



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 July 2025

by J Pearce MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19 September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/W0530/W/24/3347224

Five Acres, H F I Helicopters, Heath Road, Gamlingay, Cambridgeshire SG19 3LH

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr S Clark of HFI Ltd / Airbourne Solutions Ltd against the decision of South Cambridgeshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/04388/FUL.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a maintenance workshop.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for Erection of a maintenance workshop - amendment to planning permission 23/00252/FUL at Five Acres, H F I Helicopters, Gamlingay, Cambridgeshire SG19 3LH in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 23/04388/FUL, subject to the conditions in the attached Schedule.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development within the application form refers to the proposal being an amendment of a previous scheme. The amendment of a proposal is not an act of development under Section 55 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and so I have not included this within the description above.
3. As part of the appeal, the appellant has submitted a Tree Survey Report¹. The Council considers the Tree Survey Report addresses its second reason for refusal and has advised that reason for refusal is no longer contested. The appeal will be determined on this basis.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - whether the proposed development would make adequate provision for biodiversity net gain (BNG).

¹ Dated June 2024, prepared by RGS Arboricultural Consultants

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. The appeal site comprises a large parcel of land to one side of Heath Road. The existing buildings at the site are set back towards the rear boundary, beyond which is a large woodland consisting of the Gamlingay Heath Plantation County Wildlife Site (the CWS). The CWS provides a verdant context to the site that contributes to the overtly rural character of the area. Development on this side of Heath Road is typically dispersed, but is partly characterised by larger rural buildings set back from Heath Road. This includes buildings on either side of the site, close to the edge of the woodland of the CWS.
6. Views of the site and the neighbouring buildings from Heath Road are limited by an established hedge and mature trees to the side of carriageway. While there are glimpsed views through the hedge, including through existing accesses, opportunities to appreciate the backdrop of the woodland forming the CWS are limited. Appendix 2 of the Gamlingay Neighbourhood Plan 2022 (NP) identifies several special views and vistas, which does not include views from Heath Road towards the CWS.
7. The proposal is for a maintenance workshop within the area to the side of the existing buildings. The building would be close to the side boundary and would partly fill the gap between the existing development at the site and the neighbouring agricultural buildings. However, the development would retain views through the site to the woodland to the rear between the existing and proposed buildings as well as being visible above the building given its modest height. Moreover, the building would be a considerable distance from Heath Road broadly in line with the neighbouring buildings. This would significantly restrict its visual prominence within the area.
8. The building would have a simple rectangular form with a low-pitched roof. The utilitarian appearance and palette of materials to be used in the external finish of the building would reflect the rural setting of the proposal. In addition, the colour finish of the building would further assist in assimilating the proposal into its surroundings and could be secured by a condition should I be minded to allow the appeal.
9. There is an extant planning permission² (the permitted scheme) for a similar building to be positioned to the rear of the existing buildings at the site. The description of the appeal scheme indicates that it is a resubmission of the permitted scheme. Nevertheless, given the layout of the appeal proposal and the permitted scheme, it would be physically possible for both the appeal proposal and the permitted scheme to be constructed. Moreover, there is no mechanism before me that would prevent the permitted scheme from being constructed upon the implementation of the appeal proposal.
10. The provision of two buildings would increase the amount of built form at the site, but the Council has not elaborated on whether any harm would occur. The permitted scheme would be in a discreet permission to the rear of the existing buildings, set back from Heath Road. The buildings would be of similar proportions and finished with similar materials and would be focussed on the existing buildings

² Application reference 23/00252/FUL

at the site. Given my findings in respect of the appeal scheme, the cumulative impact on the character and appearance of the area would not harm the prevailing rural characteristics of the area.

11. I conclude that the proposal would not harm the character and appearance of the area. The development therefore accords with Policies S/7, HQ/1, NH/2 and E/16(d) of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 (LP), which collectively require proposals to preserve or enhance the character of the local urban and rural area and respond to its context in the wider landscape, respect and retain, or enhance the local character and distinctiveness of the local landscape and of the individual National Character Area in which it is located, and ensure there is no unacceptable adverse impact on the countryside with regard to scale, character and appearance of new buildings. The proposal also accords with Policy GAM 9 of the NP, which states that development should be designed to safeguard and where practicable enhance the landscape, recreation and natural environment features.

