

Location: **Land at Hatchpen Farm
The Joint
Reed
Royston
Hertfordshire
SG8 8AZ**

Applicant: **Rand**

Proposal: **Erection of three agricultural buildings. (Additional
plans received 24/08/21).**

Ref. No: 21/01742/FP

Officer: **Anne McDonald**

Date of expiry of statutory period : 09.09.2021

Plan numbers

- Location plan;
- DP/423 – excavation plan;
- Tree belt extension plan;
- Proposed block plan;
- Storage building A/B – elevations east/west and floor plan;
- Storage building A/B – elevations north/south and roof plan;
- Workshop building C – elevations west and floor plan;
- Workshop building C =- elevations north/south/east and roof plan;
- DP/434 – excavation cross section plan;
- 35221PLS-03-C – topographical survey.

Supporting documents

- Planning Statement;
- WSI;
- Archaeological Evaluation Report.

Reason for Planning Control Committee determination

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 2 hectares the proposed floorspace is 4,725 sqm.

1.0 Policies

1.1 The relevant policies in this instance are:

1.2 Saved Local Plan 1996:

- 6 – Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt;
- 16 – Areas of Archaeological Significance and other Archaeological Areas.

1.3 Submission Local Plan 2011 – 2031:

- SP5 – Countryside and Green Belt;
- CGB1 – Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt;
- NE1 – Landscape;
- NE7 – Reducing flood risk;
- HE4 – Archaeology.

1.4 National Planning policy Framework:

- Section 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 keepers cottage and associated shot accommodation in 2008 and in 2020 an application for a dedicated farm office building with car parking. This has not been constructed on site.

3.0 **Representations**

3.1 **HCC Archaeology** – required for pre-determination survey works to be undertaken on site. This has been done and the results submitted to the HCC Archaeology team. However, at the time of writing a response from this team regarding these on site works is still outstanding and this will be updated at the committee meeting.

3.2 **NHC Environmental Health** – no objection.

3.3 **NHC Environmental Protection** – no objection.

3.4 **Reed Parish Council** – no objection but wish for the buildings not to be visible from The Joint.

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 area is attractive open countryside, not within the Green Belt.

4.2 **Proposal**

4.2.1 This is a full planning application for an extension to the existing farmyard with three new buildings surrounded by a concrete apron. The site area is the north east section of the field adjacent to the farmyard. The proposal is to cut into the landscape, to set the bulk of the buildings on a lower ground level. The cross-section plan shows that the proposed excavation level is to be datum point 14m, which is a reduction in ground level of 4.75m on the uphill side and 1m on the downhill side of the site compared to existing levels.

4.2.2 Proposed buildings A and B are the same building type and are to be on the west side of the site area. These buildings are 63.3m long by 25m wide with an eaves height of

8m and a maximum ridge height of 11.6m and these are open sided structures and are to be used for straw storage.

4.2.3 Building C is positioned close to the east side boundary of the site area. This building is also 60.3m long by 25m wide but is lower in height, with an eaves height of 6m and a maximum ridge height of 9.6m. This building is enclosed, with roller shutter doors on the west elevation and is to be used as a machine store and repair building.

