

PLANNING STATEMENT

Irongate Farm, Hall's Green, Weston, SG4 7DR

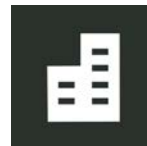
Job Ref: 24/114

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Prepared by Tom Donovan BA (Hons), MA, MRTPI on behalf of

PETER GEORGE TOWN PLANNING



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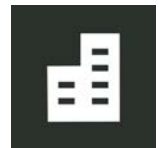
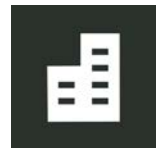


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Section 1: Introduction & Background

- 1.1 Peter George Town Planning has been instructed by Groundschool to prepare this planning statement to accompany a planning application for the change of use, extension and alteration of existing barns in use for storage to an agricultural educational facility and cookery school.
- 1.2 The purpose of this statement is to set out the proposals, provide an analysis against relevant national and local planning policy and ultimately make the case as to why planning permission should be granted.

Planning History

Ref.	Proposal	Decision Date
21/00376/FP	Change of Use of existing agricultural barns to B8 storage	Granted 02/06/2021
14/02995/1	Change of use of agricultural barn to storage (B8 use)	Granted 02/02/2015
04/00088/1	Change of use of agricultural barn to use for storage purposes (Class B8) (as amended by plan dated 29/03/04)	Granted 19/04/2004
01/00130/1	Conversion and adaptation of existing grain stores for use in connection with use of adjoining farm buildings for Class B1 purposes, as a variation of planning permission 00/00241/1 granted 20.4.00	Granted 06/04/2001
00/01282/1	Conversion and adaptation of existing grain store for use in connection with use	Withdrawn



	of adjoining farm buildings for Class B1 purposes, as a variation of previous planning permission granted on 20/4/00 under ref: 00/00214/1.	
00/00214/1	Conversion and change of use of farm buildings to use within Class B1 (Business)	Granted 20/04/2000
94/00506/1AG	Extend existing pole barn to create additional storage space	Prior approval not required 01/06/1994
92/00325/1AG	New Barn	Prior approval not required 29/06/1992



Section 2: Analysis of the Site and Surroundings

- 2.1 The application site is situated within Halls Green which is a small hamlet situated approximately 2km to the south-east of Weston. Halls Green is comprised of a small number of farmsteads and dwellings including the Irongate Farmhouse and its barns, the Rising Sun PH which is immediately opposite the site, and Fairclough Hall Farm situated a little to the north-east of the main part of the hamlet.