Biodiversity Net Gain

12. The proposed building would be sited on a part of the site that is primarily laid to grass and would introduce additional built form at the site. The mandatory condition requiring biodiversity net gain of at least 10% will be imposed on permissions granted pursuant of a planning application made on or after 12 February 2024 or 2 April 2024 for small developments such as this. Given that the application was made before 2 April 2024, this mandatory requirement does not apply.
13. Nonetheless, Policy NH/4 of the LP states that new development must aim to maintain, enhance, restore or add to biodiversity, and that opportunities should be taken to achieve positive gain through the form and design of development. The policy notes that measures may include creating, enhancing and managing wildlife habitats and networks, and natural landscape.
14. The appellant has asserted that the proposal can secure measurable BNG. No metric or other substantive evidence has been provided to demonstrate this. However, while I acknowledge that there would be some loss of existing habitat, the Ecological Appraisal³ outlines potential ecological enhancements and I consider having regard to the extent of the appeal site that there is a reasonable prospect that BNG could be achieved, including if both the permitted scheme and appeal scheme would be implemented. The Council has provided no firm evidence to the contrary. In these circumstances, I am satisfied that a planning condition could reasonably require further details of how BNG would be achieved prior to development commencing, and would offer adequate certainty of delivery before development could take place.
15. I conclude that the proposal would make adequate provision for biodiversity net gain. The development therefore accords with Policy NH/4 of the LP, as set out above.

³ Dated 11/10/2022, prepared by Cherryfield Ecology.

Conditions

16. Suggested planning conditions have been provided by the Council. I have considered the conditions having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and advice contained in the Planning Practice Guidance. I have adjusted the wording of some conditions to improve precision.
17. In addition to the standard time limit condition, I have imposed a condition requiring that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans. This is in the interests of certainty.
18. A condition is included requiring submission of details in respect of surface water drainage and archaeology. In addition, a condition is included requiring submission of details to prevent surface water run-off during construction. As these would affect the early stages of construction, the conditions need to be discharged prior to the commencement of the development.
19. The sustainability of the development, including minimising energy and water use would be addressed by conditions relating to cycle parking, the provision of Electric Vehicle Charging Points, energy efficiency and water efficiency measures, whilst the quality of the environment would be protected by conditions in respect of biodiversity net gain, ecology, external lighting, tree protection and hard and soft landscaping.
20. A condition is included in respect of the access road to prevent run-off onto the highway and in respect of highway safety. In addition, a condition is included in accordance with Policy E/16 of the LP to ensure that the proposal is first used by the existing business.

Conclusion

21. For the reasons given above the appeal should be allowed.

J Pearce

INSPECTOR

Schedule of Conditions

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with drawing numbers 23-01, 23-03 Rev A, 23-04 Rev A, G[1], and G[2].
- 3) No demolition/development shall commence until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has implemented a programme of archaeological work, commencing with the evaluation of the application area, that has been secured in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) that has been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority in writing. For land that is included within the WSI, no demolition/development shall take place other than under the provisions of the agreed WSI, which shall include:
 - a) the statement of significance and research objectives;
 - b) the programme and methodology of investigation and recording and the nomination of a competent person(s) or organisation to undertake the agreed works;
 - c) the timetable for the field investigation as part of the development programme;
 - d) the programme and timetable for the analysis, publication and dissemination, and deposition of resulting material and digital archives.
- 4) Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, a detailed design of the surface water drainage of the site shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Those elements of the surface water drainage system not adopted by a statutory undertaker shall thereafter be maintained and managed in accordance with the approved management and maintenance plan. The scheme shall be based upon the principles within the agreed Drainage Strategy Report, MEC, Ref: 27561_FLD_0101, Rev: B, Dated: October 2023 and shall also include:
 - a) full calculations detailing the existing surface water runoff rates for the QBAR, 3.3% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP) (1 in 30) and 1% AEP (1 in 100) storm events;
 - b) full results of the proposed drainage system modelling in the above-referenced storm events (as well as 1% AEP plus climate change), inclusive of all collection, conveyance, storage, flow control and disposal elements;
 - c) detailed drawings of the entire proposed surface water drainage system, attenuation and flow control measures, including levels, gradients, dimensions and pipe reference numbers, designed to accord with the CIRIA C753 SuDS Manual (or any equivalent guidance that may supersede or replace it);

