

DELEGATED FILE NOTE

CASE OFFICER: ...Tom Rea.....

APPLICATION REFERENCE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT	APPLICATION SITE
25/02102/FP	Installation of hardstanding to provide parking and turning space for vehicles and equipment in connection with established and/or permitted farming, estate management and diversified uses on immediately adjoining and nearby land (Development has commenced). Installation of fencing (Development already carried out).	Land At Shangri-la Farm Todds Green Stevenage Hertfordshire SG1 2JE

Submitted Plan Nos

CDB-1305 location/ Site Access

1.0 Policies

1.0 **Planning Policy**

1.1 **North Herts Supplementary Planning Documents.**

Design SPD

Planning Obligations SPD

Vehicle Parking Provision at New Development SPD.

1.2 **National Planning Policy Framework (2024)**

Section 2 - Achieving sustainable development

Section 6 - Building a strong, competitive economy

Section 8 - Promoting healthy and safe communities.

Section 9 - Promoting sustainable transport.

Section 11 - Making effective use of land.

Section 12 - Achieving well-designed places.

Section 13 - Protecting Green Belt land

Section 15 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

1.3 **North Hertfordshire District Local Plan 2011-2031 Proposed Submission
(Main modifications November 2018)**

Policy SP1 Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire

Policy SP2 Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution

Policy SP3 Employment

Policy SP5 Countryside and Green Belt

Policy SP6 Sustainable Transport

Policy SP8 Housing

Policy SP9 Design and Sustainability

Policy SP11 Natural Resources and Sustainability

Policy T1 Assessment of Transport Matters

Policy T2 Parking

Policy D1 Sustainable Design

Policy D3 Protecting Living conditions

Policy D4 Air Quality

Policy NE1 Landscape

Policy NE7 Reducing Flood Risk

Appendix 4: Car Parking Standards

The application site lies outside of the village of Todds Green which is a settlement washed over by the Green Belt in the North Herts Local Plan.

1.4 **Wymondley Neighbourhood Plan:**

Policy NHE2 Biodiversity
Policy NHE3 Wildlife and Ecology
Policy NHE4 Green Infrastructure Policy
Policy NHE8 Landscaping Schemes
Policy GB1 Green Belt
Policy FR1 Flood Risk
Policy FR2 Flood Risk Management
Policy TM1 Roads

2.4 **Supplementary Planning Documents**

Vehicle Parking at New Development SPD
Sustainability SPD

2.0 **Site History**

2.1 There is no direct planning history on the application site

3.0 **Representations**

3.1 Highway Authority – ‘Does not wish to restrict the grant of permission’

3.2 Wymondley Parish Council – No comments

3.3 Local Residents / Site Notice – no comments received.

4.0 **Planning Considerations**

4.1 **Site and Surroundings**

4.1.1 The application site comprises a roughly rectangular shaped piece of land located on the south west side of Stevenage Road south west of Todds Green village east. The land is approximately 2738 sq metres in area (0.27 hectares) and is relatively flat with trees along the western boundary and a post and rail fence along the southern boundary with adjacent grassland. The northern boundary abuts industrial units located within the Todds Green

A public footpath (Wymondley 021) crosses the site in a north west – south east direction.

The site is within the Green Belt.

4.2 **Proposal**

- 4.2.1 Installation of hardstanding to provide parking and turning space for vehicles and equipment in connection with established and/or permitted farming, estate management and diversified uses on immediately adjoining and nearby land (Development has commenced). Installation of fencing (Development already carried out).

4.3 **Key Issues**

4.3.1 Principle of the development

- 4.3.2 Paragraph 142 of the NPPF states that *'The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence'*.

4.3.3 Paragraph 153 of the NPPF states:

'When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.'