4.2.4 The application form states that the external materials are to be grain walling and profile sheeting.

4.2.5 A letter has been submitted in support of the proposal. Key points from this letter include:

1. The site is located on agricultural land 1.2 kilometres north of Reed. Hatchpen Farm is the centralised hub for Rand Brothers agricultural and storage operations.
2. The site is accessed via a private road, owned by the applicants off the Joint.
3. As an agricultural business, the site is surrounded in all other directions by open agricultural land.
4. The existing site at Hatchpen was excavated to minimise any visual impact and is currently very well visually contained within the wider landscape.
5. Rand Brothers was established in 1934. The business has grown to become one of the largest Arable Operations in East Anglia, farming more than 3000ha of arable land, producing and processing in the region of 50,000 tonnes of straw as well as storing and processing more than 200,000 tonnes of grain per annum.
6. Rand Brothers are one of the largest local employers with 24 full time, 6 part time and a further 30 seasonal workers.
7. The distance between the workshop and straw buildings is to mitigate fire risk.
8. The location of the buildings has been selected so that they minimise the impact on the wider countryside and relate well to the existing agricultural operations.
9. The site will be excavated, reducing existing levels considerably, to a base level of approximately 13.80.
10. The site is screened from the wider countryside with an existing bank and trees to the North and hedgerows to the East. It is proposed to extend the tree belt to the South of the existing site, to encompass the southern and western boundaries of the proposed site and provide further screening.
11. Crop assurance standards now dictate that grain stores must only store grain and not also be used as machinery stores in order to prevent contamination with the grain in store. The result is significant health and safety, as well as welfare concerns with staff maintaining and repairing machinery outside throughout the year. The lack of facilities has directly resulted in staff resignations and caused significant problems when trying to recruit replacements. This has forced the business to send machinery away to be repaired or maintained at significantly increased cost. It is unprecedented for a business of this size not to have dedicated workshop facilities. It is not uncommon to have over £2 Million of machinery stored outside.
12. Chapter 6 of the NPPF promotes the growth of business in rural areas through well designed new buildings.
13. With this being an application for agricultural buildings, it is by its nature a use that is located within a rural area and as recognised within national policy, it is an appropriate use for a rural area.
14. The Straw Enterprise at Rand Brothers produces on average 60,000 tonnes of straw per annum. Straw produced on the Rand Brothers farms is used to produce renewable energy making significant contribution to targets of producing energy from renewable sources. It is the largest supplier of straw to local renewable energy generators (power stations) in the UK. These power stations have helped to replace those using fossil fuels resulting in considerable local and national support, as well as helping the

objectives of the Draft North Hertfordshire Local Plan; mitigating the effects of climate change by encouraging renewable energy technologies.

15. Currently the straw is made up of 'bales' and stored outside on farms in 'stacks'. The straw stacks are exposed to the elements through the year. Customers have strict quality requirements demanding that the straw has a maximum moisture content of no more than 15%. The outside and top bales that make up the stack insulate the bales within the stack from the elements. This results in approximately 20% of each stack being unsaleable. Until recently these bales had a minor value in being exported to Ireland for mushroom compost, however, Brexit regulations have now made this unviable. With no market, this straw is destroyed.
16. With significant increases in the value of straw and subsequently the cost in producing it, reducing the levels of waste straw are not only essential for the business to remain competitive but also to reduce the farm's carbon footprint in producing it. Reducing the amount of waste straw would increase the amount of renewable energy produced locally. The proposed straw barns would reduce the amount of wastage to zero. The proposed two straw storage buildings will provide suitable storage, and thereby resolve issues surrounding straw moisture quality and reduce waste.
17. The proposed agricultural buildings are proposed to be located immediately west of the existing agricultural buildings at Hatchpen Farm, and are therefore considered to be well related to the existing development. The Site Excavation Plan and Elevation Plans show that the proposed straw stores and workshop will fall below the ridgeline of the surrounding landscape, whilst also being below the ridge height of existing agricultural buildings located immediately east. The proposed location of the site, is therefore considered to be the most suitable location in order to minimise the landscape and visual impact of the proposed buildings.
18. It is proposed to plant a substantial new tree belt, both to the south and west of the proposed agricultural buildings, to further limit the landscape visual impact of the buildings. The applicants are happy for the detail of the planting to be secured by way of a suitably worded planning condition.
19. No increase in transport movements will result from the application, meaning that no impacts will be felt further from the site as a result of changes to traffic movements.

Additional letter of clarification dated 24/08/21:

4.2.6 The case officer asked the following query: *Given the levels change in this location, why has this site been chosen? What other sites have been chosen and discounted?*

4.2.7 The following reply on 24/08/21 was given:

The proposed location was selected for the following reasons:

1. Safe and convenient access to the farm track
2. The lowest area on the site, adjacent to the existing agricultural buildings.
3. It would be cost prohibitive to excavate further to the South or East of the existing site, due to the steep gradient.
4. The proposed location adjacent to the existing farm buildings would reduce the visual impact on the landscape and countryside
5. The proposed site is adjacent to existing utilities such as electricity, telephone line, water and sewage connections.