- d) full detail on SuDS proposals (including location, type, size, depths, side slopes and cross sections);
 - e) site Investigation and test results to confirm infiltration rates;
 - f) demonstration that the surface water drainage of the site is in accordance with DEFRA non-statutory technical standards for sustainable drainage systems;
 - g) full details of the maintenance/adoption of the surface water drainage system; and
 - h) measures taken to prevent pollution of the receiving groundwater and/or surface water.
- 5) Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, details of measures indicating how additional surface water run-off from the site will be avoided during construction works shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The approved measures and systems shall be brought into operation prior to the commencement of above ground works.
- 6) Prior to the commencement of development above slab level, a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The BNG Plan shall target how a net gain in biodiversity will be achieved through on-site and / or off-site mitigation. The BNG Plan shall include:
- i. a hierarchical approach to BNG focussing first on maximising on-site BNG, second delivering off-site BNG at a site(s) of strategic biodiversity importance, and third delivering off-site BNG locally to the application site;
 - ii. full details of the respective on and off-site BNG requirements and proposals resulting from the loss of habitats on the development site utilising the latest appropriate DEFRA metric;
 - iii. identification of the existing habitats and their condition on-site and within receptor site(s);
 - iv. habitat enhancement and creation proposals on the application site utilising the latest appropriate DEFRA metric; and
 - v. an implementation, management and monitoring plan (including identified responsible bodies) for a period of 30 years for on-site proposals as appropriate.

The BNG Plan shall be implemented in full and subsequently managed and monitored in accordance with the approved details. Monitoring data as appropriate to criterion v) shall be submitted to the local planning authority in

accordance with the latest DEFRA guidance and the approved monitoring period / intervals.

- 7) Prior to the commencement of development above slab level, a scheme of ecology enhancement shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The scheme shall include details of bat and bird box installation, hedgehog connectivity, and other enhancements as applicable and in line with the Greater Cambridge Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document 2022. The approved scheme shall be fully implemented prior to first use of the development hereby permitted and thereafter retained.
- 8) Prior to the commencement of development above slab level, details of a hard and soft landscaping scheme shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The details shall include:
 - a) proposed finished levels or contours; car parking layouts, other vehicle and pedestrian access and circulation areas; hard surfacing materials; minor artefacts and structures (e.g. Street furniture, artwork, play equipment, refuse or other storage units, signs, lighting, CCTV installations and water features); proposed (these need to be coordinated with the landscape plans prior to being installed) and existing functional services above and below ground (e.g. drainage, power, communications cables, pipelines indicating lines, manholes, supports); retained historic landscape features and proposals for restoration, where relevant;
 - b) details of the extent of soft landscaping work around the extended parking area and attenuation basin, as well as soft landscaping/planting to the east of the building hereby approved and any other areas to be landscaped; planting plans; written specifications (including cultivation and other operations associated with plant and grass establishment); schedules of plants, noting species, plant sizes and proposed numbers/densities where appropriate and an implementation programme; If within a period of five years from the date of the planting, or replacement planting, any tree or plant is removed, uprooted or destroyed or dies, another tree or plant of the same species and size as that originally planted shall be planted at the same in the next planting season.
 - c) boundary treatments indicating the type, positions, design, and materials of boundary treatments (security fences) to be erected.
 - d) a landscape maintenance and management plan, including long term design objectives, management responsibilities and maintenance schedules for all landscape areas.

