

Location: Hatch Pen
The Joint
Reed
Royston
Hertfordshire
SG8 8AZ

Applicant:

Proposal: Erection of two proposed agricultural buildings and retention of extended excavated area

Ref. No: 25/01707/FP

Officer: Anne McDonald

Date of expiry of statutory period: 18.12.2025

Target Determination date: 18/12/25

Reason for delay: N/A

Reason for referral to committee:

The application is being presented to Planning Control Committee in accordance with paragraph 8.4.5(b) of the Council's Constitution which requires for any development with greater than 500 sqm of floorspace on a site of more than 1 hectare to be determined by the committee. In this instance, the site area is 4.5 hectares the proposed floorspace is 4,754.88 sqm.

Supporting documents:

- ☐ Local plan;
- ☐ Block plan;
- ☐ Plan RH48697PL – elevations;
- ☐ Plans L11505 – Hatchpen Farm, sheets 1 – 9;
- ☐ Planning, Design and Access Statement dated September 2025;
- ☐ BNG Metric;
- ☐ Draft Biodiversity Gain Plan dated May 2025.

1.0 Policies:

1.1 North Herts Local Plan 2011 – 2031:

- ☐ SP5 – Countryside and Green Belt;
- ☐ CGB1 – Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt;
- ☐ D1 – Sustainable design;
- ☐ NE2 – Landscape;

- ☐ NE4 – Biodiversity and geological sites;
- ☐ NE7 – Reducing flood risk;
- ☐ HE4 – Archaeology.

1.2 National Planning policy Framework:

- ☐ 6 – Building a strong, competitive economy.

2.0 Site History

- 2.1 There is a moderate planning history for the site including a detached farmhouse in 1991, the game keeper's cottage and associated shoot accommodation in 2008 and in 2020 an application for a dedicated farm office building with car parking. This has not been constructed on site.
- 2.2 More specifically to this proposal, planning permission was granted for granted planning permission for the erection of three agricultural buildings under application reference 21/01742/FP. These buildings have been constructed on site and neighbour the location for the proposed buildings the subject of this application.

3.0 Representations

- 3.1 **HCC Archaeology** – an archaeology evaluation was undertaken to provide information in advance of the determination of application 21/01742/FP where no significant heritage assets with archaeological interest were found. Therefore, we have no comment on this application.
- 3.2 **NHDC Ecologist** – the excavation works are existing and therefore there is no mandatory BNG requirement. However, Policy NE4 still applies and the submitted Biodiversity Metric shows that the proposal will deliver 11% BNG. The application is considered to be in accordance with policy.
- 3.3 **NHDC Environmental Health** – no comment.
- 3.4 **Reed Parish Council** – no objection but state that they want the visual impact of the proposal in the landscape considered and raise a suggestion that the farm stops HGV movements from the access on The Joint and uses the access to the north onto the A10. This is due to concerns that traffic along The Joint will increase with the new housing to be built in Barkway.
- 3.5 The application was advertised with site and press notices. No third party replies have been received at the time of writing this report.

4.0 Planning Considerations

4.1 **Site and Surroundings**

- 4.1.1 Hatchpen farmyard complex lies on the north side of The Joint, in a position set well back off the lane with an access track leading down to the existing farmyard. The land levels fall to north and east, with the existing farm buildings set on a low point in the landscape with established tree planting screening the buildings in views in the locality. The three buildings and land excavation approved under application 21/01742/FP has been

implemented on site. The area is attractive open countryside in the rural area beyond the Green Belt. The application site area has no land designations on it, it is not land within a wildlife site, AONB, SSSI or conservation area and does not contain or neighbour any listed buildings.

4.2 Proposal

4.2.1 This is a full planning application for the extension to the existing farmyard with the retention of the excavated area and two further buildings proposed to be used for the storage of straw. The proposed buildings are open sided and are 30m wide by 79.2m long with a shallow pitched roof with an eave's height of 10m and ridge height of 11.57m.

