

DELEGATED FILE NOTE

CASE OFFICER: ...Henry Thomas.....

APPLICATION REFERENCE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT	APPLICATION SITE
26/00615/FP	Erection of single storey building to provide café (development already carried out).	Land At Fairclough Hall Farm Halls Green Weston Hertfordshire SG4 7DP

Submitted Plan Nos

PL.001 PL.002 PL.003 PL.004

1.0 Policies

D1	Sustainable design
D3	Protecting living conditions
SP1	Sustainable development in North Herts
SP5	Countryside and Green Belt
SP9	Design and Sustainability
HE1	Designated heritage assets
T2	Parking
SECN12	Achieving well-designed places
SECN16	Conserve + enhance historic environment
SECN14	Meeting climate change,coastal,flooding

2.0 **Site History**

2.1 None relevant.

- 2.2 05/01523/1 - Conversion and adaptation of existing grain store to create combination of Class B1 business units, 36 car parking spaces, alterations to existing access and driveway and ancillary works, in accordance with additional plans received on 16th January 2006.
Conditional Permission.
- 2.3 06/02871/1 - Alterations to external elevations comprising the insertion of new windows and glazing details (as a variation of planning permission ref 05/01523/1 granted 17/01/06)
Conditional Permission.
- 2.4 12/00419/1PUD - Certificate of Lawful development : Proposed use of part of existing barn as a cafe/meeting area to be operated in association with and ancillary to the established business units.
Granted.
- 2.5 18/02397/FP - Erection of single storey detached building to provide business meeting room, work stations, toilets and a café, following demolition of existing stables.
Conditional Permission.
- 2.6 20/01242/FP - Change of use of existing business meeting room, work stations, toilets and a café to offices (B1) for a temporary period of three years
Conditional Permission.
- 2.7 22/00597/FP - Change of use from storage and distribution to office use only
Conditional Permission.
- 2.7 22/00594/FP - Continued use as commercial business and service use – offices
Unconditional Permission.
- 2.8 25/03211/FP - Change of use of existing building to offices (Class E (g) (i). (Development already carried out).
Unconditional Permission.
- 3.0 **Representations**
- 3.1 **Site Notice and Neighbour Consultation** – 32 neighbour representations received in support. Their general comments are summarised as but not limited to:
- Valuable community asset
 - Supports local business
 - Supports cyclists
 - Local employment benefit
 - Does not impact landscape
 - Suitable location.
- 3.2 **NHC Environmental Health (Combined)** – No objection subject to condition.

3.3 **Weston Parish Council** – None received.

3.4 **Waste and Recycling** – None received.

4.0 **Planning Considerations**

4.1 **Site and Surroundings**

4.1.1 The application site is located on the edge of the small hamlet of Halls Green in the Green Belt around Stevenage. The application building is situated to the north of a complex of farm buildings most of which are now used to house small businesses.

4.2 **Proposal**

4.2.1 Planning permission is sought for the retention of a single storey building for a café.

4.2.2 The building as existing is a lightweight structure comprised of aluminium truss work, wooden posts and beams, timber cladding and an insulated tin sheet roof built around a mobile food truck.

4.2.3 The building is approximately 14.4m by 8.3m, 2.7m to eaves and 4.05m to ridge.

4.2.4 The current hours of operation are: Monday to Friday, 10:00am to 2:30pm.

4.2.5 The proposed hours of operation are: Monday to Saturday, 9:00am to 6:00pm.

4.3 **Key Issues**

4.3.1 The key considerations are:

- The Principle of Development
- Impact on the Green Belt
- Design/Impact on the Character of the Area
- Impact on the Amenities of Neighbouring Properties/Future Occupiers
- Highways and Parking
- Heritage Assets
- Landscaping

The Principle of Development – Green Belt

4.3.2 The site is in the Green Belt. Policy SP5 of the Local Plan states that the Council will only permit development proposals in the Green Belt where they would not result in inappropriate development or where very special circumstances have been demonstrated. Policy SP5 refers to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which sets out exceptions to inappropriate development in the Green Belt in paragraphs 154 and 155 (December 2024 version). Para. 154 is:

154. Development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the following exceptions applies:

a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;

b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;

c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;

d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;

e) limited infilling in villages;

f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and

g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land (including a material change of use to residential or mixed use including residential), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

h) Other forms of development provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:

i. mineral extraction;

ii. engineering operations;

iii. local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;

iv. the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;

v. material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and

vi. development, including buildings, brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

4.3.3 In assessing the proposal against the above criteria, the proposal would not fall within para. 154.

4.3.4 Para. 155 states that housing, commercial and other development should not be regarded as inappropriate development where:

- a. The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;*
- b. There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;*
- c. The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework(57); and*
- d. Where applicable the development proposed meets the 'Golden Rules' requirements set out in paragraphs 156 – 157.*

4.3.5 'Grey belt' is defined in the NPPF Glossary as:

Grey belt: *For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.*

The relevant parts referred to above in para. 143 are:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns*

4.3.6 In respect of para. 143 referred to in the definition, a) is not applicable as Halls Green is not considered to be a large built up area, it would not conflict with b) as Halls Green is not a town and the site is sufficiently far from the nearest town of Stevenage, and d) is not applicable either as Halls Green is not a town. The proposal therefore complies with a) of para 154.

4.3.7 Whilst there is a public house within Halls Green, there is a lack of café facilities within the wider area. I therefore consider on this basis that the proposal would comply with b. of 155.

