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Dear Shaun

Planning Application for The Erection of Two Straw Buildings at Hatchpen Farm, The Joint Reed

This letter has been prepared by Ceres Property on behalf of the Rand Brothers in relation to a planning application for two new straw buildings at Hatchpen Farm, The Joint, Reed.

This application is accompanied by the following documents and information:

- Site Location Plan
- Elevation Plans
- Biodiversity Net Gain Metric
- Draft Biodiversity Gain Plan

This application is accompanied by photographs contained in the below Appendices:

- Appendix A – Photographs of Existing Straw On Site
- Appendix B – Photographs of Straw Waste On-Site

Background and Overview

The proposal that this application seeks planning permission for is the erection of two new straw buildings at Hatchpen Farm. The dimensions of the two proposed buildings are as set out below, as shown on the submitted elevations plan:

- 11.577 m x 30 m x 79.248 m (to the eaves).

Hatchpen Farm is located on the land east of the A10, south of Royston and north of Reed. Hatchpen Farm is the central hub of the Rand Brothers farming operations and currently has a number of large agricultural buildings, which are used for a mixture of agricultural and storage operations. Due to the continued success and expansion of the business, three agricultural buildings obtained planning

consent in 2022 under planning application reference 21/01742/FP. These new buildings are situated to the south- west of the existing site.

Rand Brothers was established in 1934 and the business has grown to become one of the largest arable and straw production operations in East Anglia, farming over 3,000 hectares of land and processing up to fifty thousand tonnes of straw per annum. The straw that is sold as fuel for local renewable energy power stations. The power stations have stringent quality specifications, particularly moisture content. This has resulted in a significant need for additional agricultural buildings at Hatchpen Farm.

The power station demands that the straw is dry and in excellent condition. The existing straw buildings are at full capacity. The excess straw is currently being stored in outside stacks, as shown in Appendix A of this letter. The top two layers of bales, the bales on the side and the bottom of the stacks are open to the elements and are unsaleable. Up to thirty percent of these outside stacks are waste. This is shown in Appendix B of this letter. There is an imminent requirement for additional straw storage buildings to accommodate the straw being produced and stored at the farm. Therefore, the purpose of the additional straw buildings is to eliminate the wastage. The proposed buildings are similar in terms of scale and design to the existing straw buildings.

Hatchpen Farm is located within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. It is not subject to any historic or ecological designations. According to the Government's Flood Risk mapping database, the site is wholly located within flood zone 1, where there is a low risk of fluvial or tidal flooding. The site is also at low risk of surface water flooding

The following sections of this letter reviews the proposed development in conjunction with local and national planning policy to demonstrate that the site is suitable for this type of development.

Planning Policy

The current adopted plan is the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031, which was Adopted in November 2022. The below section sets out the relevant policies from the adopted Local Plan alongside the key objectives from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024).

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (Adopted November 2022)

- Policy SP1 (Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire)
- Policy SP5 (Countryside and Green Belt)
- Policy SP9 (Design and Sustainability)
- Policy ETC2 (Employment Development Outside Employment Areas and Employment Allocations BA10 and RY9)
- Policy CGB1 (Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt)
- Policy T1 (Assessment of Transport Matters)
- Policy D1 (Sustainable Design)

- Policy NE2 (Landscape)
- Policy NE4 (Biodiversity and Geological Sites)
- Policy NE7 (Reducing Flood Risk)

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024)

Chapter 2, Achieving Sustainable Development, sets out the three overarching objectives to achieving sustainable development:

- a) an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;*
- b) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and*
- c) an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.*

There is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay (paragraph 11).

Paragraph 39 states that local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive way.

Paragraph 88 (part a) states that planning decisions should enable the expansion of all types of business in rural area, both through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings. Planning decisions should enable the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses (paragraph 88, part b).

Paragraph 89 states that planning decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport.

Chapter 12 states that planning decisions should ensure that developments are sympathetic to the local character and history and establish or maintain a strong sense of place.

Paragraph 181 states that when determining any planning applications, local planning authorities should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere.

Paragraph 187 states that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment.

Planning Assessment

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) require that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The previous section of this letter sets out the national and local planning policies which are most relevant to the determination of this application.