4.2.2 A Planning, Design and Access Statement has been submitted in support. Key points for this include:

- ☐ 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 is sold as fuel for local renewable energy power stations.
- ☐ The power stations have stringent quality specifications, particularly moisture content. The power station demands that the straw is dry and in excellent condition.
- ☐ This has resulted in a significant need for additional agricultural buildings at Hatchpen Farm.
- ☐ The excess straw is currently being stored in outside stacks. 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. The purpose of the additional straw buildings is to eliminate the wastage.
- ☐ The two proposed straw buildings are located adjacent to the existing straw buildings. These are situated on an area of existing hard standing that was implemented when the adjacent buildings were constructed.
- ☐ The buildings will comprise grain walling and profile sheeting roofing, with PVC composite panels on the roofs. This is the same materiality as the existing straw buildings at Hatchpen Farm.
- ☐ If the bales are stacked correctly in the shed, the side of the bales act as a wall protecting the straw from the elements, whilst the roof protects the tops layers of the stack from rain.
- ☐ Leaving the sheds open allows direct access to different types of straw, as required during the year. It also helps build a safe stack in the shed, as you can access the straw from the sides of the building when constructing that stack. Open sided sheds allow improved airflow which will improve the quality of the straw when it is stacked soon after harvest. Open sided sheds are also less expensive than sheds that have the side cladded.
- ☐ The Rand Brothers also have various long standing supply agreements to animal feed manufacturers, bedding manufacturers, livestock farmers and equine businesses.
- ☐ Straw demand has grown over the past 25 years, is reflected in the price that it can achieve. The substantial demand from straw burning powers stations, improvements in the technology of biogas plants and recognition of the value of straw (and straw pellets) as a source of fibre (particularly in ruminant diets) is only increasing demand for straw in the UK.
- ☐ All of these end users require high quality straw that has been stored correctly over winter. As such, to support the continued growth of the business, the straw sheds are required to ensure that high-quality straw can be produced and stored at Hatchpen Farm.

- 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.

4.3 **Key Issues**

- 4.3.1 The key considerations for this proposal are the principle of development, whether there would be any adverse harm in the context of the landscape, the siting and design of the buildings and traffic concerns.

Principle of development

- 4.3.2 The NPPF at paragraph 88 and a and b) states that planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings; and
- b) the development and diversification of agriculture and other land based rural business.

- 4.3.3 The Local Plan supports this policy aim, with Policy CGB1 which states that in the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt planning permission will be granted if (criteria c) the proposal is strictly necessary for the needs of agriculture and forestry. As set out above these straw barns are needed to support the applicant's existing straw business to reduce the amount of straw getting ruined by rain and become wastage. On this basis it is considered that the proposed barns comply with the policy requirements of Local Plan Policy CGB1 and the aims of paragraph 88 of the NPPF, and there is no objection to the principle of this proposal.

Landscape

- 4.3.4 The area is attractive rolling countryside. The main farmyard area is set down in the landscape with trees around which effectively screen the buildings in views in the landscape. When the 2021 application was considered, the excavated land area was to allow those buildings to be set down on a level that would ensure they would be screened by the land in views from The Joint and A10, which has been successful.
- 4.3.5 The area where the proposed barns would be sited has already been excavated as this was done when the area approved under the 2021 application was excavated. This application is seeking approval for this excavated land area. The submitted plans shows that that yard area is fairly level with a datum point of between +112.10 - +112.24. The top of the bank on the field level to the south and west of the excavated area is a land level of +126.75. This is a land level change of 14m between the top of the adjacent field and the yard area where the buildings are to be sited. As the proposed buildings have an eaves height of 10m and a ridge of 11.57m this shows how the buildings will be set down into the land.
- 4.3.6 There is no objection to this land area being removed to allow the location of these building to be sited in this location, adjacent to the existing straw buildings and set at a ground level to minimise any adverse visual impact in the countryside. Furthermore, it ensures that the farm buildings are grouped in one location and not scattered throughout the landscape.

