

Planning Statement

Including Statement of Consultation

Erection of Single Storey Farm Shop Building with Café and Access, Parking, Landscaping and other associated works

Land at Bank Top Farm, Hollingworth Road, Littleborough

Applicant - Bank Top Farm

September 2023

Job Number: 18-077

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Supporting Letters to Previous Planning Application

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by Maybern Planning and Development ('Maybern') on behalf of the owners of Bank Top Farm, Hollingworth ('the applicant').
- 1.2 It supports a full planning application for the development of a **single storey farm shop building with café** and associated access, parking and landscaping to support the diversification of farm operations and long-term viability of the farm.
- 1.3 The proposal follows refusal of planning permission for a larger scale, two storey building including a room at first floor proposed to be used as a meeting room for local community groups and for education purposes to local schools (LPA ref 22/01216/FUL).
- 1.4 That proposal was reported to Planning Committee in February and July 2023 and notwithstanding widespread support from the local community, residents and other local groups, and supporting comments made by some Members of the Planning Committee, the application was refused planning permission for a single reason related to perceived impact on the openness of the Green Belt location and a failure to respect the existing character of the area with harm to visual amenity of the area and landscape.
- 1.5 This revised application now addresses the reason for refusal of the previous application relating to the scale of the building and its impact on the openness and visual appearance of the area via a smaller, single storey building. By consequence, and with regret to the applicants, this results in the community and education use elements being removed from the farm proposals.
- 1.6 Further information is also provided to support the case for the farm diversification and to address points raised by officers during the previous planning application and in the Committee Report where relevant.
- 1.7 The proposed farm shop and café will enable the farm to remain viable and operational. It will support the expansion of existing small-scale farm produce sales that currently operate from the farm on a part time basis, diversification into associated and complementary new income streams, and support enhanced employment opportunities for the farm owners, their family and potentially additional staff. Without such diversification, the farm will not support the family and sons continuing the farm business.
- 1.8 This Statement provides details of the:
 - the site and surroundings,
 - background to the farm and current small business operations and the need to diversify and expand,
 - the proposed revised scheme as a high quality and landscape led development,
 - assessment of the proposals against the up-to-date adopted Development Plan including setting out very special circumstances for the development in the Green Belt location and accordance with the aims of national planning policy and wider national economic and rural policies for rural business support and diversification, and
 - technical considerations of the site and the proposed development.

- 1.9 It is highly relevant that there were no sustained technical objections to the previous planning application from any statutory consultees (initial parking and servicing points raised by the Local Highway Authority were later accepted as able to be addressed via planning condition).
- 1.10 A Statement of Consultation is included detailing the scope of statutory (RBC) and public/community consultation to the proposals prior to and during the previous planning application and the significant support received to the proposal from local residents, community groups and local businesses.
- 1.11 In addition to this Statement, the application is supported by the following plans and documents:

- Planning Application Forms and Certificate (via the Planning Portal ref PP-12467606)

PLANS

- Site Location Plan – Drawing Number 21358-0201 Rev P-01
- Existing Site Plan with Topographical Survey - Drawing Number 21358-0211 Rev P-00
- Proposed Site Plan – Drawing Number 21358 – 2011- Rev PO5
- Proposed Ground Floor Layout – Drawing Number 21358-2001 Rev P-03
- Elevations Plan – Drawing Number 21358 – 2151 Rev P-04
- Sections Plan – Drawing Number 21358- 2101 Rev P-03
- Landscape Layout– Drawing Number 474/01 Rev C
- Wider Landscaping Proposals – Drawing Number 474/D/02

REPORTS

- Design and Access Statement prepared by Corstophine and Wright
- Transport Statement prepared by Mode Transport
- Farm Business Diversification Statement prepared by Bank Top Farm (including supporting letter from National Farmers Union)
- Landscape and Visual Appraisal prepared by Penny Bennett Landscape Architect

Reports Re-Submitted from Previous Planning Application (Not Requiring Update)

- Phase 1 Site Conditions Report (inc Appendices) and Coal Mining Risk Assessment prepared by BEK; and
- Drainage Strategy prepared by Re:Ford
- Preliminary Ecological Survey and Assessment including Biodiversity Gain Metric 3.0 prepared by ERAP Consulting Ecologists
- Sustainability and Energy Efficiency Statement prepared by GLD Technical Consulting

2.0 Farm Context, The Site and Wider Surroundings

- 2.1 Bank Top Farm is located c0.5km to the south of the town of Littleborough, c0.5km north of Hollingworth Lake and its visitor car parks and c0.9km north-east of the main residential and commercial area of Hollingworth. It is therefore relatively closely related to these urban areas.



Figure 1 : Aerial view of the site and wider farm area

- 2.2 The farmhouse and associated operating agricultural buildings are shown by the blue star on Figure 2 below and are set c150m from Hollingworth Road on higher land and accessed via an un-made single lane access drive that rises steeply up the side of Cleggswood Hill from the road.
- 2.3 The farm covers c17ha and comprises a number of fields that rise up the hill and extend eastwards from the ridge. The land is designated as 'severely disadvantaged' due to its condition, topography and the exposed nature of its location and is mainly rough grassland for sheep and cattle grazing, albeit some parts of the farm are able to be mowed for hay or silage production at times of the year. The extent of the farm holding is shown on Figure 1.
- 2.4 The application site comprises a 0.38ha triangular area of the field that lies on the road frontage as shown with the red diamond on Figure 2. It comprises only 2% of the farm holding area.
- 2.5 It comprises land that is only usable for rough grazing due to levels and conditions. It is set on the western slope of the hill behind a stone wall that runs along Hollingworth Road. Initially the site is slightly flatter and undulating immediately behind the wall then rises up more

steeply to the farm access track; a small wet area from a small spring is in the central part of the site. An existing gate to the field area is present on the road frontage.

- 2.6 Given the hill ridge, no views of the site are possible from the east. Views from the south are highly screened by a number of mature trees located at the end of the farm access lane and views from the west are largely screened by a tall mature hedge along the western side of the road.



Figure 2: Map view of the site

- 2.7 A photograph of the general area of the site from Hollingworth Road is at Figure 3 (and further photographs are provided in the Design and Access Statement (DAS) and Landscape and Visual Appraisal Report (LVA)).



Figure 3- Photograph of site from north

Changing Surroundings

- 2.8 Opposite and to the north-west of the site is generally flatter land and the former works site of AKZO Nobel that has received various planning permissions for housing development since the closure of the large buildings complex on the site.
- 2.9 In April 2023, permission was granted for up to 127no. dwellings that will result in dwellings and other infrastructure extending along the Hollingworth Road frontage up to the northern boundary of the application site; open space and landscaping changes will also be implemented on the land area immediately opposite to the site (LPA ref 21/01146/FUL). This permission is subject to current discharge of condition applications and initial works have commenced on site including surface clearing and piling of earth on the field area immediately opposite. As a result, the visual context and character of the immediate surroundings and views along Hollingworth Road are materially altering.



Figure 4 – Approved Layout Plan AKZO Site – Bank Top Farm application site outlined in red



Sectional elevation along Hollingworth Road looking west

Figure 5 –Design Rationale Image to Approved Application-Update to View of Hollingworth Road



Figure 6 – view from west towards site (red arrow) and AKZO development site now under construction

- 2.10 It is also relevant that additional land along the western side of Hollingworth Road between this development site and the settlement of Hollingworth has been subject to environmental impact scoping for housing development and is a proposed housing allocation in the emerging 'Places for Everyone' Plan, therefore further changes in the character of the immediate site area are also likely.

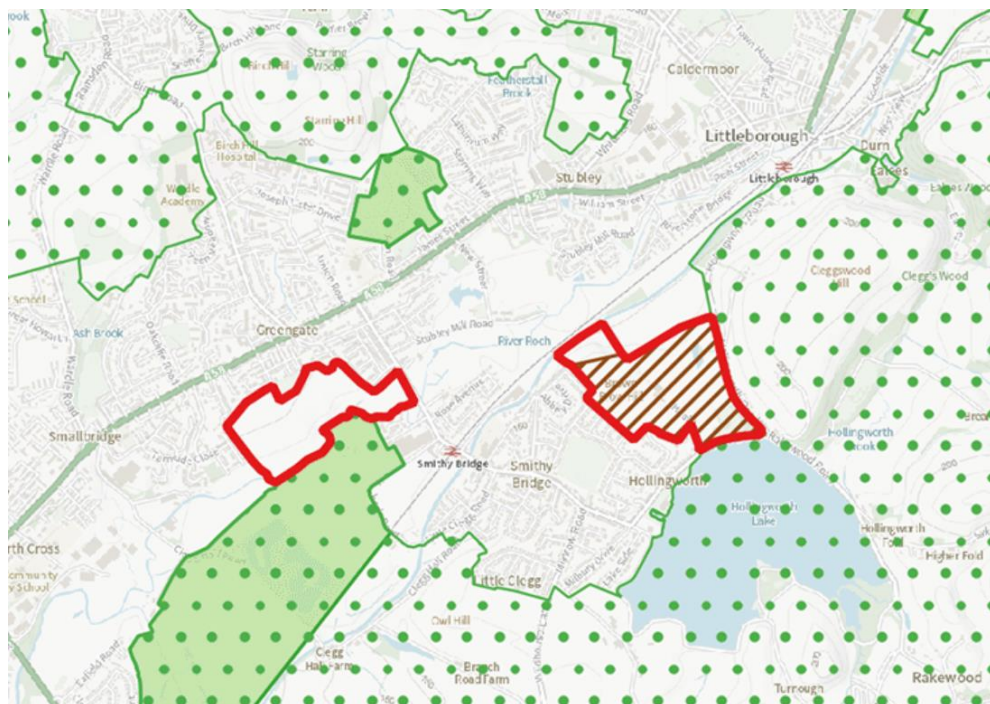


Figure 7 – proposed housing allocation and Green Belt release opposite site (hatched red area)

- 2.11 Along Hollingworth Road there is also existing frontage residential development to the north of the farm boundary linking up to the edge of Littleborough and to the south of the farm access track linking down to Hollingworth. Car parks and visitor areas to Hollingworth Lake area are present at the junction with Lake Bank to the south.