- 4.3.4 Paragraph 154 sets out various exceptions to inappropriate development in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These exceptions include at:

h)
ii) engineering operations
v) *material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds) .*

4.3.5 Policy SP5 (Countryside and Green Belt) states at c) 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;'

- 4.3.6 Prior to the construction of the car park the application site was agricultural land forming part of a larger agricultural field. The supporting statement clearly confirms the former agricultural use at paragraph 3.1 :

'The application site was the northern and lowest edge of an enclosure of permanent grassland'

4.3.7 The formation of the car park constitutes an engineering operation. Paragraph 154(h)ii of the Framework states that engineering operations are not inappropriate development in the Green Belt and paragraph v) also allows for material changes of use of land provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt and is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects.

4.3.8 The use of the land for the parking of vehicles has a visual and spatial impact. However these impacts are limited by the contained nature of the site with a substantial tree screen along the western boundary, the heavily developed industrial land immediately to the north and the recently constructed housing across the district boundary in Lowestoft Gardens to the west. The only open boundary is the grassland to the south. The site is also readily accessed off the access road serving the industrial estate. Given the above context, in particular the nearby industrial units and housing, I do not consider that the use of the site for the parking of vehicles and the storage of equipment has a significantly adverse visual and spatial impact. The provision of the hardsurfacing is seen as a natural extension of the existing access road leading up to the site from the industrial estate.

The surfacing of the site and the crushed, surfacing material does have a similar appearance to the adjoining industrial access road. Spatially, the introduction of development into land that was formerly open has had some effect on the openness of the Green Belt however as stated above given the contained nature of the site that effect is not significant. The application site remains fairly open with the amount of parking limited with most of the commercial vehicles located close to the industrial estate boundary. The encroachment into the countryside is not excessive in my view.

4.3.9 The majority of the vehicles parked on the application site at the time this application was submitted appear to be connected with the established Fenton Traffic Management company located on the immediately adjacent industrial unit to the north. Commercial parking such as this would not be considered an appropriate use in the Green Belt but parking capacity on the industrial estate is extremely limited and congested and there is a strong case to consider allowing some overspill parking on the application site on the grounds of highway safety and amenity and for the effective operation of the industrial units. As such I consider that there is a compelling case to allow some commercial parking on the site as the very special circumstances necessary to outweigh the limited harm arising from inappropriateness.

4.3.10 Parking and storage in association with agricultural purposes would be an acceptable use in the Green Belt and indeed would be considered permitted development to an agricultural holding. The applicant has provided evidence that the site is part of around 250 acres of arable land, grassland, woodland and buildings adjoining or close to the site and that evidence includes an agricultural holdings number.

4.3.12 It is concluded that, in part, the development is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt (i.e. the engineering operation and the agricultural use) and that there are very special circumstances that justify the commercial parking and the associated limited spatial and visual impact that it entails.

4.3.13 The NPPF seeks to support a prosperous rural economy however paragraph 89 of the NPPF says that it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits opportunities to make a location more sustainable. In my view the development is not overly insensitive to its surroundings given the established built forms to the north and east and therefore there some economic grounds to justify the development.

4.3.14 Development on safeguarded land

4.3.15 The application site falls within land designated under Policy SP8 of the North Herts Local Plan as safeguarded land in order to meet the longer term housing needs of the District. This is subject to review however I am not aware that the site has been discounted from any future housing needs of the District Council. The use of the land for the storage of materials and vehicles is however only a fraction of the safeguarded land protected by Policy SP8 so as not to undermine its aspirations. In any case the use of the site for parking and storage can easily be reversed and the land made ready for a contribution towards future housing growth in the district. The development is not therefore in conflict with Policy SP8.

4.3.16 Impact on the character and appearance of the area

4.3.17 As mentioned above the application site is closely associated with the industrial estate to the north and is also bounded by housing and woodland on two other sides. As such the site could not be considered to be predominantly agricultural in character. I consider that the development is not substantially in conflict with the provisions of Policy SP9 and D1 of the North Herts Local Plan which require new development to be well-designed and located and to respond positively to its local context.

4.3.18 Highway safety and sustainability

4.3.19 Local Plan Policy T1 permits development that would not lead to highway safety problems or cause unacceptable impacts upon the local highway network.