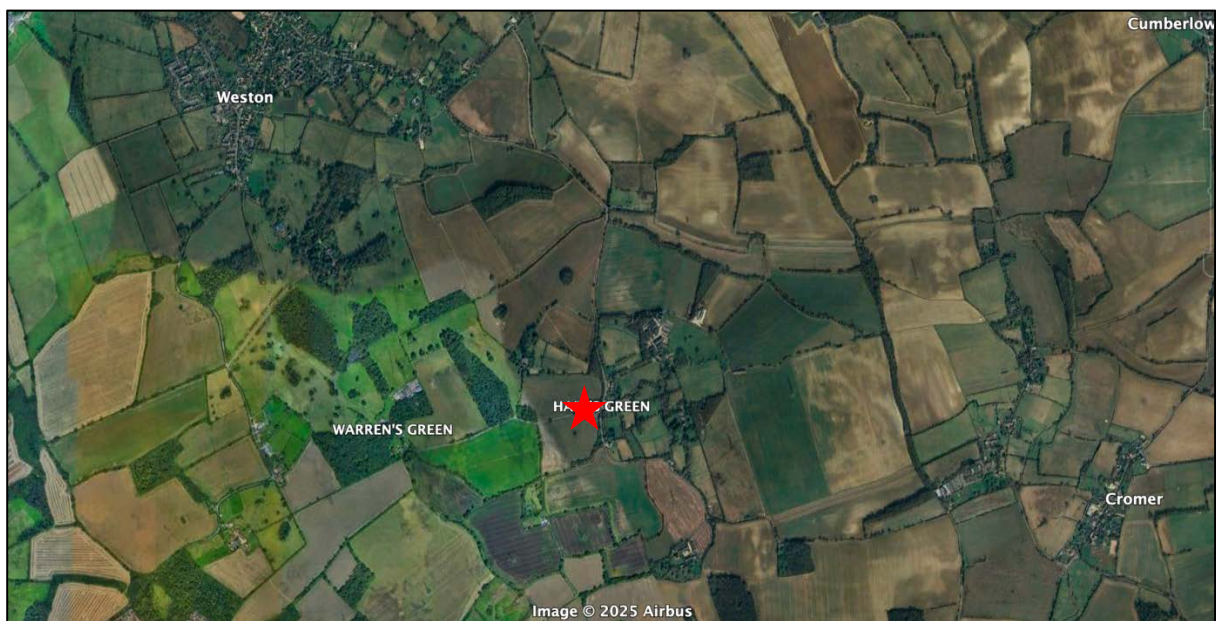


Figure 1 - Location in Context

- 2.2 Halls Green is completely washed over by Green Belt and is thus not a defined settlement as per the North Herts Local Plan, albeit it has a clear 'core' as per the above and contains a small number of residential and commercial properties.



- 2.3 Irongate Farmhouse is situated to the south side of the farmyard. It is grade II* listed, having been added to the list on the 28th of May 1987. The listing description reads as follows:

“Farmhouse. Late C16 or early C17, late C17 rear stair and stair tower, house altered and refronted early C18, windows altered C19. Timber frame on brick sill, front roughcast with plain margins, N end panelled with fan pargetting. Steep old red tile roof projecting back and front. Half hipped rear wing. A 2-storeys and attics house set back a little from road facing E with rear lean-to and 2-storeys rear wing at NW. A 3-cells, internal-chimney plan house with large chimney a third from S end, parlour at S, hall in middle, service room to N stair rising in projection to rear of hall. Kitchen in large rear lean-to. Unusually elaborate E front has moulded eaves cornice of deep projection with heavy scrolled brackets to cornice with plain modillions in groups between. 4 windows to 1st floor, flush box sashes with 6/6 panes. Similar front ground floor window to parlour and sashes in canted bay window to middle room, itself entered directly from C19 gabled porch with 6-panels fielded door. N gable has 2- lights casement window to 1st floor and attic. Interior has axial beams to ground floor and ovolo moulded to 1st floor. Internal chimney originally served ground floor only. Extra flue added for late C17 elaborate chimneypiece in chamber over hall with bolection mouldings and serpentine splat infill to doors of cupboard above.



Contemporary staircase round square well with moulded closed string, square newels with pendants and wavy splat balusters and matching balustrade at attic level. Parlour has fielded panelling, moulded dado and cornice, 2 panels doors with HL hinges, painted stone fire surround with fluted keystone. Chamber over parlour has marble fire surround with fielded panels over, deep cornice and apparently fielded panelling now hidden by stretched hessian and wallpaper. Clapsed purlin roof structure. An unusually elaborate 3-cells house with surviving internal features.”



Figure 2 - Drone View

- 2.4 Historic mapping indicates that an earlier U-shaped range of barns were located to the north of the farmhouse. Whilst much of this barn appears to have been demolished to make way for modern buildings, it appears that at least part of the U-shaped range survives as part of the roadside barn.



Accordingly, the roadside barn is likely to be curtilage-listed (albeit it falls outside of the red line boundary and thus the scope of this application).