- 4.3.7 Local Plan Policy NE2 requires for new development to respect the sensitivities of the relevant landscape and to not cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area or the landscape character area in which the site is located, taking account of any suitable mitigation. Given the mitigation measure is the excavation works to lower the ground level to ensure the buildings are set into the landscape, the proposal is considered to comply with the aims of Policy NE2 and no objection is raised to the application on this basis. These new buildings, like the existing ones adjacent to this application site, will be effectively screened in views from The Joint and A10 and will only become visible from the farm access track at the point when the whole farmyard becomes apparent.

Siting and design

- 4.3.8 Local Plan Policy D1 requires for the development to respond positively to a site's local context. There is no objection to the layout or design of the buildings. The proposed straw barns are open sided agricultural style buildings, designed for the purpose needed, and open sided to allow a fork lift truck to access all side and parts of the barn for stacking and unstacking of the straw bales. The external materials are to match the existing buildings at the farm, and a condition is imposed to ensure the colour is the same, which is grey. It is considered that the buildings will appear as part of the farmyard group. The proposal is considered to comply with the aims of Policy D1.

Other matters

- 4.3.9 The comments made by Reed Parish Council are noted. However, this application is proposing to accommodate straw bales that are already being stored in the open and is not proposed an increase in traffic generation at the farm. Therefore, traffic generation and the route the traffic takes are unaffected. Furthermore, the farm has a long-established access on The Joint and it would be both unreasonable and unenforceable to impose a limitation requiring the trips associated with these straw barns to travel via the north side of the farm to the A10 whilst the trips associated with the existing straw barns could use the access on The Joint.
- 4.3.10 The proposal does not require any parking provision as the buildings are needed for the farm's current operations.
- 4.3.11 Local Plan Policy NE4 requires for all development proposed to deliver a measure net gain for biodiversity. The metric submitted with the application sets out that there will be an 11% gain in habitat units. A condition is recommended to ensure the details of this are secured on site.

4.4 Conclusion

- 4.4.1 There is no objection to this proposal. National and local planning policies support development in rural areas that is needed for agriculture and the excavation works and landscaping will set the buildings down into the landscape and effectively screen the buildings to protect views in the landscape. The application is therefore recommended for conditional permission.

4.5 Alternative Options

- 4.5.1 None applicable

4.6 **Pre-Commencement Conditions**

4.6.1 There are no pre-commencement conditions.

5.0 **Legal Implications**

5.1 In making decisions on applications submitted under the Town and Country Planning legislation, the Council is required to have regard to the provisions of the development plan and to any other material considerations. The decision must be in accordance with the plan unless the material considerations indicate otherwise. Where the decision is to refuse or restrictive conditions are attached, the applicant has a right of appeal against the decision.

6.0 **Recommendation**

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

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out wholly in accordance with the details specified in the application and supporting approved documents and plans listed above.

Reason: To ensure the development is carried out in accordance with details which form the basis of this grant of permission.

3. The external colour of the buildings hereby permitted shall be the same grey colour to match the existing farm buildings at Hatchpen Farm.

Reason: For consistency in the locality. Local Plan Policy D1.

4. Prior to the first use of the buildings hereby approved, details of the habitat enhancement measures, including a timetable for their implementation on site, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the LPA. These measures are to include a mix of native trees, including some fruit bearing trees, to be planted in the landscaped buffer around the yard area.

Reason: To protect views in the landscape and BNG requirements. Local Plan Policies NE2 and NE4.

5. There shall be no external lighting unless the details of the lighting and the hours it is to be on for are agreed in writing by the local planning authority and only the agreed details can be implemented on site.

Reason: To prevent light pollution in the rural area that could harm wildlife. Local Plan Policy NE4.

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.