All hard and soft landscape works shall be carried out and maintained in accordance with the approved details. The works shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the occupation of the building or the completion of the development, whichever is the sooner. If within a period of five years from the date of the planting, or replacement planting, any tree or plant is

removed, uprooted or destroyed or dies, another tree or plant of the same species and size as that originally planted shall be planted at the same place in the next planting season

- 9) Prior to the commencement of development above ground level, an Energy Statement shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The Statement shall demonstrate that a minimum of 10% carbon emissions (to be calculated by reference to a baseline for the anticipated carbon emissions for the property as defined by Building Regulations) can be reduced through the use of on-site renewable energy and low carbon technologies. The approved scheme shall be fully installed and operational prior to the occupation of the development and thereafter maintained in accordance with the approved details.

Where grid capacity issues subsequently arise, written evidence from the District Network Operator confirming the detail of grid capacity and a revised Energy Statement to take account of this shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The revised Energy Statement shall be implemented and thereafter maintained in accordance with the approved details.

- 10) Prior to the installation of external security lighting, details of the external security lighting to be provided or installed as well as an artificial lighting impact assessment and mitigation scheme if required, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The assessment shall include the following:
- i. the method of lighting (including luminaire type / profiles, mounting location / height, aiming angles / orientation, angle of glare, operational controls, horizontal / vertical isolux contour light levels and calculated glare levels to receptors);
 - ii. the extent/levels of illumination over the site and on adjacent land and predicted lighting levels at the nearest light sensitive receptors. All artificial lighting must meet the Obtrusive Light Limitations for Exterior Lighting Installations contained within the Institute of Lighting Professionals Guidance Notices for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light - GN01/20 (or as superseded).

The proposed lighting strategy should also reference 'Guidance note 08/18 Bats and artificial lighting in the UK' to ensure that there is no light spill on boundary features potentially used by commuting and foraging bats and that the lights minimise their attraction to flying invertebrate prey.

The security lighting shall thereafter be installed as approved and retained. Where required, the mitigation scheme shall be carried out as approved and retained as such.

- 11) Prior to first use of the development hereby permitted, a water efficiency specification, based on the BREEAM Wat01 Water Calculator Methodology, has been submitted to approved in writing by the local planning authority. The specification shall demonstrate the achievement of 2 credits for water efficiency

(Wat01). The development shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details prior to first occupation of the development.

- 12) Prior to first use of the development hereby permitted, a scheme for a fast electric vehicle charge point shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The active charge point should have a minimum power rating output of 7kW. The approved electric vehicle charge point shall be installed prior to first occupation of the building and retained thereafter.
- 13) The access road hereby permitted shall be constructed so that its falls and levels are such that no private water from the site drains across or onto the adopted public highway. It shall have a minimum width of 5m and be constructed using a bound material, for 10m from the boundary of the public highway into the site. Once constructed the access road shall be retained thereafter.
- 14) Prior to first use of the development hereby permitted, details of facilities for the covered, secure parking of cycles for use in connection with the development shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The details shall include the means of enclosure, materials, type and layout. The facilities shall be provided in accordance with the approved details prior to first occupation of the development and shall be retained thereafter.
- 15) Prior to first use of the development hereby permitted, all ecological measures and/or works shall be carried out in accordance with the details contained in the Ecology Report (Cherryfield Ecology, October 2022) and Badger Walkover (Cherryfield Ecology, November 2022).
- 16) Demolition or construction works shall take place only between 0800 and 1800 on Monday to Friday and 0800 to 1300 on Saturday, and not at any time on Sundays or on Bank or Public Holidays.
- 17) Tree protection measures as outlined in the revised Tree Survey Report dated June 2024 shall be installed before any works commence on site. The tree protection measures shall remain in place throughout the construction period and may only be removed following completion of all construction works.
- 18) The development hereby permitted shall be first used by H.F.I. Ltd/Airbourne Solutions Ltd, the named user who shall be the first occupant of the building.

End of Schedule