- 2.5 A number of modern agricultural barns have been constructed it seems in the period since 1960. These are all large, utilitarian buildings of little architectural or historic quality or significance. The barn that is the subject of this application is one of these modern barns.
- 2.6 The farm is served by two vehicular access points: one to the north of the barns, one to the south. The road (listed as Halls Green to U267 Weston Road on the HCC Gazetteer of Roads) is a classified C road. A public right of way (Weston Footpath 028) runs across the site towards Warrens Green.
- 2.7 The site does not lie within nor is it adjacent to a conservation area. The site is not understood to fall within an archaeological area.
- 2.8 The site lies fully within Flood Zone 1 and is not at any risk of flooding from any other sources.



Section 3: The Development Proposal

3.1 The proposed development can be described as follows:

“Change of use, extension, alteration and modification of existing barn from storage and distribution (Use Class B8) to use as a community events and educative space for agriculture, cookery and related rural-based activities (Use Class F1). Single-storey extension to barn following demolition of existing lean-to. Solar PV to roof of converted barn, and installation of plant to the roof of the proposed extension.”

Groundschool – The Vision

3.2 Groundschool aims to be a centre of for the whole food and farming community working towards a future which fosters a collective, regenerative system of production. It is part of Groundswell, a two-day event, which provides a forum for farmers, growers, or anyone interested in food production and the environment.

3.3 Groundschool will provide comprehensive learning experiences in agroecology whilst developing a community of diverse enterprises with whom it will collaborate. Situated on a working farm, it will serve



as a dynamic centre of learning, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

- 3.4 Groundschool's mission is to empower agricultural students, farmers transitioning to regenerative practices, and companies seeking sustainable solutions. We achieve this through hands-on learning experiences, innovative projects, and community collaboration. By creating a unique environment where education meets real-world application, Groundschool will play a crucial role in shaping the future of sustainable agriculture in the UK.
- 3.5 The project translates ideas of good food and ecology as advocated by the Groundswell Festival, a regenerative agriculture festival to be held in Hertfordshire every summer from 2026.

Change of Use, Alteration and Extension of Existing Barn

- 3.6 The barn in question is proposed to be segregated to provide a flexible kitchen/teaching area, lecture/teaching space, gallery, commercial kitchen and associated spaces for an office, storage and WC's. This includes the insertion of a mezzanine at first-floor level. This will enable the barn to be used to host teaching and community events.



- 3.7 To facilitate this, an existing modern lean-to to the east side of the modern barn in question is proposed to be demolished and replaced with single-storey element. The east-facing wall of the proposed replacement extension would be close to but would not adjoin the adjacent curtilage-listed barn to the east.