1. AOC Archaeology Group was commissioned by Rand Contracting Ltd to undertake an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching at the site of a development at Hatchpen Farm.
2. The evaluation formed part of a programme of archaeological works, designed to inform a planning application for the development of the site for the erection of three agricultural buildings.
3. Eleven evaluation trenches were excavated across an area of agricultural fields to the west of the current buildings. The majority of the trenches showed topsoil and subsoil deposits sealing natural geology at a depth of c.0.4m – 0.5m. In at least three trenches, the natural geology was at an average depth of c 0.7m-1 m.
4. Apart from two shallow gullies, most likely created by the passage of water and a single pit which cut subsoil, no archaeological deposits or artefacts were identified.
5. The evaluation suggests that the site was open agricultural land during the medieval and post-medieval periods and lies outside of areas of known prehistoric and Roman activity.

4.3 Key Issues

Principle

- 4.3.1 There is national and local policy support for applications such as this. The NPPF, paragraph 84 states that planning policies should enable the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in the rural area and allow the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. This national advice is reflected in Local Plan saved Policy 6 and emerging Policy CGB1, which both support development that is strictly necessary for the needs of agriculture. The supporting statement sets out a robust case of need for the proposal, and as a result there is no objection to the principle of this development.

Landscape

- 4.3.2 The area is attractive rolling countryside, and the existing farm buildings are set down in the landscape with trees around which effectively screen the buildings in views in the landscape. This proposed excavation works and landscaping will have the same result for these proposed buildings and this approach is in accordance with the requirements of emerging Policy NE1 which requires for development proposals to respect the sensitivities of the relevant landscape.
- 4.3.3 The existing farmyard is on a lower datum level than the proposed area, as it is on datum level 10m while the proposed ground level for this site area is datum level 14m.. There is an existing established farm track with landscaping on either side that is to be retained between the edge of the existing yard area and the proposed yard area. The retention of this track and landscaping ensures the stability of the existing excavated area and the land continues to drop down to the existing yard area. It is not considered necessary to insist that the new area is lowered to the same datum level as the existing area, as this would result in a significant amount more of excavation works, which are unnecessary given the proposed excavation level and landscaping achieves the result of ensuring the proposed buildings are screened in the landscape. Furthermore, there are existing silo buildings in the farmyard and the ridge line of the proposed straw buildings will be 2m lower than the height of the silos. Therefore, further ground level excavation is not considered to be necessary.
- 4.3.4 The edges of the excavated area are to be left natural and vegetation will grow over the sides which will both screen and stabilise the land.

Layout and design

- 4.3.5 There is no objection to the layout or design of the proposal. 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 noted that a fire break is required between the straw storage buildings and the machinery store, and given this is a functional requirement, no objection is raised to this gap or site layout.

Other Matters

- 4.3.6 The proposal does not require any parking provision as the buildings are needed for the farm's current operations.
- 4.3.7 The extended tree belt will help to enhance bio-diversity on site in comparison to the existing farmed agricultural land. A condition is recommended to ensure native trees as well as some fruit bearing trees, to enhance bio-diversity, are planted.
- 4.3.8 It is noted that this site area is within an archaeological area and that pre-determination trenching works have been undertaken and no evidence of artefacts or previous use has been found. The application is not considered to pose harm to archaeology on this basis. However, a condition is recommended to stop works and seek advice in the event that archaeological remains are found.

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.

4. The landscape buffer is to be planted up in the first planting season following the commencement of the excavation works hereby permitted. The buffer is to be planted with native trees, including some fruit bearing trees.

Reason: To protect views in the landscape.

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.

6. In the event that archaeological artefacts are found on site during the site clearance and excavations stages, all works on site must stop and advice from the HCC Archaeology team be sought.

Reason: To protect archaeology.

Proactive Statement:

Planning permission has been granted for this proposal. The Council acted proactively through positive engagement with the applicant during the determination process which led to improvements to the scheme. 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.