

DELEGATED FILE NOTE

CASE OFFICER: ...Harriet Sanders.....

APPLICATION REFERENCE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT	APPLICATION SITE
25/03147/FP	Erection of a second layer of storage units (17no. additional units) for self-storage above existing storage units.	Land Adjacent To Unit 3 On The West Side Of Cadwell Lane Hitchin Hertfordshire SG4 0SA

Submitted Plan Nos

2512-00A 2512-01 2512-02A 2512-03A 2512-04A 2512-05A

SP1	Sustainable development in North Herts
SP2	Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distrib
SP3	Employment
SP6	Sustainable transport
SP9	Design and Sustainability
ETC1	Appropriate uses in Employment Areas
T1	Assessment of transport matters
T2	Parking
D1	Sustainable design
D3	Protecting living conditions

2.0 **Site History**

- 2.1 22/01334/FP - Use of land for the siting of 40 No. double-stacked steel shipping containers for self-storage (Use Class B8) with associated palisade security fencing,

vehicular access gates, external lighting, CCTV and hard surface – withdrawn 06/07/2022.

- 2.2 22/01810/FP - Use of land for the siting of 20 No. steel shipping containers for long-term self-storage (Use Class B8) with associated palisade security fencing, vehicular access gates, external lighting, CCTV and hard surface (amended plans received 21/10/2022 and 20/01/2023). CP 13/02/2023.
- 2.3 23/01262/S73 - Variation of Condition 2 (amendments to groundworks) of planning permission 22/01810/FP granted 10/02/2023 for Use of land for the siting of 20 No. steel shipping containers for long-term self-storage (Use Class B8) with associated palisade security fencing, vehicular access gates, external lighting, CCTV and hard surface (as amended by plan received 03/07/23). CP 17/07/2023.

3.0 **Representations**

3.1 **Consultee Responses**

- 3.1.1 *Hertfordshire County Highways* – does not wish to restrict the grant of permission.
- 3.1.2 *Environmental Health* – no objection but notes that it would be prudent to restrict hours of use to those currently on place as per condition 2 on planning permission 23/01262/S73.
- 3.1.3 *Waste and Recycling Services Manager* - no comment.
- 3.1.4 *Hitchin Forum* – object for the following reasons:
- ☐ appearance and size - would be very ugly and monolithic and would dominate the Cadwell playing field.
 - ☐ disturbance to neighbours by both noise and lighting.
 - ☐ safety to users of the upper units.

3.2 **Comments Received**

- 3.2.1 The application has been advertised with site notices and neighbour notification letters. 6 objections have been received. The key points include:
- ☐ Loss of light to workspace at Unit 3.
 - ☐ Inadequate parking provision resulting in overspill onto adjacent land and Cadwell Lane.
 - ☐ Access arrangements are already unsafe and constrained - more containers will exacerbate traffic issues including difficulty in visibility pulling out of unit 3.
 - ☐ Parking provision is inadequate and inaccurately described – users block entrance to unit 3 or use unit 3 to turn around or park in unit 3's car park.
 - ☐ Vehicle numbers and movements are underestimated.
 - ☐ Unauthorised business operations on site. Storage containers used regularly not just for storage.
 - ☐ Adverse visual impact and inadequate screening.

- Landscaping and visual impact are misrepresented. Hawthorn hedging shown as screening is seasonal and does not provide year-round mitigation.
- Approved operating hours are not adhered to, with users present well beyond permitted times.
- Increase traffic and pollution and problems with parking, blocking driveways and unsafe parking.
- Concerns about security of using second layer of units.
- There is no adequate drainage strategy, and additional containers will increase surface water run-off.

4.0 **Planning Considerations**

4.1 **Site and Surroundings**

Application Site

- 4.1.1 The application site is located on the west side of Cadwell Lane. The site is part of an existing industrial area, albeit on the edge of the industrial estate. The site is occupied by 20 containers and operates as a self-storage facility. The area occupied by the containers is fenced with approximately 2.4m high green palisade fencing with access via a security gate. An area of parking is available at the eastern part of the site. There are no staff on site and the facility is managed remotely.
- 4.1.2 The site has an existing access onto Cadwell Lane which is under the ownership of the applicant. The adjacent industrial unit to the north, Unit 3, it understood to have a right of access through the access from Cadwell Lane to Unit 3.
- 4.1.3 The site is bounded to the north by Unit 3 and associated hard standing. It is bounded to the east by Cadwell Lane and to the west by vegetation and trees with the River Purwell and railway beyond. To the south is the recreation ground. Adjacent to the boundary between the site and the recreation ground is a formed by a moderate sized hawthorn hedge on the recreation ground.
- 4.1.4 The site slopes gently down to the south towards the recreation ground and to the west from Cadwell Lane down towards the river and railway.
- 4.1.5 The site and containers are clearly visible when driving towards the industrial estate along Cadwell Lane due to the open views across the recreation ground and its location on the edge of the industrial estate. The site visit was undertaken during the winter months with little foliage on the hawthorn boundary hedge. The hedge screened the bottom third of the existing single layer of containers.
- 4.1.6 The site falls within a designated employment area where Local Plan Policy ETC 1 applies.

