



PETER GEORGE TOWN PLANNING

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Development Control
North Herts Council
Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City
SG6 3JF

Dear Sirs

Full Planning Application: New Pound Farm, Land to the North-East of Old Hale Way, Hitchin, SG4 0SA

Altered vehicular access to facilitate the use of land as a community car park together with the installation of new gates and fencing and associated landscaping (resubmission of application ref. 23/01652/FP withdrawn 11/09/2023)

Introduction & Background

Peter George Town Planning has been instructed by Mr Parker to submit a planning application for planning permission to North Herts Council for the development as described above. This supporting letter, together with the associated plans and documents, seeks to make the case that the elements referred to above are acceptable and that planning permission should be granted.

Supporting documents include:

- Drawings ST-2824-700-C and ST-2824-800-SPA **Stomor**
- Transport Statement **Stomor**
- Covering Letter/Supporting Statement **Peter George Town Planning**
- Ecological Impact Assessment **Morgan & Stuckey**



- Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment (and associated documents) **Morgan & Stuckey**

The Application Site

The application site is a roughly rectangular-shaped parcel of land forming part of an agricultural holding located to the east side of Old Hale Way and located in the Green Belt between Hitchin and Ickleford.

The front part of the site lies adjacent to Old Hale Way with an existing field access being located in the south-eastern corner of the field. The wider part of the holding extends as far east as the railway line and as far north as Icknield Way which is a Byway Open To All Traffic (BOAT, 018). Footpath 026 splinters from the BOAT and runs vertically through the site before crossing the railway and terminating at the industrial estate. Both of the PRow's are outside of the red line application site.



Figure 1 – The Application Site

Residential properties fronting Old Hale Way are located to the south of the site along with NHDC allotments which extend to the rear of approximately 20 of the gardens belonging to the above referenced houses. The allotments are accessed by a vehicle track which is situated adjacent to the existing field access to the application site and runs parallel to its southern boundary.



The Proposal

The proposal is described as follows:

“Altered vehicular access to facilitate the use of land as a community car park together with the installation of new gates and fencing and associated landscaping (resubmission of application ref. 23/01652/FP withdrawn 11/09/2023).”

The application site forms part of a large agricultural holding that extends several hundred metres to the east of the site, and which extends as far north as Icknield Way. Over the past several years, a number of new unofficial public footpaths have been created within the site to enable the public to walk/cycle through the site and is now utilising the land for a wide range of agricultural and community purposes including willow tree growing for cricket bats, allotments, and a community orchard. He has many similar future projects in mind which will hopefully come to fruition in the coming months and years.