Site Accessibility

- 2.12 The site is accessible to the local road network lying immediately adjacent the B6225 Hollingworth Road, a 30mph road with lighting and which now features double yellow lines restricting parking along the road in the vicinity of the site and down to Hollingworth.
- 2.13 It is confirmed to be an accessible site by Highway and Transport Authorities in the recent planning application.
- 2.14 It is accessible via cycling being in proximity (550m) to the National Cycle Network route no. 66 and walking via the footpaths that are present on both sides of the road linking to Littleborough and Hollingworth.
- 2.15 Bus stops are located directly adjacent to the land, served by the Rochdale- Littleborough Lakeline service generally every hour or more frequently at times. Rail stations are also present in Littleborough and Smithy Bridge, with services to Blackburn, Manchester, Wigan and Leeds.
- 2.16 A car park to Hollingworth Lake leisure and commercial area is located c 300m to the south (with further car parks also around the lake area).

3.0 Farm Background and Current Operations and Issues

- 3.1 Bank Top Farm is a small-scale livestock farm in family ownership. Fuller details of the farm business are provided in the Farm Business Diversification Statement, with information summarised below.
- 3.2 The owners purchased the farm in 1993 and have improved it from a collection of derelict and unsafe buildings to a family run farm business. Over a 20-year period, the applicants have rebuilt the property, improved associated outbuildings, and invested in new agricultural buildings. They have also reclaimed the land to bring the farm back into operation as a sheep and cattle stock farm. Alongside the grazing of animals, the farm now also raises pigs, a small flock of chickens for eggs, and turkeys.
- 3.3 The land is categorised as ‘severely disadvantaged’ due to its condition, topography and the exposed nature of its location which does not allow for arable farming and is only suitable for the grazing of animals. This land constraint also results in a natural restriction on the number of animals it can support which is not going to increase significantly. As a result, the size and operation of the farm holding is supplemented by 12ha of land that is rented for grazing purposes.
- 3.4 By nature, the farm is located outside the urban boundary, as are the majority of farms in Rochdale Borough. In the Borough all land beyond the urban settlement boundary is Green Belt or protected open land (also with development restrictions). From a review of the on-line proposals map to the Rochdale UDP (being the current available proposals map for the RBC), based on a review of the zone extending from the urban boundary of Rochdale and Middleton and associated settlements and into the surrounding land beyond, there is only likely 1 location termed ‘farm’ falling within the urban boundary area (edge of Higher Boarshaw) and c8 locations termed ‘farm’ in the POL areas, of which a number appear to have been developed for housing. As such, the majority of ‘farms’ in RBC are located beyond settlements and in the Green Belt.

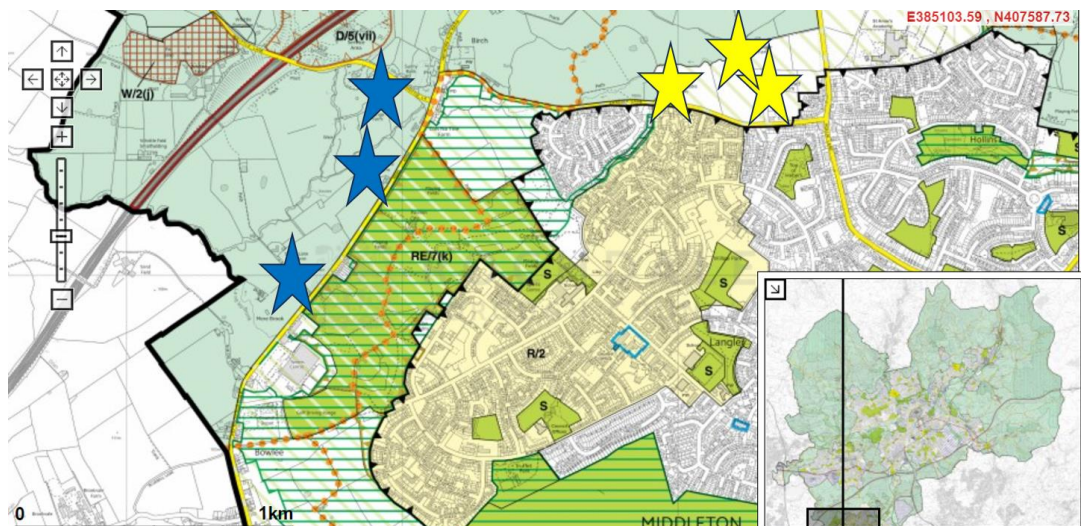


Figure 8 – example of proposals map review for interface zone between urban areas and surrounding land for locations termed ‘farms’ - blue star farms located in Green Belt; yellow star farms in protected open land (35 map extracts reviewed for farm locations in Borough- can be provided on request)

- 3.5 The farm is operated by the owners and their two sons who have progressed into farming after leaving school and agricultural colleges. To enable the farm to support the family, given the land size and nature, other sources of income are required. All members of the family therefore undertake alternative full-time employment beyond the farm to supplement the income achievable from the farm and undertake the farm work in evenings and at weekends.
- 3.6 Whilst the farm sells via livestock markets, some meat is also sold direct from the farm under the '*Better Taste, Less Miles*' context; this draws upon the applicant's current farm operations and aim for quality, ethically based animal welfare and farming operations.
- 3.7 Associated with their time growing up at the farm, the sons have undertaken small-scale farm produce sales. This has subsequently developed over the last c 10 years to a small, part-time business for meat sales from the farm produced animals.
- 3.8 'Pete's Meats', developed for sales of bacon, sausages, chops and seasonal turkeys, alongside the wider farm sales of whole and half/ jointed lamb and pork, eggs and vegetables, operate primarily at the weekends from a 'farm shop trailer' which is towed to the bottom of the farm lane on Hollingworth Road. A small level of pre-ordered sales is also undertaken around other employment times, and the family also attend nearby farmers markets. Such direct sales now support the farm business to an extent, particularly as meat prices from livestock market can be highly variable and generally achieve lower prices than direct customer sales.
- 3.9 Given the small-scale and part-time nature of this produce business, there are several constraints to its operation. These include:
 - operational and cost issues - the preparation of some meat products is currently required to be undertaken by others due to the limited meat preparation areas present at the farm as all other existing farm buildings are operational for animals/equipment, and time and financial constraints as other employment is required to support the farm;
 - sales are of frozen meats and limited product ranges and sizes only;
 - the limited weekend sales are constrained by time and lack of customer parking opportunities at the farm entrance.
- 3.10 The current operations and the scale of customer sales have now reached a position where further business expansion and diversification is required to enable the sales business to move to the next level and for the farm to remain viable and the family to secure more full-time farm-based employment to maintain and expand the business as referenced in the Diversification Statement.
- 3.11 It is also highly relevant that the post Brexit context has removed/altered potential income streams to farmers and the transitional arrangements to 2027 are reducing any payments that may have been received. A replacement scheme (based on Environmental Land Management Standards for providing environmental benefits) is also not anticipated to offer the same levels of support and likely result in reductions in farm incomes. Information received from the NFU (within the Business Diversification Report) outlines that this level of reduction could be c50% of support.
- 3.12 Instead, Government analysis and considerations to the farming industry is placing principal reliance on diversification as a way to replace lost income streams and to support the viability of farms. An element of this is the launch of the DEFRA 'Farming Transformation Fund and

Programme' where support to '*work, processing and diversification*' can potentially be offered via grants.

- 3.13 Aims for 'Rural Levelling Up' and diversification were also published in September 2022¹ and a large number of subsequent DEFRA policy statements and reports have also highlighted that farm diversification is to be encouraged for farm business and wider economic, environmental and social considerations (as referenced below).
- 3.14 This changing context is of direct relevance to the farm which did receive an element of income from rural subsidies.

The Need for Diversification

- 3.15 Having regard to the farm size, position and operational issues, the applicants have fully reviewed options for the farm and business. (This need remains as per the previous application).
- 3.16 Diversification of the farm to enable the expansion of the associated meat sales business would provide an opportunity to ensure the viability of the farm going forward and into the long term.
- 3.17 The proposals have been carefully considered over a period of time and a consultant development team appointed to inform and assess the proposals.
- 3.18 Whilst the current proposal is now reduced in scope from the previous planning application and excludes the community and education element, the farm shop with on-site butchery and meat preparation areas was and remains the key focus for expanding the farm business via sale of produce and associated meat-based products.
- 3.19 Alongside this, the farm café would be an associated offer that is now heavily demanded by farm shop customers and would enable the direct cooking and sale of farm meat meals and snacks and associated drinks alongside other locally sourced produce.
- 3.20 The proposal would reflect national aims for rural diversification and could deliver a range of other benefits as are set out below. The facility would also support the local area and economy via supporting other local farms and producers, enable opportunities for further job creation, and enhancement of the food tourism potential.
- 3.21 The application proposals therefore represent an opportunity for the farm to:
 - diversify operations via a farm shop and café to support the ongoing viability of the farm and small business and support the potential for that business to expand and move to the next level
 - address operational and sales constraints to the current meat business
 - support full time family employment at the farm and small business replacing other employment requirements

¹ 'Delivering for Rural England' Report (DEFRA)

- to enable the sale of wider ranges of fresh produce sourced directly from the farm, as well as from other farms in the local area, thus reducing food miles and increasing local choice in fresh food and produce
- to enable the promotion of wider farming operations for example from field to fork, animal welfare and other rural business and agricultural practices
- to support other local farms and businesses via the opportunity to provide produce to sell at the farm shop – specific contact with and letters of support from established local producers were provided to the previous planning application highlighting the clear economic and business benefits of the farm shop proposal (see Appendix 1)

4.0 Statement of Community Involvement

Points Raised in Considering Previous Application at Planning Committee

- 4.1 The proposals have been developed following pre-application contact with officers at RBC and the local community. Details of pre-application contact with RBC and how it influenced the proposals are provided in Appendix 1.
- 4.2 The now proposed scheme also seeks to respond to comments made by some Members of the Planning Committee regarding the scale and size of the building and amount of engineering works proposed to the hillside to accommodate a two-storey building. The application is therefore a direct response to such feedback.