4.3.8 Part c. of 155 considers whether the development would be in a sustainable location. It is acknowledged that users would be largely reliant on the private car as the site is rural with limited public transport, shops or services nearby, and narrow rural roads with no footpaths/bike lanes will reduce the likelihood of such non-car movement. Such situations are however common in rural areas, and are referenced in para. 110. The site can be considered sufficiently sustainable as it's close to a public highway and sited within an existing agricultural / commercial park. Traffic generation would be minimal, with safe access onto the highway. Whilst it is noted that the café is predominantly frequented by the existing businesses on the site, several public comments have been submitted stating that they cycle and walk to the café from the surrounding area. The development is therefore not considered to conflict with 155 c.

4.3.9 The last part of the definition states 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development. Footnote 7 states:

7 The policies referred to are those in this Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 189) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, a National Landscape, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 75); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.

- 4.3.10 The proposed development is not considered to be on land referred to in footnote 7. The site would be set away from the nearest designated Heritage Assets (Fairclough Farm House and East Barn) and does not impact their setting. This would not provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development as referred to under footnote 7 for the definition of Grey Belt.
- 4.3.11 The proposal is considered to comply with para. 155 of the NPPF, and would not be inappropriate development. The proposal is acceptable in principle, and complies with Policy SP5 of the Local Plan and Section 13 of the NPPF.

Principle of Development – Commercial

- 4.3.12 Policy ETC2 states that Planning permission for employment uses outside of allocated Employment Areas will be granted provided that:

a) The proposal is:

- i. within a defined settlement boundary or the built core of a Category B village; or*
- ii. for small scale offices or other small employment development; and*
- iii. is appropriate to the location in terms of size, scale, function, catchment area and/ or historic and architectural character; and*

b) There would be no significant adverse impacts on living conditions.

- 4.3.13 The proposed café would be small scale development which would be appropriate in size and scale for its location and would not result in any significant adverse impacts on living conditions of neighbouring businesses / dwellings.

Design/Impact on the Character of the Area

- 4.3.14 Policy D1 of the Local Plan states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that respond positively to local context and create or enhance the public realm. Policy SP9 of the Local Plan further considers that new development will be supported where it is well designed and located and responds positively to its local context. This is echoed in Section 12 of the NPPF.
- 4.3.15 The scale, form and design of the building is considered acceptable in my opinion. Its single storey nature and soft material pallet are relatively sympathetic to the prevailing character of the area and will ensure its subservience against the larger units within the commercial / agricultural yard.
- 4.3.16 The proposed development is therefore considered to respond positively to local context, in accordance with Policies SP9 and D1 of the Local Plan.

Impact on Heritage Assets

- 4.3.17 The erected café building is set sufficiently set away from neighbouring Grade II Listed Buildings of Fairclough Farmhouse and East Barn. The materials and design are considered sympathetic to the locality and these heritage assets. The proposal therefore complies with Policy HE1 of the Local Plan and Section 16 of the NPPF.

The Impact on Neighbouring Dwellings/Future Occupiers

- 4.3.18 Policy D1 of the Local Plan also requires that development proposals meet or exceed the nationally described space standards. Policy D3 of the Local Plan states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals which do not cause unacceptable harm to living conditions. These considerations are echoed within Section 12 of the NPPF.
- 4.3.19 The site has no residential neighbours within the immediate vicinity and is set away from the farmhouse itself sufficiently. Given the commercial / agricultural Retail Park. Therefore, it is unlikely that the proposal will result in any material harm upon the reasonable living conditions and well-being of neighbours. This is in line with Policy D3 of the Local Plan.

Highways and Parking

- 4.3.20 The site would be accessed via the existing access. Given the existing commercial / agricultural businesses on this yard, a Café is unlikely to significantly affect traffic within the wider area.
- 4.3.21 The yard is served by sufficient parking. The proposal would introduce a number of cycle parking spaces to accommodate for cyclists. The proposal would satisfy the requirements under Policy T2 of the Local Plan.

Landscaping / Ecology.

- 4.3.22 The proposal would be exempt from BNG and would have no significant implications for the local environment in terms of ecology and carbon emissions and therefore would be generally in compliance with Section 14 of the NPPF and Policy D1.

Other Matters

- 4.3.23 Environmental Health have requested a condition to restrict the hours of operation. In my view, I consider the proposed hours submitted by the applicant to be reasonable within the context of the commercial / agricultural yard.

4.4 Conclusion

- 4.4.1 The proposal is considered acceptable in planning terms and in accordance with Policies SP1, SP2, SP5, SP9, ETC2, D1, D3, HE1, T1 and T2 of the Local Plan, as well as Section 12, 13 and 16 of the NPPF.

4.5 Alternative Options

4.5.1 N/A

4.6 **Pre-Commencement Conditions**

4.6.1 N/A

5.0 **Recommendation**

5.1 That planning permission be **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

1. The use hereby permitted shall only take place between the following hours 09.00hrs to 18.00hrs on Mondays to Saturdays.

Reason: to protect the residential amenities of existing residents in accordance with Policy D3 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.

2. Within 3 months of this permission, 5 Sheffield cycle stands shall be erected and retained unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To comply with Policy T2 of the Local Plan

Biodiversity Net Gain

1. This development is not subject to the statutory Biodiversity Gain Plan condition because it is considered exempt under the statutory exemptions (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain-exempt-developments>) or transitional arrangements in respect of the biodiversity gain condition.

Proactive Statement:

Planning permission has been granted for this proposal. Discussion with the applicant to seek an acceptable solution was not necessary in this instance. The Council has therefore acted proactively in line with the requirements of the Framework (paragraph 38) and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

Signed  Anne McDonald	Development Management North Hertfordshire District Council Council Offices Gernon Road Letchworth Herts SG6 3JF
Determining Officer Date: 24 April 2026	