Surrounding Area

- 4.1.7 Surrounding uses include extensive industrial uses to the north and east, including recycling facilities, recreation uses to the south and residential to the southeast. The adjacent unit, Unit 3, is modest in height with a taller element at the rear of the Unit. There is parking on the hard standing to the front of Unit 3. Opposite the site is a two-storey building and yard areas enclosed with palisade fencing and gates.
- 4.1.8 The overall character of the area in this transition zone is mixed industrial and employment uses with a variety of unit styles, heights and designs with some yard areas with security fencing and enclosures. The entry to the industrial area along Cadwell Lane is characterised by residential properties and the open recreation ground. A small parking area is available on Cadwell Lane adjacent to the recreation ground. There is on street parking on the streets nearby.
- 4.1.9 During the site visit, it was noted by the officer that the area was moderately busy with traffic and larger vehicles including lorries. Several lorries were parked on Cadwell Lane with others turning into and out of Wallace Way.

4.2 **Proposal**

4.2.1 Consent is sought for:

“Erection of a second layer of storage units (17no. additional units) for self-storage above existing storage units.”

- 4.2.2 It is proposed to stack a second layer of containers onto the existing, excluding three closest to Unit 3. This would result in an overall height of approximately 5m. The containers would be painted dark green to match the existing. It is proposed that the facility would continue to be operated as a self-storage facility. Access to the upper level containers would be via a mobile access staircase.
- 4.2.3 Hours of operation would continue to be between 0700-2000 7 days a week.
- 4.2.4 No alterations are proposed to the access from Cadwell Lane or the gated access to the site. Customers can park within the compound by the containers or use the additional parking area adjacent to the compound.

4.3 **Key Issues**

4.3.1 The key issues for the consideration are:

- The principle of the development.
- The effect on the character and appearance of the area.
- Impact on neighbouring amenity.
- Highways, access and parking.
- Environmental and ecological effects.
- Other considerations.

The principle of the development

- 4.3.2 The application site falls within the designated employment area Wilbury Way HE1 on the Local Plan policies map. Policy ETC1 applies and states that within such areas:

“planning permission will be granted for office, research and development, industrial processes, industrial and storage and distribution uses provided:b) Any Use Class B8 development is easily accessible from the primary road network.”

- 4.3.3. The principle of B8 use on the site has already been established under the previous consent for the existing use. The proposal would be an intensification of this existing use and would be acceptable in principle.

- 4.3.4 The proposal complies with Local Plan policies SP3 and ETC 1. The principle of the proposal would therefore be acceptable.

The effect on the character and appearance of the area

- 4.3.5 Consideration needs to be given to the siting, design and layout of the proposal and its potential impact on the character and appearance of the area.

- 4.3.6 Section 12 of the NPPF places great emphasis on the quality and design of new development, with the aim to ensure that new development is sited appropriately and would be appropriate in terms of local character and context. These aims are reflected in Local Plan policies SP9 and D1. Policy D1 of the Local Plan states that development will be granted provided the design of the development appropriately and positively responds to the site's local context together with other criteria to encourage a positive and sustainable form of development.

- 4.3.7 The site is located within an existing, designated industrial/employment area, albeit on the edge of the designated area. The site forms part of the transition zone from the residential and recreational uses to the south, transitioning to the industrial/employment uses to the north and east. The site is particularly visible on the approach from the south along Cadwell Lane with clear views across the open recreation ground. The application site and the adjacent Unit 3 form an isolated area, separated from the rest of the industrial/employment area by Cadwell Lane to the east and bounded to the west by the River Purwell and railway and to the south by the recreation ground.

- 4.3.8 The proposed additional layer of 17 containers above the existing 20 containers will increase the overall height of the containers to approximately 5m. The overall visual height would vary across the site due to variations in ground level. The ground level of the recreation ground sits at a lower level than the site, resulting in a height of the containers of 5.2m above the recreation ground level along the boundary.

- 4.3.9 The adjacent Unit 3 varies in height from 3.65m along the elevation facing the application site rising up to 4.5m at the ridge. The taller area to the rear of Unit 3 rises to approximately 5.3m at its highest point but is set back from the road and is not particularly prominent in the streetscene.