Public Consultation

- 4.3 To assist the applicant in considering the need for the farm shop proposal and the range of facilities to be proposed, the applicant engaged with existing customers of Bank Top Farm, Pete's Meats and with the local community in Spring 2022.
- 4.4 RBC Councillors for the site ward and the adjacent ward of Wardle Shore and West Littleborough were also contacted to inform them of the developing proposals.
- 4.5 An information leaflet with questionnaire was circulated to around 4,000 properties in the Littleborough and Hollingworth areas and 118 responses received, all but two being supportive. In addition, the applicant provided copies of the leaflet to customers attending the farm sales trailer and visiting their stall at a farmers' market they attended in Rochdale in June 2022. A copy of the leaflet and review of the responses received is provided in Appendix 1. Overall, there was clear support for a far shop, provision of a café and provision of on-site car parking.

Public And Community Responses to the Previous Planning Application

- 4.6 The applicants are pleased that a significant number of supportive responses were also received to the previous planning application from local residents and the local community. Over 188 supporting comments were submitted with only one objection made on traffic points.
- 4.7 The farm also received over 200 'likes' and comments of support to their Facebook page over the course of the planning application.
- 4.8 The proposal was also supported by Smithy Bridge and Littleborough Save The Green Belt Group and Littleborough Civic Trust, both of whom provided detailed submissions to RBC. Specifically the Save the Green Belt Group confirmed that, in their view, the proposal would not result in harm to the purposes of Green Belt and the continuation of the farm would protect the Green Belt from inappropriate residential development. Copies of comments are provided at Appendix 1.
- 4.9 To reflect the support for local businesses that would result from the farm shop sale of local goods, letters of support were also received from Paxendale Cheese Suppliers and Reedy's Naturally (jam supplier).

5.0 The Proposed Development

- 5.1 This planning application now seeks full planning permission for the:
- ‘Erection of a single storey farm shop building with café, access, parking, and landscaping and other associated works’*
- 5.2 As referenced above, it is recognised that some Members of the Planning Committee raised comments to the scale and size of the previously proposed building and the potential for impact on the Green Belt.
- 5.3 The reason for refusal also raises that the scale of the building and amount of engineering works to the hillside to accommodate the two-storey building was considered significant.
- 5.4 This planning application is a revised and smaller scale proposal addressing these points via the removal of the first-floor so reducing the height by 2.4m and lessening the scale and massing of the building in all views. The removal of the first floor also reduces the level of engineering works and extent of alteration to the slope of the hillside to set the building into it.
- 5.5 It however maintains a high-quality landscape-led development which respects the setting and delivers facilities required by the applicant to support the farm and meat business.

Layout, Scale and Appearance

- 5.6 The proposal takes advantage of the road frontage location and context of the farm holding as well as the shape and slope of the specific site area.
- 5.7 The revised one-storey building minimises its footprint and removes the previous southern side extension, whilst still sitting into the slope of the hillside to minimise its scale and massing. There is a 32 sqm reduction in gross external footprint area and 219 sqm reduction in overall floorspace on the site. There is a reduction in width of the building of c5m overall and reduction in depth of 4.1m via the removal of the first floor, therefore reducing the extent of the incursion and engineering work into the slope of the hillside by this amount. Overall there is also a 2.4m reduction in height.
- 5.8 The accommodation would comprise the farm shop and customer café accessed from a customer entrance on the frontage of the building with a secondary delivery entrance on the northern side direct from the car park.
- 5.9 To seek to address the scale and visual concerns has led to the omission of the first-floor community and education room. Consideration had been given to options to retain an evening community use via joint use of the ground floor café area, however this has not been possible due to size, operational and security issues. The size of the café area would not provide the space required for most community groups use (i.e. above 20 persons) or space to move tables out of the café area if a group wanted an open floor area; the café area could not be fully segregated or shut off from the shop area to prevent visitors from accessing the shop with security implications to stock and facilities/ equipment in the rest of the building; and a joint use of the café kitchen by group visitors (as would be required by most groups to provide refreshments etc) would not be possible to maintain hygiene and operational matters to the farm café.

5.10 Further, as school and education use would be required in daytime hours only, when the café would be operational, this joint use is also not now possible.

5.11 In summary the accommodation would now comprise:

Accommodation Element	Floorspace Sq m	Use
Farm shop with butchery area	84 sqm shop 20 sq m for butchery preparation area	sale of farm meats (beef, lamb, pork, turkey) in various cuts and weights/sizes and fresh and frozen. sale of meat products such as sausage rolls, scotch eggs, meat pies alongside eggs from the farm sale of other locally produced produce such as vegetables, cakes, chutneys, pickles, cheese, ice cream, bread etc meat preparation area with cold room
Café	47 sqm inc. circulation (café public seating and food / drink consumption area is c38sq m)	sale of cold and limited hot food and drinks for consumption on site and limited takeaway it is envisaged there would be c 6 tables providing for c20 covers (in the café)
Kitchen area	21.9	
Toilet and baby change	4.8	
Refuse area	6.5	

5.12 The building would be constructed of a small palette of sustainable sourced materials including timber and local stone to reflect a rural and farm-based building. Two windows and a door would be present to the frontage for internal lighting and customer focus. Due to the reduction in scale of the building and removal of the first floor, the design has been simplified and the extent of glazing significantly reduced. The sloping roof would comprise profiled cladding and would align into the slope of the hillside at the rear.

5.13 The refuse and services area would be set at the rear of the building and largely screened in views.

5.14 Due to levels and the site arrangement, a stone gabion wall would still enclose the parking area but at a reduced height of c 3-3.5m. Stone to be used in the gabion baskets would match

the building material and it would be planted to provide it with a high level of green screening and for habitat creation.

- 5.15 It is not envisaged that there would be any other structures/ play areas on the site.
- 5.16 Overall, the footprint of the proposed building, along with the terrace area and tarmac car park areas at 1,065 sqm would represent a built extent on only 0.62% of the whole farm holding area, therefore a very small part of the farm area is proposed to be used for the built development. The remaining area of the site would either be treated in landscaping improvements or soft and permeable surfacing.

Access and Connectivity

- 5.17 Vehicular access and egress is still proposed via a new two-way access point from Hollingworth Road that was accepted in the previous application. Given the relatively straight alignment of the road, relevant visibility distances for the access can be provided. A separate pedestrian access is again proposed via a modification to the existing field gate location.
- 5.18 The access would accommodate movements by vans or larger vehicles for delivery and refuse collection purposes with manoeuvring and turning of such vehicles utilising the wider car park area outside of the shop opening hours. This was accepted previously by the Highways Authority and via use of a service management plan.
- 5.19 The car park would provide 17 spaces including 3 mobility spaces. Provision for motorcycles and cycles is also made.
- 5.20 The site is also accessible by foot via footpaths along Hollingworth Road to nearby settlements and by bus with stops directly adjacent to the site and was accepted as a sustainable and accessible location.
- 5.21 Further details on site provisions for access and parking are provided in the updated Transport Statement.

Landscaping and Green Infrastructure

- 5.22 The frontage stone wall would be retained around the two access points and repaired where necessary. Native hedgerow would be planted inside the wall and also to northern and eastern site boundaries and to the rear of the building and gabion. It is also proposed to continue hedge planting northwards along the full length of the farm road frontage along Hollingworth Road. Additional tree planting on the wider farm area is also proposed, with small clusters of trees in corners of some fields reflecting the cluster at the end of the farm access driveway.
- 5.23 Within the site, the grazed land would be largely subject to wildflower meadow seeding and managed accordingly either via limited cutting or grazing. A small area of wetland grasses south of a small spring location south of the building and patio would be maintained and extended with additional wetland planting.
- 5.24 On the patio area, a raised kitchen garden and herb bed area would be supplemented by fruit trees including in planters.
- 5.25 Fuller details of the landscaping proposals are provided on the landscaping plans.

Farm Shop and Café Operations

- 5.26 During the assessment of the previous application, additional information on the operation of the farm shop and café was provided by the applicants following requests from Officers. This information remains relevant and comprises:

- Range of goods to be sold from the farm shop

It is common that farm shops and retail outlets are subject to a planning condition to cover the range of goods to be sold. Reflecting conditions utilised by other local planning authorities, the proposal for this shop is for:

Not less than 40% of the total product range of goods to be sold shall be of goods produced at Bank Top Farm. Up to 40% of the total goods range shall be of goods produced from within an area of 50 miles from Bank Top Farm, and up to 20% of product range sold may be sourced from elsewhere.

The 40% of products being from Bank Top Farm produce would be a minimum and it is considered the level will normally be higher as it is the applicant's intention for a full-time farm shop expanding upon the current business and part-time sales.

The reference to 50 miles catchment for sourcing of other products is based on the distance to a number of suppliers in Lancashire that Bank Top Farm already work with at times of the year for products sold alongside their meat (e.g. potatoes, vegetables from West Lancashire and products in Christmas hampers). The applicants wish to retain such established local north-west links as well as sourcing complementary products from other local farms and producers. In this respect, this is considered to maintain a local supply context and support for local and north-west home-grown producers.

- Café area and use associate with the farm shop

It is proposed that the public seating and functioning area of the café will be c38 sq m (excluding the walkway area to the kitchen and toilet area) and will be located towards the southern end of the building. The Business Diversification Statement outlines that 20 covers will likely be provided for. This floorspace level and its positioning alongside the shop and its servery area will clearly result in the cafe remaining ancillary to the farm shop.

Whilst there will also be some external seating for use by customers of the café, having regard to the pedestrian access routes to the building (from the car park and road), the landscaping proposal for planting to the terrace area, and the location of the cycle parking area, the level of seating to this area will remain limited and ancillary.

A planning condition is offered that the café remains ancillary to and associated with the operation of the farm shop so to allay concerns of potential separate usage to the farm shop. The hours of operation of the café would also align with the same hours of the farm shop (or be less e.g. via earlier closing time on some days).