4.3.20 The Highway Authority has considered the application carefully with the following assessment:

'The Highway Authority (HA) has reviewed the submitted documentation, which includes:
• A site plan • A Planning Statement (PS) The PS outlines that the hardstanding is intended to address a shortfall in parking for staff and visitors to nearby buildings. These buildings are currently served by a single private north-south spine road, which presents operational challenges including:
• Congestion • Poor visibility • Reversing movements in confined areas • Potential conflicts with oncoming traffic The proposed hardstanding

would allow vehicles to enter and exit from the southern end of the spine road in forward gear, improving safety and operational efficiency. While the Local Planning Authority (LPA) is responsible for assessing the adequacy of parking provision and layout, the HA's remit is to ensure that the development does not adversely affect the public highway. Given that: • The site is accessed via a private road • The proposal aims to improve internal vehicle movements • No direct impact on the public highway is anticipated Consequently, the HA considers the proposed development is not likely to have any significant impact on parking demand or operation on the local highway network, subject to the use of the land is restricted to the adjoining land use.'

4.3.21 I would concur with the above views of the Highway Authority that the development provides the opportunity to alleviate some highway and parking issues on the adjacent industrial estate and that the development has negligible impact on the surrounding highway network.

4.3.22 Impact on neighbouring property

4.3.23 The nearest neighbours are the industrial units to the north which will benefit from the extra parking and manoeuvring that the development provides. The houses to the east are separated from the site by a landscaped buffer and public footpath so that there would be little impact in terms of visual amenity and the development being limited to parking and storage is unlikely to generate significant noise. The development is therefore considered to comply with Policy D1 and D3 of the Local Plan.

4.3.24 Loss of BNG

4.3.25 The development, although retrospective, is not exempt from the need to achieve a 10% biodiversity net gain as more than 25 sq metres of on-site habitat would have been affected. The application is not accompanied by the statutory biodiversity metric that would have measured how many units of habitat the site contained before the development took place or how many habitat units are needed to replace the units of habitat lost to achieve 10% BNG. The imposition of the standard BNG condition is recommended.

4.3.26 Flood Risk

4.3.27 The site is within Flood Zone 1 and therefore there is a low probability of flooding. The site is below 1 hectare therefore a Flood Risk Assessment is not required prior to determining this application.

4.3.28 Impact on Public footpath 021

4.3.29 The footpath can be kept open through a suitably worded condition.

4.3.30 Climate change

4.3.31 The development is not considered to have any significant impact on local climate change

4.3.32 Planning Balance

4.3.33 I conclude that the development is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt and any harm is limited. There are no significant impacts on highway safety in fact there is some benefit in highway terms through alleviating congestion on the adjacent industrial estate. There would be no harm to adjacent occupiers amenity and any environmental harm is limited.

4.4 **Conclusion**

4.4.1 That the development is acceptable in planning and highway terms.

5.0 **Recommendation**

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

1. There shall be no storage of materials on the site that exceeds 3 metres in height

Reason: In the interests of protecting the visual amenities of the locality. To comply with Policy SP9 and D1 of the Local Plan.

2. The route of public footpath Wymondley 021 shall not be obstructed at any time.

Reason: To ensure that the footpath remains open and usable to the general public. To comply with Policy D1 and SP9 of the Local Plan.

Biodiversity Net Gain

1. The effect of paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is that planning permission granted for the development of land in England is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition "(the biodiversity gain condition)" that development may not begin unless:
(a) a Biodiversity Gain Plan has been submitted to the planning authority, and
(b) the planning authority has approved the plan.
The planning authority, for the purposes of determining whether to approve a Biodiversity Gain Plan if one is required in respect of this permission would be North Hertfordshire District Council.
There are statutory exemptions and transitional arrangements which mean that the biodiversity gain condition does not always apply

(<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain-exempt-developments>).
Based on the information available this permission is considered to be one which will require the approval of a biodiversity gain plan before development is begun because none of the statutory exemptions or transitional arrangements are considered to apply.

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: 12 March 2026	