- 4.3.10 The application site and Unit 3 provide an important transition from the wide open views across the recreation ground on the approach along Cadwell Lane towards the industrial estate. The area is separated from the wider industrial estate by Cadwell Lane. The single layer of containers and the shallow, low height roof form of Unit 3 behind provide a stepped transition of bulk and height of development into the industrial estate. They sit adequately within the streetscene and do not dominate the views on the approach from Cadwell Lane or when viewed from the recreation ground. This lower level of development is a key feature in the streetscene in this location and should be preserved and maintained.
- 4.3.11 The addition of a second layer of containers would increase the overall bulk and mass of the site to an unacceptable level. The height would exceed the height of the main part of the adjacent Unit 3, inverting the gradient of heights in the transition area when viewed from the street and across the recreation ground. The second layer of containers would be visually harmful and would not respond positively to the site's local context.
- 4.3.12 The applicant notes in the supporting Planning Statement that the existing site is largely hidden from public view on the approach from the south. As stated above, the hawthorn hedge is seasonal and when the site was visited in December, the hedge provided little screening, obscuring only approximately the bottom third of the containers. The supporting visuals are misleading in this respect. It is also noted that the hedge is not within the applicant's ownership and cannot be relied upon to provide screening.
- 4.3.13 The applicant also notes in the supporting Planning Statement that the proposed second layer of containers would be set against a backdrop of existing industrial units to the rear. This is also misleading. The second layer of containers would result in an overall height of approximately 5m. This would obscure and dominate the industrial units (Unit 3) behind.
- 4.3.14 The containers would be painted dark green to help reduce their visual impact which would create a cohesive visual appearance.
- 4.3.15 As a result of the increase in height of the second layer of containers, the design and siting of the development fails to relate adequately to the site's local context. It would be visually dominating and intrusive, particularly when viewed from the south and from the open recreation ground. It fails to respond positively to the site specific transitional character of the site from residential to employment/industrial use. The proposal is unacceptable in terms of design and appearance and fails to comply with Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and Policies SP9 and D1 of the North Herts Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

Impact on neighbouring amenity

- 4.3.16 Policy D3 of the Local Plan permits development that does not result in unacceptable harm to the amenity of neighbouring occupiers and where necessary encourages the use of mitigation measures to reduce these impacts. This is generally reflected by the provisions within the NPPF.

Potential Impact on Residential Amenity

- 4.3.17 The closest residential occupiers are approximately 80m to the south of the site on the opposite side of Cadwell Lane in an apartment block set back from the road. Given the distance between the apartment block and the site, it is considered that no unacceptable harm would be caused to the amenity of the occupiers of the apartments.
- 4.3.18 Comments raised that residents in the area are already affected by noise and disturbance have been taken into consideration. However, no objection has been raised by Environmental Health or Highways.
- 4.3.19 It is noted that noise arising from the opening and closing of the steel containers and accessing the site could cause disturbance during the night. If the proposal was to be approved, it would be reasonable and necessary to continue to impose the same hours of operation as existing.

Potential Impact on the Occupiers of Unit 3

- 4.3.20 The site is bounded to the north by Unit 3. The unit has a number of windows and a door on the side elevation facing the site. No containers are proposed to be stacked on the three containers closest to Unit 3 (nos 18, 19 and 20). Two containers are proposed to be stacked on the containers close to the north west boundary. However these containers would be sited opposite the roller style warehouse door and would not result in sense of unacceptable overbearing to the occupiers of Unit 3. There would be no unacceptable loss of light arising from the proposal.
- 4.3.21 Concerns raised by the occupiers of Unit 3 have been noted and reviewed. Concerns regarding parking and access have been noted, however Highways have raised no objection to the proposal.
- 4.3.22 Comments regarding use of Unit 3's premise for parking and/or manoeuvring is noted. However, this is a civil matter and not a material planning consideration.
- 4.3.23 Concerns have been raised regarding security issues and a potential increase in crime as a result of the proposal. It is noted that the increase in height at the site could result in a more enclosed feel. However, lighting and CCTV is installed on the site and should be sufficient to address these concerns.

Potential Impact on Recreation Ground Users

- 4.3.24 The increase in height as a result of the second stack of containers would have an overbearing presence on users of the recreation ground along the boundary to the north. This could diminish the enjoyment of the recreation area. The proposal is therefore unacceptable in terms of impact on neighbouring amenity and fails to comply with Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and Policy D3 of the North Herts Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

Highways, access and parking

- 4.3.25 Local Plan policies SP6, T1 and T2 state that planning permission will be granted provided that development would not lead to highway safety problems or cause unacceptable impacts upon the highway network and that proposals are assessed against the relevant parking standards.
- 4.3.26 Hertfordshire County Highways do not wish to restrict the grant of permission. Objections raised regarding exacerbation of the existing situation and the underestimation of trips have been noted. However, Highways state in their comments that the trips are considered to be infrequent and so would not have a wider impact on the highway network. With no objection from County Highways, the highways and access arrangements are considered to be unobjectionable.