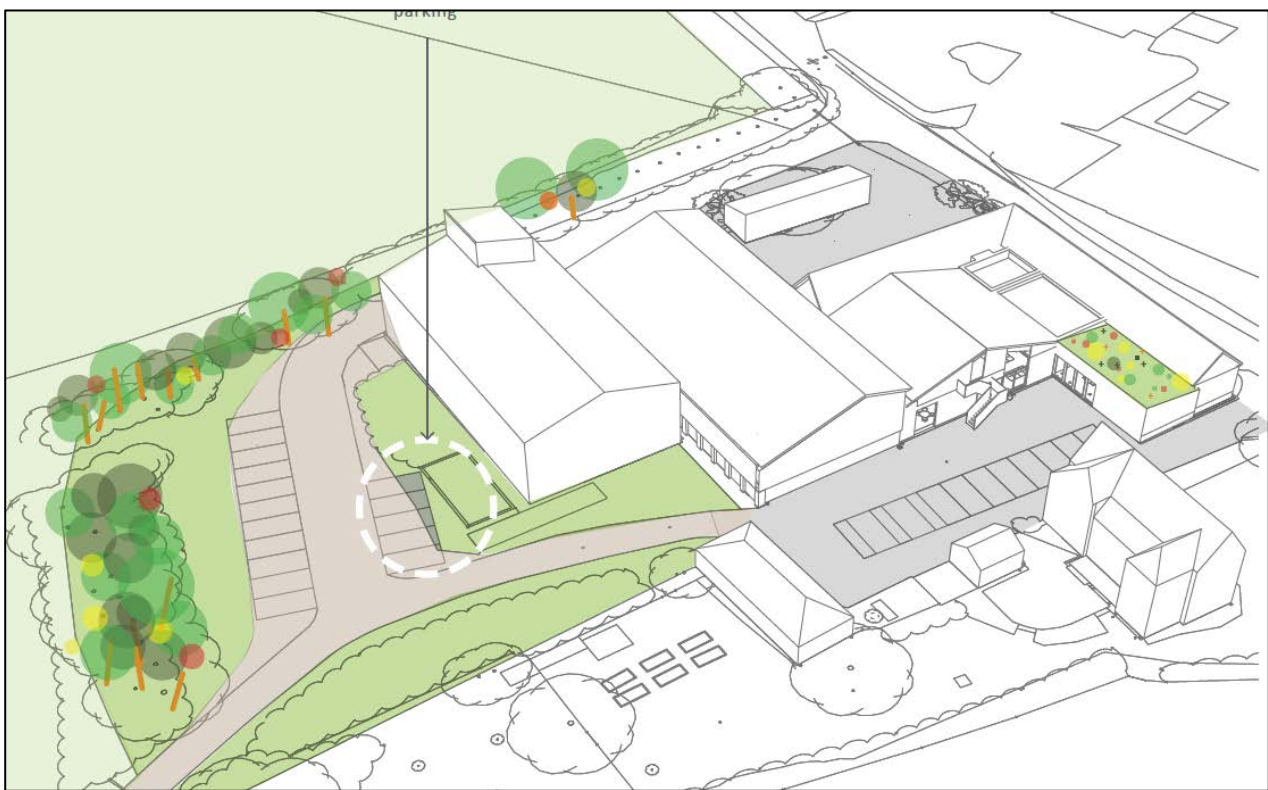


Figure 3 - Perspective View

- 3.8 A number of external alterations are proposed to the main part of the modern barn including new glazing elements to its south-facing (front) elevation and proposed rooflights. An external staircase is proposed to this elevation providing external access to the proposed mezzanine level.



- 3.9 The proposals include renewable energy elements including solar PV to the roof of the main barn and a sedum/green roof to part of the roof of the side extension. Some items of plant related to the proposed kitchen area are proposed to be sited on the hidden flat roof section of the side extension.



Section 4: Relevant Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.1 The Government policies on different aspects of planning are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (the Framework).
- 4.2 The relevant sections of the Framework are as follows:
- Section 2: Achieving sustainable development
 - Section 9: Promoting sustainable transport
 - Section 12: Achieving well-designed places
 - Section 13: Protecting Green Belt land
 - Section 14: Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
 - Section 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
 - Section 16: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Development Plan

- 4.3 Section 38(6) of the Planning Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that:

“If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination under the Planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations dictate otherwise.”



4.4 The development plan context for the planning application is provided by:

- **North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (adopted November 2022)**

4.5 The following policies are considered relevant to the consideration of this application:

Strategic Policies

- 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 SP9: Design and Sustainability
- Policy SP10: Healthy Communities
- Policy SP11: Natural Resources and Sustainability
- Policy SP12: Green Infrastructure, Landscape and Biodiversity
- Policy SP13: Historic Environment

Development Management Policies

- Policy T1: Assessment of Transport Matters
- Policy T2: Parking
- Policy D1: Sustainable Design
- Policy D3: Protecting Living Conditions
- Policy NE1: Strategic Green Infrastructure
- Policy NE4: Biodiversity and Geological Sites



- Policy HE1: Designated Heritage Assets

Supplementary Planning Documents

- Vehicle Parking at New Development SPD September 2011
- Design SPD July 2011



Section 5: Planning Analysis

Principle of Development: Green Belt

Policy Background

- 5.1 Section 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) contains policies pertinent to development within the Green Belt. Local Plan (LP) Policy SP5 largely defers to the Framework.
- 5.2 Paragraph 154 of the Framework advises that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless compliant with a list of exceptions set out in the remainder of the paragraph. Relevant exceptions are discussed in the following.