- Farm Shop Operation to Bank Top Farm

The applicants are again willing to accept a planning condition that the farm shop and building uses are related to the operation of the farm via tie to the farm holding number only.

This is to provide comfort that the intentions for the proposal are fully related to the operations and viability of the farm.

- Servicing Management

A servicing management plan to detail the hours of refuse servicing of the farm shop and for any deliveries that do occur by HGV to be outside of shop opening hours is an accepted mechanism to ensure such servicing can occur without disruption to or harm to highway safety. This was accepted by the Highways department and in the Committee report to the previous application.

- 5.27 Whilst Officers at RBC raised concerns to the use of such planning conditions during the previous application, the proposed wording of such conditions is based on planning conditions utilised by other Local Planning Authorities in England, and indeed the use of similar conditions in other retail locations in Rochdale Borough. The use of such conditions should therefore be appropriate in this case and the applicant is willing to discuss the scope of such conditions with Officers further. (It is also noted that at a recent RTP1 conference, it was outlined by a speaker that conditions should only be resisted where they are not capable of being used by other areas/ proposals or local authority areas. In this respect, as the proposed conditions have been based on other farm shop and retail proposals, there should be no undue reason to prevent their use in principle).

6.0 Planning Policy Context and Other Material Considerations

- 6.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that *“where in making any determination under the Planning Acts, regard is to be had to the development plan, the determination shall be made in accordance with the plan unless material consideration indicates otherwise”*.
- 6.2 The statutory Development Plan comprises Rochdale Core Strategy (CS) which was adopted in 2016, prior to current national planning guidance. The emerging Greater Manchester wide ‘Places for Everyone’ Plan has been subject to Examination and now carries some weight, albeit is to undergo a further consultation stage. In both plans the land is within the Green Belt.
- 6.3 Material considerations to the proposal include the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), local Supplementary Planning Documents and supporting evidence / technical reports to the Borough. Government reports and advice on promoting diversification of farms and rural businesses is also of key relevance to the proposal. This is backed up by published research on the delivery and benefits of farm shops to the economy.
- 6.4 The relevant planning policy context and associated advice on promoting farm shops is at Appendix 2.

Government Advice on Promoting Farm Diversification

- 6.5 There is wide-ranging government advice supporting farm and rural diversification to enable the ‘levelling up’ of rural parts of the UK and following the changes to the EU funding arrangements following Brexit and the transition away from subsidies, and now also with the current cost of living and other economic pressures facing the economy.
- 6.6 The DEFRA report ‘Delivering for Rural England- Second Report’ (Sep 2022) acknowledges key aims for food and farming including via diversification:

‘The government recognises the benefits which farm diversification can bring to strengthening the wider rural economy. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides that planning policies and decisions should enable the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through the conversion of existing buildings and the erection of well-designed new buildings, as well as the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses’.
- 6.7 The report also acknowledges that the visitor economy is a major source of employment in rural areas and that *‘the government wants to see a growing, dynamic, and sustainable tourism sector reaching its full potential and driving growth in every nation and region of the UK’*.
- 6.8 More recently the report ‘Unleashing Rural Opportunity’ (DEFRA June 2023) outlines four broad priorities for government that are key for rural areas to thrive and improve the quality of life for rural people. Also, to ensure levelling up and diversification of rural areas and the agricultural sector given the changes to funding regimes.
- 6.9 Included in this paper is recognition that having the opportunity to run a modern business from rural areas is good for the local economy and for quality of life.

- 6.10 It also highlights that rural businesses can train and employ local people, who can develop their skills and find work close to where they live.
- 6.11 One of the priorities of the report is Growing the Rural Economy. It acknowledges that *'For rural areas to prosper, farming needs to prosper. ...It gives life to our rural communities and our landscapes ... By investing in the foundations of food security, we will enable thriving businesses, resilient food production, and will support farmers'*
- 6.12 It also outlines that *'Supporting growth and jobs in rural communities is a top priority for this government and is fundamental to levelling up our countryside... We are also supporting traditional rural industries like farming, forestry, and tourism to grow. We will continue to focus on removing barriers to enterprise and investment, and to equip rural communities with the necessary skills and workforce to take full advantage of our transition to a greener, more sustainable future'*.
- 6.13 The report acknowledges the benefits of initiatives such as farm diversification, projects to boost rural tourism, and community infrastructure projects and will also help people start local businesses and create employment opportunities for rural areas (including via the Rural England Prosperity Fund). There is also aim to build on the recent 'Farm to Fork summit' by helping our farmers and food producers in rural communities.
- 6.14 As part of the report and focus on improving the position for farmers and rural areas, it is acknowledged that planning processes can stifle the potential to grow the rural economy. Whilst this references changes to buildings, the basis of the report on achieving diversification and supporting farmers should also be a consideration to new development proposals which are fully in line with the thrust of the Governments focus and aims for rural growth, productivity and diversification.
- 6.15 As well as farm and agricultural diversification, 'Thriving Communities' is also one of the four priorities. There is aim for *'rural communities to continue to be places where people want to live and work and that rural communities are rich in the communal spirit and strong social networks which contribute enormously to the unique joy of rural life'*. Whilst local libraries are referenced, it is acknowledged that locally accessible hubs for essential service delivery and social and recreational activities can address loneliness and social isolation and supporting community cohesion.
- 6.16 The provision of the coffee shop where local people can meet and "catch up" over a coffee and cake, is therefore fully in line with the national aims for achieving rural community involvement and growth.
- 6.17 Key support to diversification of the farming sector is therefore at the forefront of current Government policy.

7.0 Key Considerations for Assessment of the Proposals

7.1 In assessing the proposal, consideration is required against:

- key policies of the development plan and other material considerations of national guidance in respect of:
 - Principle of Development
 - assessment of the proposal in relation to it's impact on the openness and visual appearance of the Green Belt and to the demonstration of very special circumstances (VSC) to outweigh harm to the Green Belt; and
 - rural development and supporting business growth and diversification
 - Other Design and Layout and General Development Principles
- Other technical considerations – as noted in section 1, there were no technical objections to the proposed development of this site for a farm shop and café from any technical consultees. Later assessment of the technical matters therefore has full regard to this position.
 - Drainage
 - Ecology
 - Highways and Accessibility
 - Landscape Considerations and Provision
 - Ground Conditions
 - Sustainability

8.0 Assessment Against the Development Plan and Other Material Considerations

Principle of Development - Green Belt Considerations

- 8.1 As the site is located in the Green Belt where a new building for a farm shop proposal is not listed as an appropriate form of development, it is necessary to undertake a balanced appraisal of whether the proposal would result in material harm to the openness or purposes of Green Belt, and if so, whether there are benefits or VSC to the development to justify and outweigh the level of harm that may arise.
- 8.2 It is to be noted that an agricultural building on the site to accommodate livestock or equipment related to the farm operations would comprise appropriate development in the Green Belt. This could be a building to the same (or larger) size and location as proposed, or indeed positioned more prominently closer to the road and not into the hillside so having more impact on the openness and visual amenity of the area.
- 8.3 Engineering operations which can include the construction of car parking and alterations to landform are also listed as appropriate uses in Green Belt locations under national planning policy where any effect on openness is considered acceptable. Notwithstanding this, given the alteration to site levels also proposed to accommodate the car park, the full development proposal is considered in respect of VSC for completeness.
- 8.4 Whilst the overriding policy for the consideration of Green Belt proposals is contained in national guidance and reflected in local policies, there is no clear definition of 'openness' or what constitute VSC; instead a proposal is to be assessed to the benefits that could arise, and having regard to interpretation from matters in case law.

Consideration of Impact on Openness

- 8.5 As there is no definition of openness in the NPPF, the issue has been considered in the Courts. The judgement in *Timms v Gedling BC* (2014) EWHC 654 (Admin) held that openness was "*an absence of any building or development*" and accepts that "*any development constitutes an impairment to openness, at least to some degree*"; whilst all development will therefore by definition be harmful, this should not result in all proposals being rejected i.e. those where VSC arise.
- 8.6 Subsequently, the decision of *Turner v East Dorset Council* has held that openness can involve various factors including consideration of how built up the Green Belt is both now and if development were to occur, the scale/volume of development, and visual factors i.e. the visual context /sensitivity of the landscape and the scale and importance of site views both in short and long range considerations.
- 8.7 In this respect, whilst the proposal will by definition be harmful to openness (from built development occurring), the level of harm is considered to be minimal as follows:
 - the site is not a highly sensitive or isolated rural location in the Green Belt
 - the site is physically contained by the road and farm track and set within the context of the main road frontage with existing built infrastructure and services (road, pavements, streetlights, bus stop and significant traffic

movements etc) and is relatively close to settlements and urban development; this is now more so given the housing development occurring opposite (as below)

- views of the site are generally 'contained' by the slope of the land and to an extent by surrounding landscaping (e.g. the hedging opposite and the trees to the south); it is visually separated from more open parts of the wider and more sensitive, undeveloped Green Belt that extends from the ridge of the hill to the east of the site
- the landscape and visual appraisal of the site has concluded that the site and revised proposal is now primarily only visible in short range public views along the road corridor and only two other public views from footpaths (from the west only). It is also now further considered that the landscape character of the site is different from published character assessments- and this changed context is increasingly so due to the implementation of the development proposal on land to the western side of Hollingworth Road – it is considered a semi-urban and mixed landscape character context, rather than a highly sensitive, rural and open moorland character
- the implementation of the housing development on the adjacent land and the likelihood that further land will also be taken forward from proposed allocation to development is a clear material consideration to the assessment of the site
- the proposal has been designed in terms of siting, layout, size and landscaping via a business and landscape led approach to seek to minimise its scale and impact on the openness of the site and immediate surroundings.
 - the revised layout and reduced scale of the proposal is considered the minimum required for the needs of the business
 - by setting the building into the hillside in a section with a slight natural hollow, and now via removal of the upper-level, this minimises the scale and footprint on the site, height and massing, and physical incursion into the hillside to reduce the amount of engineering works and the building projection into views - the reduction in scale of the proposal is shown on the comparison views from the DAS below



Current Planning Application - visual of single storey farm shop and café building



Previous Planning Application - visual of two storey building – height and massing greater in views from Hollingworth Road

- the roof form and run back to the slope also seeks to take advantage of the form of the hillside to minimise the visual context of the building and its impact on openness
- the provision of hedgerows to boundaries to enclose the site also reflect the landscaping assets of the immediate surroundings and will soften views of the proposal to minimise the degree of impact on the current undeveloped nature of the site

- 8.8 The road-side site therefore has an existing context of development and activity and is not a wholly open or undisturbed rural Green Belt location whilst the revised scale of the proposal and its design, materials and landscaping has sought to minimise its scale and appearance.
- 8.9 The LVA concludes that the proposal would have a limited impact on the nature of the openness of the site itself, and little loss of openness of landscape character as the site is contained by landform and the proposal would be well below the skyline so as not to impinge on views; it would generally have a low impact on the visual openness of the land from wider views and in its wider context (see later sections also).

