

Design, Access and Planning Statement

Proposal: Change of use to a mixed-use car sales premises (Sui Generis) with open air vehicle storage, erection of ancillary office/workshop building.

Site: Former N and P Windows Site, Bury Mead Road, Hitchin, SG5 1RT

1. Introduction

This Planning, Design and Access Statement is submitted in support of a full planning application for the change of use and redevelopment of the Former N and P Windows site at Bury Mead Road, Hitchin. The proposed scheme seeks permission for the use of the site as a car sales premises (Sui Generis), with open-air display and storage of vehicles, the erection of a new ancillary office/workshop building for administrative and operational purposes.

The site is located within a designated Employment Area (HE2) under the North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2011–2031), and the proposal seeks to bring the vacant site back into viable commercial use in accordance with national and local planning policy.

The applicant is an established business owner currently operating from Unit 3 South Road, Baldock, SG7 6BZ. The existing premises are no longer adequate to accommodate the business's needs, and extensive searches have failed to identify any other suitable sites within the local market. This proposal represents an opportunity for the business to expand and relocate to a more sustainable and policy-compliant location.

2. Site Context

The application site is located on the southern side of Bury Mead Road, an established employment area in Hitchin. It comprises a fully hard-surfaced parcel of land enclosed by existing steel security fencing. The site was formerly occupied by N and P Windows and has been used for open air storage following the demolition of buildings previously on the site.

To the east and west are commercial and industrial buildings, while to the south the site abuts the rear gardens of residential properties on Heathfield Road. The site benefits from an existing vehicle access from Bury Mead Road which is to be retained.

The site is not located within a Conservation Area, is not within a flood risk zone (Flood Zone 1), and contains no protected trees or heritage assets.

3. Proposed Development

The application seeks planning permission for the following:

- Change of use of the vacant commercial site to a car sales premises (Sui Generis)
- Open-air display and storage of vehicles for sale
- Erection of one ancillary office/workshop building, to accommodate:

- Sales office and reception
- Staff WC and kitchen facilities
- Workshop area for internal vehicle servicing (only for vehicles owned by the business; not for public repairs or MOTs)
- Retention of existing hardstanding, with repairs and resurfacing where required
- Retention of existing access from Bury Mead Road
- Retention of boundary treatments, including steel security fencing and gates
- New hedgerow planting along the southern boundary to soften the visual impact for neighbouring residents

The proposed hours of operation are:

- Monday to Friday: 09:30 – 18:30
- Saturday: 09:30 – 18:00
- Sundays: 10:00 – 16:00

The applicant is willing to revise these hours if required.

4. Planning History

The site previously benefitted from planning permission (ref: 20/02481/FP) for the erection of a B2/B8 industrial unit. This permission was not implemented, and the site is currently vacant. Historically, it operated as a window manufacturing and storage site, which would fall under a B2/B8 classification. Although the previous buildings have been removed, the existing use of the site could be reasonably described as a vacant employment site falling within B8.

5. Planning Policy Context

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023)

The NPPF supports the reuse of previously developed land (para 120), the growth of small and medium-sized businesses (para 81), and encourages economic growth (Chapter 6). It promotes sustainable development and making effective use of land.

This proposal aligns with NPPF objectives by:

- Bringing a long-vacant site back into active use.
- Supporting local business growth.
- Enhancing employment opportunities within a designated employment area.

The development of the site for a Sui Generis car sales use will bring a long-vacant parcel of brownfield land into beneficial economic use and support the growth of a local small business.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2011–2031)

Relevant policies include:

- Policy SP3: Employment – supports development that helps deliver sustainable economic growth.
- Policy ETC1: Employment Areas – encourages appropriate employment-generating uses within Employment Areas. The policy confirms that sui generis uses such as car sales may be acceptable, subject to compatibility with neighbouring uses and amenity considerations.
- Policy D1: Sustainable Design – encourages high-quality design and compatibility with the site context.
- Policy D3: Protecting Living Conditions – ensures developments avoid harmful impacts on residential amenity.
- Policy T2: Parking – requires developments to provide suitable and safe vehicle access and parking.
- Policy NE8: Sustainable Drainage Systems – supports SuDS for surface water management.
- Policy NE5: New and Improved Public Open Space – not applicable to this proposal.

The proposal adheres to these policies by:

- Supporting a growing local business within an allocated employment site.
- Minimising impact on nearby residents through layout, boundary planting and control of operating hours.
- Retaining existing site infrastructure (access, boundary, hardstanding) to limit environmental impact.

North Hertfordshire Design SPD

The design and layout reflect guidance by:

- Respecting site boundaries and context.
- Minimising intrusion into views by locating the new building away from residential properties.
- Incorporating soft landscaping to the rear boundary.
- Maintaining appropriate separation between commercial activity and adjacent dwellings.

6. Design and Appearance

The proposed office/workshop building will be positioned near the front of the site to minimise any impact on residential properties. It will measure approximately 15 metres in length by 9.5 metres in width, with a ridge height of 5.5 metres and a shallow pitched roof of 10 degrees.