Whether Inappropriate Development: Conversion of the Existing Barn

- 5.3 Paragraph 154h, sub paragraph iv permits the re-use of existing buildings which are of permanent and substantial construction, provided they preserve the openness and purposes of the Green Belt.
- 5.4 The existing barn has a concrete frame with block and brickwork walls (externally timber clad), and a corrugated metal roof. It is in good condition



and is clearly of a permanent and substantial construction meeting compliance with the first part of paragraph 154h iv.

5.5 The proposed change of use of the barn would not have any impacts on openness due to the modest nature of any proposed alterations, and the self-contained nature of the proposals. There would be no impact on the purposes of the Green Belt.

5.6 As a result, the proposed conversion of the existing barn would be compliant with paragraph 154g of the Framework and LP Policy SP5 and would thus not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Whether Inappropriate: Extensions to the Barn

5.7 Paragraph 154c of the Framework permits the extension of an existing building provided it does not result in disproportionate additions over and beyond the size of the original building.

5.8 The replacement extension to the east side of the barn would be single-storey and more-or-less occupy the same footprint of and have a similar scale to the existing lean-to that it proposes to replace. Moreover, the



proposed extension would be modest set against the context of the size and scale of the barn to which it would be attached.

5.9 The proposed external staircase to the south side of the barn would have a small projection and would be relatively modest in terms of its height. Accordingly, this part of the proposals would appear modest in context of the overall size and scale of the existing barn.

5.10 In all, it is not considered that the proposed extensions would be disproportionate additions to the existing barn and would thus not be inappropriate development in compliance with Paragraph 154c and LP Policy SP5.

Summary

5.11 For the reasons discussed in the foregoing, the proposed development would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Accordingly, it would thus be compliant with Section 13 of the Framework and LP Policy SP5.

Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area & Impact on

Designated Heritage Assets



Policy Background

- 5.12 LP Policies SP9 and D1 seek to ensure that new development is well designed, physically acceptable and appropriate in the context of the surrounding area/landscape. These policies are consistent with Section 12 of the Framework insofar that they seek to ensure the same objectives are met.
- 5.13 The statutory duty under Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Building & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) sets out, with regard to applications for planning permission affecting a listed building or its setting, regard should be had to the desirability of preserving the setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
- 5.14 Policies SP13 and HE1 are in general accordance with Section 16 of the Framework, with all being consistent with the overarching legislative objectives set out above.

Discussion

- 5.15 The main barn proposed to be converted is in reasonably good condition, albeit it is a fairly large, utilitarian former agricultural building and it would be hard to characterise it as being particularly attractive. The associated



lean-to does not appear to be in a particularly good state of repair although it has limited prominence due to its position between the main barn and the roadside barn.

- 5.16 As a result, the barn and lean-to in question, whilst perhaps not completely inappropriate in a rural context, do not make a positive contribution to the setting of the grade II* listed farmhouse. Accordingly, there is an opportunity to improve the buildings and their relationship with the listed building.
- 5.17 Indeed, the proposals are intended to rejuvenate the building through the replacement of the existing poor lean-to with a modern flat-roofed extension with a part flat, and part living roof, and alterations to the main barn including recladding and the insertion of floor-to-ceiling glazing to the south-facing elevation.
- 5.18 The replacement of the lean-to would be a particular benefit of the proposals in heritage and design terms, whilst the other alterations and modifications would greatly improve the external appearance of the barn and its relationship with the farmhouse.



- 5.19 The plant items proposed for the roof of the proposed side extension would be positioned in a secluded location between the flank wall of the main barn and the roadside barn. Accordingly, they would have little public visibility and are not therefore considered to have a negative impact on the setting of the listed building, or the character and appearance of the area more generally.