Parking Standards

- 4.3.27 The proposal would result in an increase in floorspace of 245sqm resulting in a total of 540sqm.
- 4.3.28 A parking area for six vehicles is detailed in the submitted plans at the eastern end of the site. During the site visit it was noted that cars were parking in a different format to that marked on the plans. However, the space appeared to be able to accommodate 6-8 parked cars.
- 4.3.29 The council's SPG Vehicle Parking at New Developments 2011 sets out the following parking requirements for B8 uses:
- 1 car parking space for every 75M2
 - 1 cycle space for every 500m2
 - 1 visitor space every 1000m2
- 4.3.30 The proposed facility would provide approximately 540m2 of floorspace in total, giving rise to a requirement for 7.2 parking spaces. Taking into account that some users will park adjacent to their containers, this requirement can be met on site.
- 4.3.31 Although the Highway Authority and Local Planning Authority look to encourage the use of cycling as a sustainable form of transport, it is accepted that few customers are likely to deliver or collect items from storage on a bicycle. Customers could take their bicycles into the secure storage facility.
- 4.3.32 The proposed parking is acceptable.
- 4.3.33 Objections have been raised regarding the availability of the parking area shown at the north of the site. On the basis of the information submitted, it is understood that the land is within the ownership of the applicant, it is shown within the red line and that the parking is available for the storage units. Any further dispute is not a material planning consideration.

Environmental and ecological effects

- 4.3.34 The proposal would not result in any unacceptable environmental or ecological effects.

Other considerations and response to concerns raised in objections

- 4.3.35 Waste and refuse collection – same as existing.
- 4.3.36 Safety - the safety and operating of the site is not a material planning consideration.
- 4.3.37 Unauthorised business operations on site – this is not a material planning consideration.
- 4.3.38 Approved operating hours are not adhered to - this is not a material planning consideration.
- 4.3.39 Drainage – concerns have been raised that there is no adequate drainage strategy, and that additional containers will increase surface water run-off. The site area is below the threshold (1ha) that requires a flood risk assessment. Therefore any surface water management issues would be dealt with under building regulations. The government Flood Map for Planning has been checked and the site is not within flood zone 2 or 3 or at risk of identified surface water issues.
- 4.3.40 The proposal has raised a number of objections and the Local Planning Authority is sympathetic to local concern. It is considered that the objections raised have been addressed in the report above.

4.4 Conclusion

- 4.4.1 As a result of the increase in height of the second layer of containers, the design and siting of the development fails to relate adequately to the site's local context. It would be visually dominating and intrusive, particularly when viewed from the south and from the open recreation ground. It fails to respond positively to the site specific transitional character of the site from residential to employment/industrial use. The proposal is unacceptable in terms of design and appearance and fails to comply with Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and Policies SP9 and D1 of the North Herts Local Plan 2011 - 2031.
- 4.4.2 As a result of the increase in height of the second layer of containers, the proposed development would result in an overbearing impact on the amenity of the users of the recreation ground along the boundary with the site. The proposal is therefore unacceptable in terms of impact on neighbouring amenity and fails to comply with Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and Policy D3 of the North Herts Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

4.5 Alternative Options

- 4.5.1 None applicable

5.0 **Recommendation**

5.1 That planning permission **REFUSED** for the following reasons:

1. As a result of the increase in height of the second layer of containers, the design and siting of the development fails to relate adequately to the site's local context. It would be visually dominating and intrusive, particularly when viewed from the south and from the open recreation ground. It fails to respond positively to the site specific transitional character of the site from residential to employment/industrial use. The proposal is unacceptable in terms of design and appearance and fails to comply with Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and Policies SP9 and D1 of the North Herts Local Plan 2011 - 2031.
2. The proposed development would result in an overbearing impact on the amenity of the users of the recreation ground along the boundary with the site. The proposal is therefore unacceptable in terms of impact on neighbouring amenity and fails to comply with Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and Policy D3 of the North Herts Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

Proactive Statement:

Planning permission has been refused for this proposal for the clear reasons set out in this decision notice. The Council has not acted proactively through positive engagement with the applicant as in the Council's view the proposal is unacceptable in principle and the fundamental objections cannot be overcome through dialogue. Since no solutions can be found the Council has complied 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: 6 February 2026	