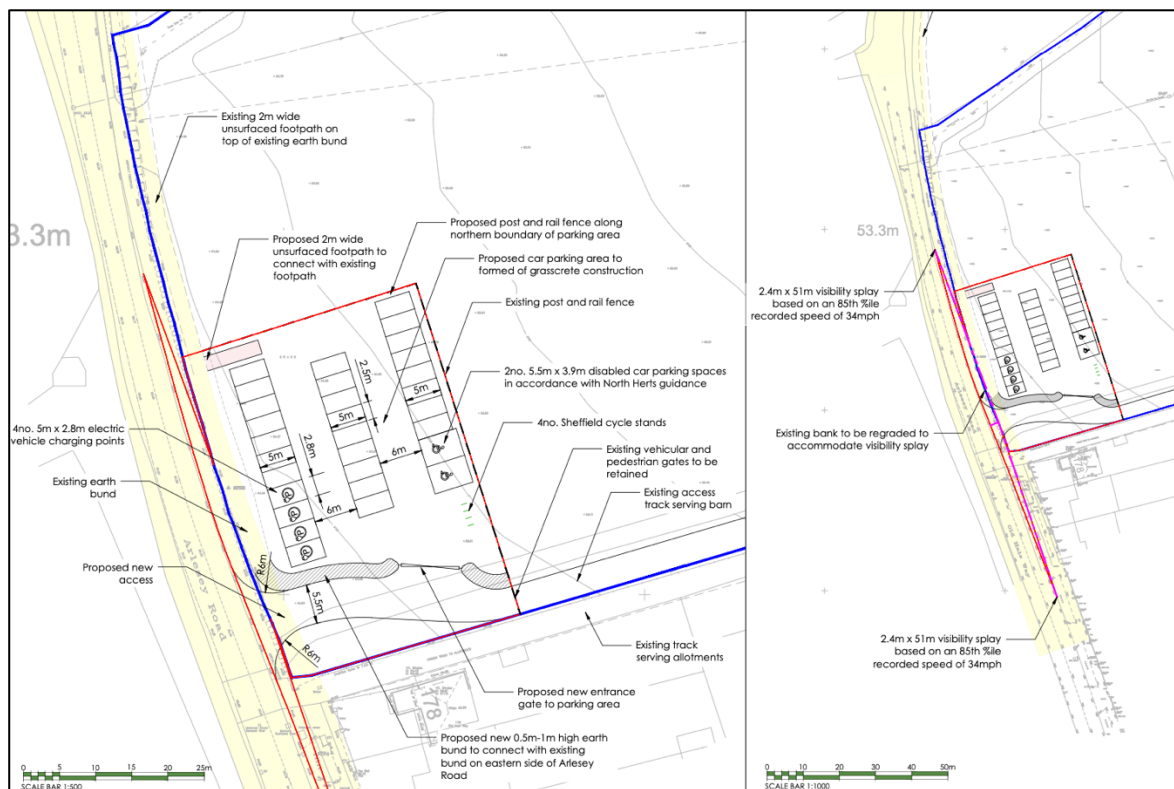


Figure 2 - Proposed Site Plan (Not to Scale)

The proposed would involve the formation of a small community car park to a) serve those wishing to use the land, b) provide a small amount of additional overflow parking to serve Ickleford, which struggles for sufficient parking provision, and c) provide an area for occasional farmers markets, car boot sales and the like.



The proposed car park would provide approximately 30 parking spaces including two disabled spaces, four spaces with electric vehicle charging points. Four Sheffield cycle stands are proposed. Physical development involves the installation of grasscrete for the surface of the car park and new gates to the access. Post-and-rail fencing is proposed to the northern boundary of the car park to connect to the existing fencing.

The existing access is proposed to be altered to improve the interaction between the site and the public highway and the adjacent access to the Council allotments. This involves the provision of visibility splays of 2.4m x 51m which are based on the results of the speed survey that has been carried out.

The car park would be connected to an existing pedestrian footway that has been created adjacent to the front boundary of the site on our client's land and which ultimately connects with the adopted footpath that provides pedestrian access to Ickleford. A small section of footpath is proposed to facilitate this.

Relevant Planning Policy

Applications for planning permission should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan for the area comprises the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031

Policies relevant in this case are as follows:

- Policy SP1: Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire
- Policy SP5: Countryside and Green Belt
- Policy SP9: Design & Sustainability
- Policy D1: Sustainable Design
- Policy T1: Assessment of Transport Matters
- Policy T2: Parking

The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) sets out planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The Framework places at its heart an emphasis on granting planning permission for sustainable development; sustainable development being that which contributes to economic, environmental and social



ambitions. The online Planning Practice Guidance is also a material planning consideration where relevant.

Relevant sections of the Framework include:

- Section 9: Promoting sustainable transport
- Section 12: Achieving well designed places
- Section 13: Protecting Green Belt land
- Section 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Planning Analysis

Key Issues

The key issues in the consideration of the planning application are considered to be as follows:

- Whether the proposed change of use would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and, if so, whether sufficient very special circumstances exist which outweigh any identified harm.
- The visual effects of the proposed change of use.
- The effect on the safe operation of the adjacent highway.
- Other material considerations.

Green Belt

Discussion

Section 13 of the Framework contains policies pertinent to development in the Green Belt. Local Plan Policy SP5 largely defers to the Framework with respect to proposed development within the Green Belt. This Policy is therefore considered to be consistent with the Framework in terms of decision making.

Paragraph 154 of the Framework deals with the construction of new buildings and is therefore not relevant to the determination of this application.

Paragraph 155 of the Framework sets out that, certain forms of development are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. This includes at 150 (e) – “**material changes in**



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

It is firstly important to note that, whilst paragraph 155e contains two examples of material changes of use of land that could be applicable, the use of the words 'such as' clearly indicates that other material changes in the use of land can be considered under this paragraph.

In terms of the impacts, the physical aspects to the proposed change of use are fairly minimal comprising the laying of a macadam surface to form the surface of the proposed car park, and the erection of a pair of field gates to its proposed entrance. These aspects are not considered to cause any reduction to the openness of the site or fundamentally affect the purposes of the Green Belt in this location.

In terms of the use of the land itself, a car park is obviously somewhat transitory with cars using the site only expected to be present for relatively short periods of time and not forming a permanent presence at the site. There are moreover currently limited views through the site at present due to the presence of the existing bund that extends across the full extent of the site frontage. Accordingly, cars parked on the land would have limited visibility from Old Hale Way and thus the effect on openness would be fairly limited.