Summary

- 5.20 It is considered that the proposed extensions and alterations to the barn would result in the clear improvement of the existing barn and its immediate environment. As a result, the proposed development would, in our view, represent a slight enhancement to the setting and significance of the grade II* listed farmhouse and represent an improvement in design terms.
- 5.21 As a result, it is considered that the proposed development would accord with the statutory provisions of Section 66 of the Act, LP Policies SP9, SP13, D1 and HE1 and Sections 12 and 16 of the Framework.



Impact on Neighbouring Properties

- 5.22 The adjacent farmhouse is situated immediately adjacent to the barn in question. This is the closest residential property to the site and the only that has the potential to be impacted by the proposed development.
- 5.23 In terms of the proposed extensions and alterations, these would all be modest and set sufficiently away from the farmhouse to ensure that these parts of the proposed development would not be harmful to the living conditions of this property.
- 5.24 Regarding the proposed plant proposed to be installed on the roof of the proposed extension, the potential impact of these items in terms of noise and disturbance has been considered in the noise report that accompanies the application. This concludes that the equipment would not be harmful to the living conditions of occupants of the farmhouse.
- 5.25 In terms of the use itself, it is not considered that the use would be one that would have a harmful impact on amenity given a) the nature of the operations and b) the times that the operations are proposed to occur. Moreover, and in any event, it would be sensible for the authority to consider amenity matters in context of the lawful B8 use of the barn (and



others in the yard). In other words, the proposed use is unlikely to be harmful set against the context of the types of uses that could be carried out lawfully at the site as part of a B8 use.

Highways Matters

General Considerations

- 5.26 No alterations are proposed to the existing access arrangements which are considered suitable for vehicular access to and from the site. Indeed, the site access is in a position whereby there is good visibility in both directions from the mouth of the access whilst the speed limit at this point is 30mph.
- 5.27 Moreover, the existing lawful use of the barn is for B8 purposes. Such a use is likely to involve vehicular traffic of a more significant nature in terms of both the size and number of vehicles. Accordingly, set against this context, it is considered that the proposed use would introduce a more appropriate use in terms of trip generation and highways safety.

Parking

- 5.28 The proposed use doesn't neatly fall within any of the categories set out in the Council's Vehicle Parking at New Development SPD, albeit this is partly



as a result of the age of the SPD together with subsequent revisions to the Use Classes Order.

- 5.29 In any event, it is proposed to deliver 25 on-site parking spaces (including 2 disabled bays) together with 10 cycle spaces. One EV-charging point is proposed to be installed, with cabling provided to enable further installation at a later point.
- 5.30 It is considered that the provision proposed would be more than suitable for the proposed use given a) the size of the converted/extended barn, and b) the nature and intensity of the proposed operations. Moreover, it is appropriate for the LPA to take account of the lawful B8 use of the barn and the possible implications that this could have in terms of parking capacity.

Ecology

Protected Species

- 5.31 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) has been carried out in support of the application. This concludes that further surveys are required in respect of roosting bats. No further surveys are considered to be necessary in respect to any other UK or European protected species.



Biodiversity Net Gain

- 5.32 The proposed development meets the de-minimis exemption for BNG on the basis that it impacts less than 25m² of habitat. Please see the DAS for more information regarding this.

Other Matters

- 5.33 There are no other matters relevant to a determination on the application.



Section 6: Summary & Conclusions

- 6.1 This statement supports an application for planning permission for the extension and alteration of an existing barn to facilitate its conversion from B8 use (storage and distribution) to F1 use (community and education).
- 6.2 As discussed in the foregoing, the proposed development would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would thus be acceptable in principle. Moreover, the change of use from B8 to a more appropriate rural use is considered to weigh in favour of the principle of the change of use.
- 6.3 Other matters material to the consideration of this application have been considered and discussed in the foregoing and it is considered that the proposed development would represent a suitable form of development for the site and would be fully compliant with relevant national and local planning policy.
- 6.4 In light of the above, it is respectfully requested that planning permission be granted.