The key planning matters relevant to the determination of this planning application are:

- Principle of Development
- Sustainable Development
- Design, Layout and Scale
- Access and Highways
- Flood Risk
- Biodiversity Net Gain

Principle of Development

The site is located within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. Local Plan policy CGB1 (Rural Areas Beyond the Green Belt) states that planning permission in the rural areas beyond the green belt will be granted provided that the development:

- a) Is infilling development which does not extend the built core of a Category B village;
- b) Meets a proven local need for community facilities, services or affordable housing in an appropriate location;
- c) Is strictly necessary for the needs of agriculture or forestry;
- d) Relates to an existing rural building;
- e) Is a modest proposal for rural economic development or diversification; or
- f) Would provide land or facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and cemeteries that respect the generally open nature of the rural area.

In this regard the buildings are necessary to support the expansion of the agricultural operations at Hatchpen Farm and therefore fall into category C.

The proposed development that this planning application relates to is the construction of two straw buildings at Hatchpen Farm. Following the 2022 planning consent, the straw bale have quickly become full to capacity. The Rand Brothers have further expanded their straw bale operations, which is partly in response to a recently awarded contract to provide straw to a power station.

Excess straw is currently stored in outside stacks, as shown in Appendix A of this letter. These are open to the elements and is resulting in straw wastage, which is shown in appendix B. There is an imminent requirement for additional straw storage buildings to accommodate the straw being produced and stored at the farm. Therefore, the purpose of the additional straw buildings is to eliminate this wastage and ensure the business can continue to develop with minimal agricultural waste. The proposed development is therefore strictly necessary for the needs of agriculture, in compliance with part C of Local Plan policy CGB1. As such, the construction of two new straw sheds on an established farmyard is considered appropriate within the rural area beyond the green belt. The principle of development is therefore considered acceptable.

The following sections of this Assessment reviews the proposed development in relation to other planning considerations to demonstrate that the development is considered acceptable and compliant with local and national planning policy and guidance.

Sustainable Development

The NPPF sets out three overarching objectives to achieve sustainable development. These are economic, social and environmental in nature (paragraph 8).

The proposed development will facilitate an increased productivity at the farm and minimise the waste of straw. The increased storage capacity for straw and reduction of straw waste will benefit the applicant and assist in supporting the local business and rural economy. The development will secure existing jobs opportunities at the farm and generate employment opportunities during the construction and operation phases. The proposed development therefore complies with the economic objective of sustainable development.

The additional straw buildings will ensure that future needs of the local community are supported in terms of generating and protecting agricultural produce and local economic benefits. There is a need for the farm to expand to keep pace with existing straw production and facilitate the ability to expand production. The proposed development will positively contribute to the culture of the British countryside, which is compliant with the social objective of sustainable development.

Hatchpen Farm is an established agricultural unit with numerous buildings and structures which support the operations of the farm. The construction of the new straw buildings adjacent to the existing straw buildings is an effective use of land. It does not intrude onto open countryside. Due to the topography, the site slopes downwards and the structure will not be visible from the nearest adopted highway or within the wider countryside. This complies with the environmental objective of economic development.

As the planning application seeks permission for additional straw buildings in an already established farm, the proposed development should be viewed as a positive contribution to the agricultural

industry within the District. This planning application will undoubtedly yield economic, social and environmental benefits for the local community.

Design, Layout and Scale

Local Plan policy SP9 (Design and Sustainability) states that the Council considered good design to be a key aspect of sustainable development. Local Plan policy D1 (sustainable Design) states that planning permission will be granted provided that development proposals respond positively to the site's local context.

As shown on the Site Plan, two existing straw buildings are located adjacent to the proposed buildings to the east. To positively respond to the local context of the farm, the design, scale and materiality of the new straw buildings are in-keeping with the existing straw buildings at Hatchpen Farm. The proposed straw sheds will each measure 11.577 m x 30 m x 79.248 m (to the eaves). This is similar in terms of scale to the existing buildings to the east. The buildings will comprise grain walling and profile sheeting roofing, with PVC composite panels on the roofs. The materials are the same as the adjacent straw buildings.