- 8.10 Therefore, whilst there would be some impact on the openness of the Green Belt, as for any development in a Green Belt location, it would now be much more limited in scale and visual context and a minor impact.

Assessment against Green Belt Purposes

- 8.11 It is considered that the proposal does not materially conflict with the purposes of Green Belt as defined in the NPPF. Indeed it is noted that in assessing the previous planning application, the Committee Report only made reference to impact on the Green Belt via encroachment, therefore it must follow that RBC agrees the proposal does not harm the other purposes of Green Belt.

- 8.12 On the basis of the current scheme, it is not considered the scheme will result in harm to any of the purposes of Green Belt via:

- Encroachment: the site is contained visually and spatially by its topography, landscape features and road and access infrastructure and is not in a highly isolated or featureless/ open area of Green Belt. Boundaries will be reinforced and contain the proposal. The proposal will not therefore result in encroachment into a highly open or highly sensitive area of Green Belt or beyond the small site boundary area.
- Sprawl: by virtue of its siting, scale and landscaping and the applicant's intentions for the proposal it would not encourage further development on the site nor provide a precedent in the immediate area which could result in sprawl
- Merging of settlements: the proposal would not result in the merging of settlements
- Urban regeneration: as the proposal is fully related to the farm operations and produce, it would not undermine the aim for brownfield development elsewhere in the Borough; and
- Historic Town: this is not relevant to the proposal.

- 8.13 Taking the above into account, the proposed development is not considered to result in significant material harm to the purposes of Green Belt.

Demonstration of Very Special Circumstances

- 8.14 Local and national planning policy advise that inappropriate development may be acceptable where an impact on openness is present if VSC are demonstrated and the balance of such VSC weigh in favour against the level of harm that may occur.

- 8.15 There are a number of VSC that can be weighed in favour in the assessment of this proposal as follows:

- Business needs of the farm and small business for growth and diversification to support the viability of the farm business; this being locationally dependent to the farm holding
- Support to farm viability to assist future land management and improvement given the changing regime of agricultural subsidies and external inputs

- Support to the local economy via a boost to the local food and visitor and tourism economy; also having regard to significant positive need and feedback for the provision of a local farm shop in the local community
 - Support to other local farms and businesses/ producers
 - Direct employment for the family on the farm fulltime and potential future additional employment to the local area
 - Biodiversity benefits via significant net gain and improved site landscaping
- 8.16 In assessing these matters it is the view of the applicant and development team that clear VSC are present to address the limited scale harm to the openness and visual appearance of the Green Belt that would result.
- 8.17 Assessment of such factors by Officers in the previous application did outline that moderate or limited weight was to be applied to a large number of the factors. The assignment of low or no weight to a small number of factors is however now to be reassessed in the context of the revised proposals and the additional information now provided in this submission. In summary, the previous committee report outlined:
- Business Needs/Viability – moderate weight
 - Tourism/ Local economy/ Community – moderate weight (nb – this includes consideration of the café and agri-tourism elements that remain in the proposal as well as the previous community/education elements)
 - Benefits to other farms/ businesses – moderate weight
 - Ecological/ landscape provision – moderate weight
 - Local employment – low weight
 - Landscape and visual context – low weight
 - Design – low weight
 - Locational requirement– no weight
- 8.18 As can be seen, key circumstances related to the needs of the farm business and benefits to the local economy and other local businesses are accepted along with the contribution that the scheme will make to biodiversity and landscape provision.
- 8.19 Having regard to the demonstration of VSC as part of the assessment of the case for the application, the matters assessed also generally accord with the consideration of the proposal against the relevant policies of the development plan and national planning policy framework. As such, assessment of the proposal against the development plan and other relevant policy context is also therefore undertaken in this section to avoid duplication.
- 8.20 Having regard to the feedback to the last application (and that potential energy efficiency measures are to be confirmed at detailed design stage), consideration of the design of the building and the potential energy efficiency and sustainability features that could be incorporated are other material factors to the scheme and are now assessed separately to VSC elements.

Business Need and Requirements for Diversification

- 8.21 The application proposal fully accords with aims for rural diversification as encouraged in national planning policy and recent government reports and business and farming support schemes that are addressing the implications of Brexit and the recovery from the pandemic. It also fully accords with support for businesses, diversifying the rural economy and agriculture and aims for tourism and recreation growth as set out in local policies E2, E5 and E6 of the CS, for example:

'To support, strengthen and diversify the rural economy and where possible increase rural employment....support agriculture, the processing and marketing of local produce...' (policy E6)

Diversification for Business Growth and Viability

- 8.22 The clear business need for growth and diversification of the farm given its limited land size and quality and the stock levels it can accommodate and the changing farming context is provided in the applicants Business Diversification Report and the issues recognised by the National Farmers Union (NFU) representative.
- 8.23 The farm has experienced a number of years of losses after considerations to costs, revenues (from stock sales), falling subsidies and the requirements for continued investment in the holding. In this respect, over the last 5 years, losses have been experienced in the last 2 years, and there has been a 316% reduction in the level of income (net profit) from 5 years ago. As a significant element of this, the rural aid payment has reduced by over 51%.
- 8.24 The variable and unpredictable market prices for animals prevent accurate future business planning and the farm has therefore sought to expand the direct sale of produce to public customers to seek to maximise values and more certainty to ongoing viability. The opportunity to grow the businesses via the diversification proposals for full farm produce sales via a farm shop would therefore assist the farm greatly and seek a return to profit and ongoing viability.
- 8.25 Addressing the operational constraints of the current meat sales as summarised earlier is also necessary to enable the customer sales business to grow. The provision of a dedicated and formal shop outlet expanding functions to include all butchery and product preparation, increased sales capacity and ability to serve more customers shown by the high level of local support, expansion of the limited sales hours, and addressing parking issues is therefore necessary.
- 8.26 Growth and improvement of the farm produce sales elements alone will however only enable a level of business growth, limited to the farm size and (maximum) stock numbers. As such, the associated benefits of a farm café to diversification and economic growth of the business are further linked to the produce of the farm and is a facility that is now largely expected and demanded by customers to farm shops; a factor clearly seen in the responses to the consultation exercise where 96% of respondents would support a small café as part of the proposals. The offer of a small café would provide a further directly associated source of income to support the farm.
- 8.27 In this respect, as referenced in the Diversification Statement, the café would be a further outlet for the farm produce i.e. selling breakfasts utilising the meat, and sandwiches/ rolls and a limited range of hot meals (e.g. cottage/shepherds pies) using the farm meats.
- 8.28 It is also further outlined that the farm can plan for and service the direct stocking of the farm shop in line with the proposals and having regard to the context and limitations of the farm

location and land conditions. Since the previous planning application, the farm had increased animal stock levels slightly. This had been undertaken with a view to the previous planning application being granted planning permission in mid 2023 and being implemented over late 2023 and so to enable the farm to deliver meat produce levels to stock the farm shop having regard to the cyclical nature of and timeframes for animal growth and meat production.

8.29 The current stock levels are:

Aberdeen Angus cows- 18

Sheep – 80 breeding ewes with c150 lambs per year

Pigs – 1 breeding sow and 30 fattening pigs

Turkeys – c180

Chickens flock

8.30 As the applicants are experienced in stocking and meat production having regard to animal growth and preparation timeframes and the seasonality of product requirements, the stocking levels to the farm would vary through the year; for example:

- Lamb – lambing times in April and then assigning stock levels to weekly and seasonal shop demand (including higher spring demand); any additional stock could be sent to general market sales
- Turkey - birds arriving in August and grown on for the Christmas market
- Pork - pig stocking levels of average of 30 to provide c half yearly meat requirement with breeding producing c8 young per sow to provide forward requirements. In addition the farm can increase the availability of pork and bacon without increasing stocking levels on the farm significantly by altering the time to meat as necessary
- Beef - stocking levels on average of around 18 animals at different ages which can be utilised as necessary to account for shop and seasonal requirements; again the availability of meat to shop can be increased by altering the length of time to slaughter if shop stock increase is required

8.31 The ability to service the farm shop with own grown and produced meat throughout the year to the levels as referenced in the proposed planning condition is therefore possible.

8.32 The meat operations for the farm and farm shop to the farm business will also relate to approximately half of the income to the farm (this is a clarification to the lower level referenced in the Committee Report to the previous application).

8.33 To address concerns raised to the context of the proposed café during the previous application, it is confirmed that the scale of the café is of limited floorspace (as referenced above) and will be fully associated with the farm shop in terms of operation, hours and staffing. In addition the turnover of the café would also be based on the sale of farm produced meat products, therefore whilst approximately half of the predicted business income, it is fully related the farm business and its produce to further support farm viability. The proposed planning conditions would further ensure this (and prevent use unassociated with the farm i.e. it could not be operated by another business e.g. Costa or MacDonalds).