It is perhaps also important to note that the land parcel in question is situated in an area of Green Belt which was instigated to, amongst other aims, guard against the coalescence of Ickleford and Hitchin. However, these proposals would not conflict with this purpose given a) the significant Green Belt buffer that would be retained between the northern edge of the site and the southern edge of the Ickleford village boundary, and b) the limited nature of these proposals in terms of built development.

In terms of the earlier planning application that was withdrawn, these proposals are for a car park less than half the size of that previously proposed (30 spaces compared with 70 previously proposed). Accordingly, these proposals would have a significantly reduced impact upon the openness of the Green Belt than those previously proposed.

Summary

The Framework sets out that material changes in the use of land are not inappropriate development in the Green Belt subject to the proposed change of use preserving openness and not conflicting with its purposes.



In this case, it is considered that the proposed use of the land as a community car park would not cause any reduction to the openness of the Green Belt, nor would it fundamentally affect the reasons for including land within it.

Accordingly, it is considered that the proposals would be compliant with Section 13 of the Framework and LP Policy SP5. A case for Very Special Circumstances is discussed at the conclusion to this letter.

Visual Considerations

As already touched upon, the proposed would have limited visual implications due to the minor nature of the proposed surfacing and associated gates together with the existing bund at the front of the site which largely obscures immediate views to and across the site from Old Hale Way. Additionally, proposed landscaping would involve new planting of trees and other shrubs. These would further reduce any potential visual impact.

Overall, it is considered that the visual implications of the proposals would be limited and that the proposals would not result in any tangible harm to the character and appearance of the area. Accordingly, the proposals would be compliant with Sections 12 & 15 of the Framework and Policies SP9 and D1.

Highway Considerations

The submitted Transport Statement (including a Stage 1 Road Safety Audit) and associated drawings prepared by Stomor provide justification for the proposed car park and the associated works to the access point with the highway. Accordingly, it is not considered that the revised proposals would give rise to any tangible impacts on highway safety. In connection with this, a Stage 1 Road Safety Audit has been undertaken and has not identified any issues regarding the proposals.

Biodiversity

The Ecological Impact Assessment that has been carried out has concluded that the site has limited potential for bats, badgers, great-crested newts or any other protected species. Accordingly, in this regard, the proposed development would not give rise to harm to protected species.

Regarding Biodiversity Net Gain, a baseline assessment has been carried out and is submitted with the application. An off-site contribution would be required in order to deliver the required 10% statutory biodiversity net gain. The details of this can be



considered and secured as part of a Biodiversity Net Gain Plan which it is anticipated would be secured by condition.

Very Special Circumstances

The case is made within the foregoing that the proposed development would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt insofar that it would involve the material change of use of land (and development associated with such) and that such would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and not conflict with its purposes. However, were officers to disagree, it is noted that planning permission should only be granted in very special circumstances.

Our client, since taking on the land, has implemented several initiatives to encourage the use of the land by the public. This has included the provision of new footpaths through the site for the use of the public, the use of one land parcel by local people as allotments, and the siting of dog bins and similar along some of the established rights of ways and other footways.

The intention of the proposed car park is to encourage the further use of the site by providing a place for members of the public to park be they simply looking to go walking or use the allotments. Moreover, a new footway has been created alongside the existing narrow footpath that lies adjacent to Old Hale Way/Arlesey Road which would be connected to the car park. Accordingly, the car park could provide additional 'overflow' parking for the village (the centre of the village is a 7–8-minute walk) with this new footpath connection enabling easy access by foot.

In addition, it is proposed that the car park would be utilised for car boot sales, farmers markets and similar such events a small number of times per year. This would be a further public benefit of these proposals.

Conclusions

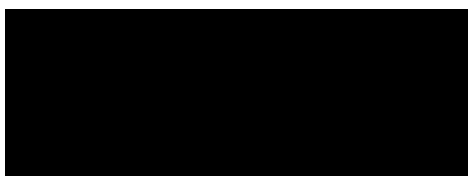
This letter supports an application for planning permission for the change of use of land to form a community car park and associated physical development including the hard surfacing of the site and the erection of new field gates and fencing, landscaping and the modification of the existing access.



For the reasons set out in the foregoing, it is not considered that the proposals would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, whilst the proposals are considered to be acceptable in visual and highways terms. Moreover, the proposed is intended to be provided largely for the use of the local community and, as such, positive weight should be attributed to this in the overall planning balance.

In light of the arguments put forward within this letter, it is respectfully requested that planning permission be granted.

Yours sincerely,



Tom Donovan BA(Hons) MA MRTPI
PETER GEORGE TOWN PLANNING