The site slopes downwards towards the farmyard, which means that any new structure of this scale in this location will not be visible from the A10 or The Joint. As such, the new buildings will have no visual impact from the nearby village of Reed.

The design, layout and scale of the proposed straw sheds are in-keeping with the existing straw sheds and agricultural buildings on the farm in terms of appearance, materials and scale. The development will respond positively to the site's local context, which is an agricultural farming unit comprising multiple agricultural related buildings.

Access and Highways

Local Plan policy T1 (Assessment of Transport Matters) states that planning permission will be granted provided that the development would not lead to highway safety problems or cause unacceptable impacts upon the highway network.

Paragraph 116 of the NPPF states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

Hatchpen Farm is accessed via an existing access track from The Joint. The track is currently used for accessing the site and is regularly used by various agricultural related machinery and vehicles. The two new sheds will not result in a significant increase in vehicle movement because the purpose of the sheds is to provide storage for existing straw currently stored outside.

Due to the modest scale of the development, the construction of the buildings will not lead to adverse significant increase in vehicles on the public highway.

The development is therefore compliant with Local Plan policy T1 (Assessment of Transport Matters) and paragraph 116 of the NPPF. It is therefore considered that this application should not be refused on highways grounds.

Flood Risk

Local Plan policy NE7 (Reducing Flood Risk) states that planning permission for proposals will be granted provided that the development is located outside of medium and high-risk flood areas (flood zone 2 and 3) and other areas affected by other sources of flooding where possible.

According to the Government's Flood Risk Mapping Database, the site is located wholly within Flood Zone 1, where there is a low risk of tidal or fluvial flooding. The site is also at very low risk of surface water flooding. The proposed straw sheds are for agricultural purposes and defined as less vulnerable to flood risk in Annex 3 of the NPPF.

The proposed development will not result in an increase in flood risk within site or elsewhere. The development is therefore compliant with Local Plan policy NE7 (Reducing Flood Risk) and chapter 14 of the NPPF (Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change).

Biodiversity Net Gain

Local Plan policy NE2 (Landscape) states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that do not cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

National policy requires new developments to provide a minimum 10% net gain in biodiversity.

A Biodiversity Net Gain Metric and Draft Biodiversity Gain Plan accompanies this submission. The Biodiversity Gain Plan incorporates the findings and recommendations to the Biodiversity Net Gain assessment at Hatchpen Farm. The Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment concludes that an area of 1.5ha existing modified grassland can be enhanced through the provision of an increased native species composition (at least 6-8 species per m²) and managed to a 'good' condition to result in a net gain of 11.02% (0.72) habitat units.

The Site can therefore deliver a Biodiversity Net Gain in accordance with local and national current planning policy and the Environment Act (2021).

Summary

This planning application seeks planning permission for the erection of two straw buildings at Hatchpen Farm, The Joint Reed.

The site is located within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. Local Plan policy CGB1 (Rural Areas Beyond the Green Belt, part C) states that planning permission in the rural areas beyond the green belt will be granted provided that the development is strictly necessary for the needs of agriculture. The proposed straw buildings will be located adjacent to existing straw buildings and required to store excess straw currently stored outside. The purpose of the straw buildings is therefore to reduce agricultural waste and support the continued growth of the business.

Paragraph 88 (part a) of the NPPF states that planning decisions should enable the expansion of all types of business in rural area, both through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings. Planning decisions should enable the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses (paragraph 88, part b).

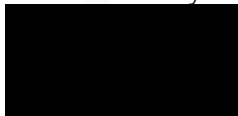
Paragraph 89 of the NPPF states that planning decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport.

The design, scale and layout of the proposed buildings are in-keeping with the existing agricultural buildings at Hatchpen Farm. Due to the site topography sloping downwards, the proposed straw buildings will not be visible from the local highway.

The proposed development is supported by local and national planning policy and it is considered that this application should be approved without delay.

I trust that this letter and the accompanying plans are sufficient to allow for validation of the application.

Yours sincerely



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Graduate Planner



Appendix A – Photographs of Existing Straw On Site









Appendix B – Photographs of Straw Waste On-Site