- 8.34 Therefore, as the farming industry faces uncertain times, the applicant is aiming to secure the long- term economic future for the farm business and improve its resilience to cope with the market and changing support frameworks. Diversifying and expanding based on the farm qualities, resources and the existing produce business would therefore provide this aim in line with national policy advice and government statements and accord with the criteria of policy E2 to support the creation and retention of businesses, including other employment generating uses (retail, leisure/ tourism). Further it would also accord with the aims of the policy for business in the north of the Borough, to support small scale and other employment development that generates low levels of peak hour journeys and the rural economy. It also fully accords with relevant elements of policy E6 to support agriculture and the processing and marketing of local produce.
- 8.35 To date it is only a result of the external employment and incomes to the family that investment in farm operations, land improvement and fixed assets has enabled the farm to continue to operate and the family to remain farming. Without the opportunity to address such economic matters in this location, it would clearly undermine the immediate and longer-term viability of the farm and likely ultimately result in its failure e.g. as members of the family move to other family circumstances/retirement and the opportunities for external incomes to support the farm operations change.
- 8.36 Whilst policies of the CS support rural growth and diversification there are also considerations to ensuring proposals address the landscape and rural character. As such, the scale and range of elements proposed have been fully considered and are small scale and the applicants are keen to only draw upon associated offers of the farm that would utilise their produce and other local goods. The approach therefore limits the size of the proposals to minimise the scale of the building and fully consider the landscape and rural character of the area whilst enabling a further source of income to sustain the business and support the family. Further, without the proposal that would enable ongoing farming and management of the land, recent gains to the land improvement and productivity undertaken by the family would likely also be lost resulting in detriment to the landscape in visual and character terms.
- 8.37 As such, and as referenced later in respect of design analysis, the scale and appearance of the proposal has been fully considered such that the proposal aligns with all associated elements of policy E6.
- 8.38 It is also relevant that in line with the NPPF, small scale rural development does not require considerations to the sequential test or impact assessment.

Tourism, Local Economic and Community Benefits

- 8.39 It is widely accepted that farm shops and cafés add to local tourism and the economy as well as providing income to a farm business (research by universities and Farm Retail Association).
- 8.40 Many farm shops appear on tourism websites, have tourism road signage and attract visitors from beyond the immediate local catchment and form ‘agri-retail’ facilities.
- 8.41 The area of Hollingworth and Littleborough is an established tourism area and destination (as recognised in the CS and other Council publications) and the proposal would therefore add a further agritourism element to this local economy; likely also attracting some pass-by trade from visitors to the area.
- 8.42 The local research undertaken by the applicant in terms of the availability of farm shops in the Rochdale Borough area has found this to be limited and that the nearest offers are c 7-10 miles away (Halifax/ Delph) and beyond, such that there is a geographical gap. This was also seen in

feedback to the public consultation that local residents referenced having to travel 10+miles for a good farm shop offer. As such, there is a level of local demand and market need for a farm shop.

- 8.43 As referenced in section 3, the farm is outside the urban area, as are the majority of farms in the Borough – this is by nature a factor of farms. Research on farm shops in the North West/ Yorkshire area has also determined that the vast majority of farm shops located around the urban conurbations are within the Green Belt, this being due to the presence of this longstanding land designation. It is clear that need for farm shops is accepted by Local Planning Authorities across the region (and the wider countryside of England). For example:

- Craggies Farm shop HX7 5TT
- Albion Farm Shop, Delph, Saddleworth OL3 5RQ
- Brosters Farm Shop, Huddersfield HD7 4JU
- Far Barsey Farm shop, Halifax HX4 0BG
- Hinchcliffes Huddersfield HD4 7LE
- Falshaws Farm shop, Bury BL9 5LJ
- Park Farm Shop, Bury BL9 5NP
- Red House Farm, Dunham Massey WA14 5RL
- Huntleys Country Stores, Samelsbury PR5 0UN
- Silvesters Farm Shop, Chorley PR7 6DJ
- Windy Arbour, Billinge WN5 7XX
- Kenyon Hall Farm shop and PYO, Warrington WA3 7ED
- Cedar Farm Galleries, Ormskirk L40 3SY
- Toogood Farm Shop, Wroughton WN6 9PN
- Taylors Farm Shop, Lathom L40 5UW
- Fir Tree Farm Shop, St Helens WA11 8RG

- 8.44 As such, the ability of farms to diversify and sell own products (along with other products to a larger or lesser degree) is a factor accepted to assist both the farms and the local economies. The view from the previous Committee Report that the business case made is not exceptional and could be made at many other farms should not be a factor weighed against the proposal. Each planning application is to be considered on its own merits and there are clear special circumstances in the case of Bank Top Farm to support the proposal.

- 8.45 The applicants also consider that a small café would assist the diversification and tourism element of the business expansion– a large scale offer e.g. catering for a coach party is not the aim or intention of the proposal. Rather it would serve the local area and customers to the farm shop, but with some potential for tourism and pass-by customers. It would also provide a location where small groups of residents could meet for a ‘coffee and chat’ at times, as recognised as a function of smaller and community facilities in government advice.

- 8.46 The inclusion of these elements and opportunity to enhance facilities for tourism and recreation and services for local communities and visitors is in line with criteria of policy E2, E5 and particularly E6 of the CS along with policy C8 for community facilities.

Support to Other Local Farms and Businesses

- 8.47 The intention for the farm shop to offer sales of products and goods from other local farms and businesses in the area would also further enhance the rural economy and local businesses.

- 8.48 Given the focus on fresh and local produce, there would not be direct competition with shops in nearby towns; instead, the focus on products sold with knowledge and enabling customers to ask about production and quality would be key.
- 8.49 The farm has links with a number of local businesses for the sale of vegetables and seasonal products and it is intended that such links would be furthered as a result of the shop, the proposed planning condition enabling this local produce link to be maintained.
- 8.50 Support from a number of the associated businesses has been received to the proposals (letters and verbal support) demonstrating the wider local and UK farm/ produce benefits that could arise. Copies of supporting information provided to the previous planning application is at Appendix 1.
- 8.51 The café would also enable the sale of other local produce e.g cakes and biscuits alongside using vegetables from local farms in hot food offers.
- 8.52 Again, this sits with the criteria for supporting agriculture and marketing of local produce in policy E6 of the CS.

Local Employment

- 8.53 It is considered that the proposal would enable the offer of a small level of further employment opportunities in addition to the family taking on fuller time employment at the farm business. This would include in the butchery and staff to serve in the shop and café, with full and part time roles. Whilst the final level would depend on operations, a small number of roles (likely up to 5) would be generated. Given current economic circumstances, this is still a material consideration of moderate weight to the proposal.
- 8.54 This would provide a further benefit to the local job market and economy in line with criteria (d) and (e) of policy EC2.

Locational Requirements

- 8.55 Policy E6(b) also aims to create stronger physical and economic linkages between the urban and rural areas, whilst the NPPF accepts that rural businesses will require a setting beyond towns - '*planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements*' (para 85).
- 8.56 The proposal is wholly related to the farm location, operations and its produce and it would not meet the aims for a true farm shop and café if it was not associated with the farm location. In this respect, it is akin to retail expansion proposals where an extension to a retail store cannot be located other than on the store site to enable the operational and product sales benefits; in such cases the location specific requirements of the business outweigh the consideration of off-site (or in this case off- farm) locations².
- 8.57 Given the farm-based context required, the applicants have also fully considered locational options for the proposal on the wider farm holding. The application site was concluded to result in lesser impact on visual and Green Belt considerations and to raise fewer technical issues, therefore being the most appropriate location. In this respect:

² This position is widely accepted in grants of planning permissions for extensions to supermarkets.

- there are no existing vacant or redundant buildings available for alternative use in the farm complex
- to provide additional building, car parking and site infrastructure at the higher levels of the farm holding on the ridge positioning would be significantly more visually intrusive. It would also require the widening of the farm access track for its full length with highly visible engineering works, whilst car movements and activity from customers and deliveries would be significantly more visible moving up and along the hill ridge.

The visual context of the farm complex setting and the farm access track compared to the application site in views from the west is illustrated in the photograph from the LVA below:



Orange arrow – Bank Top Farm complex on top of ridge – visually prominent

Yellow arrow – access track to farm crossing up hillside – visually prominent

Red arrow – Farm Shop site located behind the hedge along Hollingworth Road – this location is significantly lower (elevationally) and associated with road/ other infrastructure – much reduced visual context

- there would be a number of potential safety issues from public uses in proximity to a working farmyard area – hygiene, farm vehicle conflicts, stock safety and stock welfare from additional noise and activity
- security issues to the operational areas of the farm if visitors diverted from ‘public areas’
- the location proposed is the most accessible, including via a range of means (bus, walking, cycle) and best serves customer use for access, visibility and safety – there were no objections from the highway authority and it was accepted as an accessible site;
- a single-track farm access arrangement is not acceptable for an associated retail and customer use and it is considered there would be objection from the Highway Authority to such use. To amend the track to a two-way lane would not be viable for the farm proposals (given the length of the track and scope of widening works required)

- the location also makes the most viable contribution to tourism potential of the area
 - the site land is poor quality and not suitable for other agricultural use
- 8.58 Clear locational needs and advantages are therefore present for the proposal at the farm and in this location on the farm with further information now provided. Whilst the farm is within a Green Belt location, as most farms are in RBC, this should not prevent the business from growing and diversifying where VSC and other clear benefits arise.
- 8.59 Given the above business and locational elements, the remit for allowing diversification and growth is accepted in national and local policy.

Lack of Visual and Landscape Harm

- 8.60 As referenced at the start of this section, case law has considered that alongside the physical/volume implications of development on openness and appearance of Green Belt, visual considerations of development in views in its surroundings and the landscape context is also relevant.
- 8.61 In this respect, the updated LVA has considered the site, its context and key views. Whilst it was considered that the previous two storey building was appropriate in visual and landscaping matters including visual site parameters, constraints and key viewpoints, the revised scheme has been further considered including in the context of the development now progressing on the land opposite/ north.
- 8.62 The LVA considers the existing landscape resource and visual context of the site and provided recommendations to help set and integrate the proposed development in this context. The design proposals were then assessed to consider potential visual effects and any proposed mitigation, and also to advise on enhancing both the landscape setting and biodiversity of the site context.
- 8.63 The LVA confirms the proposal is not within a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and outlines its Green Belt designation and key considerations of the rural character areas in which it is located, being beyond the urban edge. In this respect the assessment reviews the national and local character areas but recognises the transitional nature of the area on the edge of urban settlements rather than an isolated rural setting, this being more so with the development opposite commencing. The LVA also highlights the developed context with road infrastructure and activity.
- 8.64 With reference to the topography of the site and the wider valleys/Green Belt setting, the LVA confirmed objectives for the siting of:
- to integrate the building in its landscape context
 - to minimise and incorporate functional requirements and associated building and exterior spaces 'into' the landscape
 - to provide a landscape setting which compliments the existing landscape assets and rural character of the area; and
 - to include landscape features and a management strategy which will enhance the landscape biodiversity on site (discussed further below).

