET will not be implemented. However, given that this was approved there are no specific concerns surrounding this. Further clarification is required on the hard and soft landscaping (to ensure suitable boundary treatments for example) but overall, the development is considered to be consistent with development of this nature and would not be uncharacteristic of or result in harmful and incongruous development in a rural location. It therefore accords with Policies LP11 and LP12 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*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. HDC's Environmental Health Team have

been consulted and raise no objections in terms of noise, odour light pollution, dust or contamination.

There are no residential dwellings in the immediate vicinity of the site (the closest being the farmhouse itself). As such, given the separation to all other privately occupied land or buildings, the scale of the development (in terms of height), the proposed continuation of use and the lack of objection from specialists there is considered to be no harm and the development accords with Policies LP14 and LP37 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Highway safety and Access

The submitted Design and Access Statement provides details of proposed vehicle movements including volumes and frequencies. There is no change to the way that vehicles enter or leave the site as a result of the development. CCC Highways Team have been consulted and raise no objections in terms of highway implications.

There is a public bridleway passing through the site and as such, CCC Rights of Way Team have also been consulted. Whilst they raise no objections to the development they note that the bridleway must remain open and unobstructed at all times. An informative note shall be added to the permission in this regard.

Overall, given the details provided alongside the lack of objection from specialists (as above) the development is considered to be acceptable with regard to highway safety and access and accords with Policy LP17 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Flood risk

The application site is wholly within Flood Zone 1 as per the most recent Environment Agency Flood Risk Maps and Data. Development of this nature is acceptable within Flood Zone 1. However, given the scale of the wider site a Flood Risk Assessment is required as per the NPPF (2024), and one has been submitted (including a drainage strategy) with the application. A drainage layout has also been provided following initial consultee comments.

CCC as the Lead Local Flood Authority have been consulted. Initially they objected to the scheme citing lack of rainfall data. Following submission of the revised FRA and drainage layout they have been re-consulted and now raise no objections observing that the surface water management is acceptable (subject to conditions). Furthermore, the Environment Agency were consulted and raise no objections on flood risk grounds. It should be noted that the Middle Level Commissioners were also consulted but no representations have been received at the time of determination.

Overall, given the level of detail provided alongside the lack of objections from specialists (as above), the scheme is considered acceptable in terms of flood risk and surface water management and broadly accords with Policies LP5 and LP15 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Biodiversity

Policy LP30 of the Local Plan requires a development to ensure no net loss of biodiversity and achieve a net gain where possible.

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) is required for all development, 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.

In this case the application is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal dated January 2025. This concludes that no further surveys are required and makes recommendations for mitigation and enhancement measures. Detail as to how these will be provided shall be secured by a condition requiring the submission of a Biodiversity method Statement.

In terms of BNG the submitted metric and BNG details state that a 10% BNG can be achieved on site. HDC's Ecology Officer has been consulted and is broadly supportive of the proposals. The Ecology Officer did raise a query on the categorisation of the land used for the hens to graze (neutral or modified grassland) but on balance, Officers do not consider it necessary to pursue this matter further given the measures and scope for BNG proposed. The BNG shall be secured by condition.

Given the location within the setting of Waresley and Gamlingay Woods SSSI's, Natural England have been consulted. They have responded noting the location of the proposed development and advising that they are presently working on their approach to betterment (also known as emission reductions) for agricultural developments which affect protected sites. This proposals (introducing modern working practices) is presented as a betterment). At present, N.E do not have an organisational position on their approach to emission reductions and therefore stated that they had no comments to make.

Whilst it is acknowledged that this is a neutral response as opposed to 'no objections', it is considered that if there were significant objections or risk to the SSSI's or conditions required then N.E would have taken the opportunity to highlight these. Given their neutral response the LPA are satisfied that there will be no significant harm to the SSSI's (especially given the existing operations taking place).

Overall, having regard to the above matters, the development is considered to be acceptable with regard to biodiversity and impacts on the nearby SSSI's and accords with Policy LP30 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Other matters

*Impact on Trees

HDC's Arboricultural Officer was consulted and observed that due to the lack of trees within and surrounding the site. As such, they raise no objections. This is included within the report for completeness and to confirm accordance with Policy LP31 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Archaeology

CCC's Historic Environment Team were consulted and advise that whilst there were examples of medieval ridge and furrow in the vicinity this is no longer extant. They note that given the scale of development and level of archaeology known within the main area they have no recommendations to make.

The development is considered acceptable with regard to its impact on heritage assets and accords with Policy LP34 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Utilities

UK Power Networks have been consulted and whilst they raise no objections they do advise that given that there are overhead cables within close proximity advice should be sought from them prior to commencement of works. An informative note shall be added to the permission in respect of this.

*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 it is acceptable in principle, would be visually acceptable and would not be harmful in terms of residential amenity, highway safety, flood risk, ecology or impact on trees.

Having regard to all relevant material considerations the proposed development is considered to comply with Policies LP2, LP3, LP5, LP10, LP11, LP12, LP14, LP15, LP17, LP19, LP30, LP31, LP34 and LP37 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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