Materials and Finishes:

- External Walls: 35mm box profile wall cladding (80mm composite), plastisol-coated steel sheeting in Merlin Grey (BS 18B25)
- Roof: 35mm box profile roof cladding (100mm composite), plastisol-coated steel sheeting in Goosewing Grey (BS 10A05)
- Sectional Doors: Two roller shutter doors (4000mm W x 3500mm H) in Goosewing Grey
- Personnel Doors: Secure access door with 12-point locking, in Tele Grey (RAL 7045)
- Rainwater Goods & Flashing: Galvanised steel hot-dipped in plastisol coating, Goosewing Grey

The appearance of the proposed structure will be entirely consistent with modern industrial design and typical of other nearby buildings in the Bury Mead Road Employment Area. The colour palette and materials have been selected to be neutral, durable and visually appropriate.

7. Air Quality and Environmental Considerations

The proposed open-air car storage and display area will not result in significant air pollution or environmental harm. Vehicle movements will be modest and limited to transporting cars for sale and occasional test drives. There will be no public vehicle servicing, no engine testing in open areas, and all maintenance is internal and restricted to business-owned vehicles.

The development lies within an established employment area, and the nature of use is inherently low-emission relative to other industrial operations. The Council's Environmental Protection team has previously raised no objection to similar uses at this location. As such, no unacceptable air quality impacts are anticipated.

Should the Local Planning Authority consider it necessary, the applicant is willing to accept a planning condition requiring the provision of air quality mitigation measures or electric vehicle charging infrastructure, in line with local guidance.

8. Justification and Benefits

Employment

The proposed development will initially support 6 employees, with scope for future employment growth. Although there is no employment density set for employment areas, the use is clearly consistent with the aim of supporting small and growing local businesses.

Economic Development

The proposal allows a local business to relocate from inadequate premises at South Road, Baldock, which are no longer suitable. Alternative sites have been explored and none were found to meet the business's operational and location requirements.

Amenity and Neighbour Impacts

- The hours of operation are modest and typical for such a use
- Workshop activities are limited to internal servicing of business-owned vehicles only
- New boundary planting provides visual buffering for residents
- No lighting or external equipment is proposed that would affect amenity

9. Amenity Considerations

- The proposed hours of operation are moderate and respectful of nearby residents.
- The ancillary workshop is limited to vehicles owned by the business.
- The rear hedge planting and location of the building at the front of the site ensure separation from homes along Heathfield Road.
- Environmental health concerns (e.g., noise, lighting, air quality) can be addressed through conditions, as done in previous approvals on this site, if required.

10. Highways and Parking

The site benefits from an existing access point from Bury Mead Road, which has previously been deemed acceptable by Hertfordshire County Council Highways in earlier planning applications. No changes to the access arrangements are proposed.

The proposed site layout includes:

- 6 designated staff parking spaces
- 5 designated visitor parking spaces, including 1 disabled bay measuring 3.6m x 6m, which complies with relevant accessibility standards
- 52 marked spaces for display/storage of vehicles for sale

While the exact number of sale vehicles will fluctuate, the layout ensures more than sufficient operational capacity. In addition, the hardstanding offers flexibility with ample overflow parking space available within the secure site boundary, if required.

The internal layout enables vehicles to safely turn and manoeuvre on site. Servicing and deliveries can take place entirely within the site envelope, avoiding disruption to Bury Mead Road.

Cycle parking/storage facilities can be secured by planning condition and provided near the office/workshop entrance.

To clarify, no car washing facilities will be provided on site. When required, vehicles will be transported to local off-site car washing businesses. This avoids any drainage or pollution concerns that might arise from on-site washing operations.

- The existing access is retained and has previously been deemed suitable by HCC Highways (ref: 20/02481/FP)
- Hardstanding allows for safe vehicle manoeuvring, turning and parking
- There is ample space for car display, customer parking and service movements

11. Waste Management

Commercial waste management will be addressed in line with guidance previously provided by the Council's Waste and Recycling Services Manager. While the proposed layout does not currently show a detailed waste storage area, the applicant confirms they are happy for this to be secured by condition, as was accepted in the previously approved application on the same site (ref: 20/02481/FP).

The applicant is committed to ensuring appropriate, well-managed waste storage and collection arrangements are implemented that protect the amenity of surrounding residents and contribute to sustainable waste practices.

12. Biodiversity and Drainage

Biodiversity Net Gain

The site is entirely hard-surfaced with no ecological value. It qualifies for exemption from the Biodiversity Net Gain requirements under current legislation.

Drainage and Flooding

- Site lies in Flood Zone 1 (low risk)
- Drainage will be managed by a SuDS-compatible soakaway system, with detailed design to be agreed by condition

13. Conclusion

The proposal represents a sustainable and appropriate use of a vacant brownfield site within an established employment area. It complies with national and local planning policies, supports local business growth, and has been carefully designed to protect residential amenity.

There are no technical constraints which cannot be addressed by condition, and the proposal is policy compliant in principle and in detail. It is therefore respectfully requested that planning permission be granted.