- 8.65 Given this visual context and the site topography, the design evolution included to build into the contours and natural slope/hollow of the site such that large sections of the building is built into and therefore 'hidden' in the hillside. There is also provision for plant to be screened to the rear.
- 8.66 There was also reference to materials choice and the design aim for a rural/ agricultural character for the landscape setting i.e. the façade to include a natural/rural element akin to a stone wall, with timber elements referencing an 'agricultural shed'. The stone gabion element to the parking area would also have a character of a stone wall or potential quarry or rock cliff, which can be found in the wider area, however it would also be planted to soften the visual change to the current grazing field. The use of grasscrete to the majority of the parking area would also retain a low-key change to the wider site area. Significant landscaping would also soften the proposal.
- 8.67 The LVA has been updated following the previous refusal of planning permission and reduced scale/height and to reflect the updated site context with the adjacent development now underway. This has particularly influenced updated assessment of the proposed development visually in viewpoints.
- 8.68 In all cases in longer viewpoints (1-5), the assessed level of visual impact has reduced; the proposal is not now visible in viewpoints 2 and 5 and has negligible impact to residents viewpoints. In the other longer range views, the proposed building would be largely glimpsed or partial views of the top of the building only as a result of topography and landscape screening. The three closer range views from Hollingworth Road now have only slight-moderate visual impact, albeit it remains that these views are 'typical' and not unique and are taken in the context of a developed view and character with infrastructure. These views and the level of impact would also be temporary as walkers pass by via the footpaths or drivers go past the site; as such the material nature and harm of the 'impact' is considered to be reduced.
- 8.69 Changes to the site context itself resulting from the proposal, whilst permanent, remain mitigated by the high-quality design and agricultural form of the building and by it sitting into the landscape and its setting and from the landscaping proposals. It is therefore considered an appropriate change.
- 8.70 Taking the above factors into account, the location, siting and reduced scale of the farm shop result in it not be significantly visible in permanently held public views whilst the form and materials of the building would be rural in nature and character and are not considered to result in any material harm to the other limited public or private views, of which the zone of visual influence is primarily the road corridor. As the context of the site and its presence in longer range views is also becoming materially different as set out in the LVA and photographs, this is therefore a clear material consideration and change to the visual setting and character and landscape of the area.
- 8.71 Given the above, it is concluded that whilst the proposal will, by definition, have some negative effect on the visual and landscape amenity of the Green Belt by the introduction of 'volume/ footprint' of development (as any new development would), given the form of the building mostly set into the topography of the site, the materials and the limited external infrastructure and significant landscaping, the level of change and harm to views and wider views is considered to be minimal.
- 8.72 It is also relevant that over time the proposal would be assimilated into the landscape as a low-key rural building as materials weathered and landscaping establishes. Also, as there are other rural buildings in the views from the west and given the development site opposite, it would not introduce development into a 'virgin' landscape.

- 8.73 As such, the proposal is considered to align with policy SP2 and relevant elements of policy E6 providing a rural economic proposal in the Pennine fringe area having due regard to the appearance and rural character of the countryside, policy P2 via potential for integrating into the natural features and protecting the countryside character and policies P3 and DM1 for high standards of design.

Landscaping Provision and Ecological Enhancement

- 8.74 The natural setting and habitats context of the site have also informed the landscape intentions for the proposal from the outset.
- 8.75 The landscaping scheme (plans 474.01 RevC and 474/D/02) demonstrates how native hedging, as well as wildflower meadow planting and expansion of the existing marshy area can provide for aesthetic and landscape benefit and also to promote enhancement of biodiversity at the site. The landscape architect (in liaison with the ecologist) has also fully specified planting to the wider site and the patio area including fruit trees, shrubs and herb garden and more natural planting including to attract bird, bat and invertebrate species to the gabion wall.
- 8.76 In this respect the scheme has been fully assessed against the newly published Natural England Biodiversity Gain Metric 3 and can be concluded to score at 20% gain. This level is significant and would provide a significant upgrade from the current low level of the site. It is also considered that this level of gain could enable the site to be utilised as an 'exemplar scheme' for the Borough in terms of this new biodiversity provision (and future requirement).
- 8.77 The Ecological Report also confirms that a future management plan could enable the proposed landscaping to remain effective and to assimilate into the rural character of the site.
- 8.78 The landscaping proposals are therefore compliant with the NPPF and development plan including policies G7 and DM1.
- 8.79 Accordingly, this collaborative approach has catalysed biodiversity benefits to be very significant and overreaching emerging standards, resulting in a benefit which constitutes a VSC.

Other Material Considerations

High quality design and low impact site infrastructure.

- 8.80 The appointed team includes C+R who have significant experience with regards to high quality commercial development schemes and, with the benefit of Penny Bennett and ERAP appointments, the team fully considered how the scheme could be of high quality architecture designed into the landscape whilst also promoting ecological and landscaping enhancements and functions.
- 8.81 Whilst the building has been re-designed following comments from members of the Planning Committee and having regard to the reason for refusal regarding scale and the two-storey nature previously proposed, the applicant has sought to retain a building design that has a rural and agricultural context and vernacular, uses local materials and accommodates the business requirements in an efficient and low-key manner. It has also sought to reduce the level of glazing to the front elevation which was identified as an 'extensive' amount.
- 8.82 Notwithstanding, the Committee Report assessment of the previous proposal did recognise that the proposal is '*relatively well designed to take influence from the surroundings to*

minimise its visual impacts. By setting the building into the hillside would appear less prominent on the site ... and the use of stone and timber cladding would respond positively to the rural backdrop of the site... the landscaping of the site would further aid in softening the appearance of the development'.

- 8.83 The reference to there not being a submission to a design review board and that the proposal was not considered to reach an 'outstanding or innovative' level is noted. However, the applicants did undertake pre-application discussions with RBC, which, whilst there wasn't a full design presented for review, the scheme did take on points from that officer feedback. Also, given the nature and scale of the proposal and costs/timescale of such an external design review process, economic circumstances to the farm were prohibitive.
- 8.84 The revised scheme remains a high quality building making a positive presence in the street scene whilst recognising the local agricultural vernacular and materials. It is not considered it needs to be 'innovative' in respect of involving new design techniques or experimental methods of construction or materials to be considered 'high quality' in a Green Belt setting.
- 8.85 The evolution of the proposals as now submitted therefore acknowledge further feedback from the last application and still deliver a high quality building and landscaped setting that does provide visual benefits to the site and street scene by:
- a connected site and design - connecting the physical appearance of the location, topography and site features and the proposal via its form, scale and materials palette – the reduction in height in particular sets the building much more 'into' the slope of the site with the hillside continuing above, whilst views in the street scene from Hollingworth Road, being the most visible views as referenced in the LVA are significantly more against the lower portion of the slope as seen in the visual comparisons on page 23
 - acknowledging the site's agricultural use and its wider context and (semi) rural character
 - minimising the extent and impact of associated infrastructure including via scale, form and materials
 - considerations for sustainably sourced/local building materials and a consolidated palette with significantly less glazing and future maintenance and environmental performance of the building including use of renewable technologies where possible (as discussed further below).
- 8.86 As the design has regard to a landscape led approach, further assessment of design is also referenced in the visual and landscape section below.

Energy and Sustainability Enhancements

- 8.87 To enable the proposals to have regard to energy efficiency and limited resource take requirements, the applicant commissioned a high-level review of potential energy and sustainability measures that could be incorporated in the building via full assessment at detailed design stage.
- 8.88 In summary, the review has concluded the following measures could potentially be provided at this site:

- solar photovoltaic (PV) could be considered – consideration to roof or alternative ground-based options could be assessed at a later stage if to be proposed
- air source heat pumps to use renewable energy taken from ambient air to heat the building and provide a heat source throughout the year or ground source heat pump
- passive ventilation replacing mechanical ventilation to reduce energy use
- rainwater harvesting

8.89 In addition to the above, the following measures are proposed:

- use of thermal efficient glazing systems and the use of large/roof glazing areas to increase natural light penetration to reduce/offset lighting needs
- EV charging points for cars; and
- low energy light fittings.

8.90 Whilst this element was not considered of merit or any weight to the previous planning application, the clear need for all development proposals to seek to achieve energy efficiency and sustainability benefits to address the clear issues of climate change that are commonly reported in the media is in line with national and local policy aims.

8.91 Further sustainability gains would also be achieved at the site via the accessibility of the site by a range of means for potential customers to undertake local produce shopping. As the local population in the immediate area will also increase, the shop would be highly accessible to 127 families. It would also provide reduced miles to the farm via the sale of produce at the farm shop rather than animals being transported to markets to sale.

8.92 As such, there are a number of sustainability benefits that could be delivered to the proposal and would be in line with policies G2 and P2/T2 for energy reduction and accessibility.

Overall Assessment

8.93 Given the above, it is concluded that the proposal does benefit from VSC and other supporting considerations and accords with the aims of policies E2 for supporting existing businesses and policy E6 for rural economic development, in particular where proposals in the Green Belt will be supported where it delivers quality design and biodiversity gains, supports agriculture, the processing and marketing of local produce, provides for tourism and recreation and delivers environmental quality and sustainability.

8.94 The revised scheme has sought to address points raised to the previous planning application. Namely:

- further information on the locational requirement for the farm shop and that this is the most appropriate location
- reducing the scale to single storey – whilst this removes the education element (with regret to the applicant), this use element was previously considered by Officers to be 'less evidenced' to support the diversification of the farm business. By consequence, removal of the community and education room element reduces the scale of development and level of engineering works required and significantly reduces the visual harm and encroachment into the Green Belt from that previously assessed

- additional information is provided including on the café function as a supporting element and to the ability of the farm to supply the farm shop
- the implementation of the large scale housing scheme in very close proximity to the site is clearly changing the visual and character context of the site as referenced in the LVA
- reiteration that the proposed planning conditions are in line with similar conditions utilised by other local planning authorities and are relevant to the proposal and can be appropriately discussed and applied

9.0 Technical Considerations

Drainage Strategy

- 9.1 The submitted Preliminary Drainage Strategy (DS) to the previous planning application was accepted and planning conditions recommended to secure the agreement of final details of the drainage scheme to the site and proposal.
- 9.2 This reflects the site's location in flood zone 1 and that the proposal can utilize and build upon the existing drainage regime in the area for an efficient use of infrastructure in line with policy G8 of the CS and climate change /flooding policies of the NPPF.

Ecology

- 9.3 The landscaping and habitat creation proposals for the site largely remain as the previously assessed scheme (with the exception of omission of the green roof and balustrade planting) and were fully accepted by the relevant ecological consultee.
- 9.4 The previous site survey and habitat assessment remains relevant along with the findings of the Ecological Assessment report that:
 - habitats on the site are of limited ecological significance and not unusual with other similar habitat present in the area
 - there is limited potential for nesting and foraging birds in the trees and site or for presence/ foraging of bats
 - no invasive species were found
- 9.5 The proposed development will not result in direct impacts to any designated sites given distances to such sites and will not result in undue harm to ecological value of the site or any habitats of significance.
- 9.6 The proposals and the landscaping scheme which has been developed in consultation with ecologists ERAP retain a biodiversity net gain associated with the DEFRA metric 3.0 with new and improved habitat including:
 - improvement and extension of the marshy grassland area around the small spring to include a wider range of wetland species and habitat potential
 - introduction of native hedgerow planting to boundaries and to the rear of the building and car park area
 - significant areas of wildflower meadow seeding and growth
 - herb and fruit trees/bushes area as a kitchen garden feature and also herb and produce source to the farm shop and café use
 - relevant planting and bird/ bat box and nesting facilities to the gabion wall to encourage invertebrates, bats and birds
 - planting to the terrace areas of the building

- bird and bat boxes to the trees and building
- 9.7 In addition wider habitat enhancement proposals also planned for the wider farm site can also further support ecological gain including the continuation of native hedgerow all along the Hollingworth Road frontage and provision of a number of trees in field corners, reflecting historic planting patterns on the farm and in the area.
- 9.8 As a result of this, the BNG review confirms a gain in biodiversity.
- 9.9 Ensuring development would not be to the detriment of ecology including priority species and/or their habitats is therefore in accordance with policies G7 and E6 of the CS and Paragraphs 174 and 180d of the NPPF.

Transport Statement

- 9.10 It has been confirmed by the Local Highway Authority that there are no highway safety or capacity issues to the development of the site for the uses proposed. It has also been agreed by the LHA and LPA that the use of a servicing management agreement is appropriate to cover deliveries and refuse collection to the site.
- 9.11 It has also been confirmed that the site is an accessible and sustainable site for access by a choice of means.
- 9.12 The Transport Statement (TS) has been updated to support the current planning application and it uses and again concludes that:
 - the proposed development accords with relevant national and local policy aims with regards to transport and highways matters
 - the proposal will not have a detrimental impact on highway safety by way of traffic generation or operation of the highway
 - the site is accessible by a range of sustainable modes of transport including on foot, cycle, bus and there are also train links to the adjacent settlements that are also in relevant distances for walking or linked trips (cycle or bus). Bus stops are adjacent to the site and provide a clear source of access
 - the vehicular access to the site provides appropriate visibility splays and for access by a range of vehicle types including refuse vehicles and delivery vehicles
 - separate pedestrian and cycle acceptable
 - swept path analysis shows that a refuse vehicle can enter and exit in a forward gear via safely manoeuvring within the proposed car park area. Appropriate provision for servicing via private arrangements outside of the opening hours of the farm shop can be ensured by the applicant and secured via planning condition; and
 - appropriate parking levels can be achieved in the site with reference to the uses proposed on the site and joint use of the facilities; provision in line with standards is made
- 9.13 Based on the above, it is concluded that the revised proposed development remains to have a negligible impact on the local highway network there should be no highways or transportation reasons to preclude the granting of planning permission and the scheme accords with criteria of policies T2 and DM1 of the CS and para 111 of the NPPF.

Landscaping

- 9.14 Penny Bennett Landscape has prepared a detailed landscaping plan to support the planning application in combination with the landscape appraisal of the site and in consultation with the scheme ecologist.
- 9.15 As referenced above, the plan includes significant new planting that will greatly enhance the biological focus of the site, but also provides for a scheme that sits well with the landscape and visual context of the site and wider area.
- 9.16 As such, native species hedges (rather than trees) and ground-based vegetation are proposed to support the building and application site area supported by some new trees on other parts of the wider farm site having regard to historical landscape patterns.
- 9.17 Full regard has therefore been had to the aims of local policies for landscaping including the considerations of Policies P2, E6 and DM1 of the CS.

Ground Conditions

- 9.18 The site has been assessed via a Phase 1 Ground Conditions review and also a coal mining risk review, both accepted in the previous planning application. Planning conditions recommended by the relevant consultees should again be relevant to the consideration of this proposal and acceptance of the scheme in line with Policy G9 of the CS.

Sustainability

- 9.19 Achieving sustainable and energy efficient provisions within the development has been a key factor within the scheme development and on to its delivery as outlined above in relation to building design, materials, use, wider site landscaping and accessibility. Main provisions from the previously submitted information remain relevant and final elements to be proposed would be addressed at detailed design stage and pursuant to a planning condition to confirm the scope of such technologies should planning permission be granted.

Summary

- 9.20 From the above there are no technical matters which would preclude the grant of planning permission for the proposed development.
- 9.21 A series of planning conditions to a grant of planning permission would be relevant and would be generally in line with standard technical matters that are covered by planning conditions.

10.0 Conclusion and Planning Balance

- 10.1 The development has been assessed against relevant up to date policies of the development plan and found to be in accordance.
- 10.2 Given the site's location in the Green Belt, it is considered that VSC do exist for the proposal and that it would not result in material harm to the purposes of Green Belt. As a result, it is concluded that these elements outweigh the limited harm to the openness and visual intrusion to the Green Belt context that arises from the revised proposal.
- 10.3 It is also considered that the proposal accords with key policies for supporting rural businesses and development and support for rural diversification as contained in national and local policy.
- 10.4 In respect of the three elements of sustainable development of the NPPF, and flowing from the VSC, the proposal provides significant relevant benefits as follows:

Social

- Provision for local choice in fresh food shopping
- Provision of a facility where people can meet and chat
- No material harm to long term held or long range public views – transient and passing views along the road are the main views of the proposal
- No harm to residential amenity

Economic

- Support to the viability and growth of a local business as well as other local farms and nearby based food producers
- Local jobs support for construction companies and related local suppliers during the construction process
- Local jobs during the operation purposes; also the potential freeing up of other jobs held by the family as they seek to transfer to full time working in the meat/ farm shop/ café business
- Support and expansion of local tourism facilities via agri-retail tourism

Environmental

- Significant biodiversity gain on the site and wider farm holding – both to flora and fauna
- Accessibility by a range of means with cycle, foot and bus accessibility to the site and also accessibility to the wider rail network
- No undue floodrisk to arise and relevant drainage provision to be made

- No harm to heritage assets
- Delivery of a high-quality building that respects the site and rural character of the area
- Appropriate landscaping and new planting to the site that respects the ecological character of the site and area
- Maintain the long-term management and quality of the wider land on the farm and for landscape maintenance purposes
- Sustainability considerations to the building fabric and it's operations

- 10.5 Having regard to para 11 of the NPPF, the relevant site policies are considered broadly up to date with national guidance. It is also considered that even if policies are out-of-date, VSC for the proposal are present and policies for Green Belt would not provide a clear reason for refusing the development.
- 10.6 The proposal is considered to form a sustainable development and has significant benefits.
- 10.7 The information and technical documentation submitted in support of this application demonstrate that there are no significant adverse impacts of the proposal and in light of the accordance with up-to-date development plan and sustainable development the application should therefore be approved.

Appendix 1 – Statement of Community Involvement

Pre Application Consultation

Consultation with RBC

In considering the proposal, at an early stage of the project, a pre-application advice request was submitted to RBC to allow the opportunity to *‘approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way’* (Para. 38 of the NPPF) and, also for any feedback that may influence the future design and site operations which could alleviate or entirely remove any concerns which Officers at RBC may have had.

The pre-application advice request was supported by an outline of the diversification aims and requirements for the proposal to support the viability and needs of the farm and small business and a number of very special circumstances considered relevant to the site’s position in the Green Belt. Initial sketch proposals that outlined that the site context and design quality were of fundamental importance to the applicant even at the concept stages of the proposed building, were also provided.

An on-line meeting was held with RBC on 14 September 2021 and following the meeting, formal written pre-application advice was issued by RBC on 21 September 2021.

Whilst the feedback acknowledged that diversification is to be generally supported for businesses, concerns were raised to the Green Belt location and the considered ‘open setting’ of the site. It was also questioned whether very special circumstances (VSC) for the proposal could be demonstrated.

The pre-application preliminary design option was subject to a number of comments regarding the potential scale and layout of the proposal. A number of the comments and design changes were incorporated in the previous (refused) scheme to consider the setting of the site whilst achieving optimum business and diversification requirements for viability of the farm. Key changes at that stage comprised:

- the positioning of the building –to set into the slope of the site
- the form and scale of the building - to offset the upper floor level and sit it back into the site slope to reduce the bulk and massing of the building, and limit the impact on the openness and visual appearance of the Green Belt
- the roof arrangement -provision of a gentle sloping roof to ‘land’ the building into the slope of the site and to minimise the overall height and massing; a curved roof arrangement would have resulted in a greater overall height and mass of the building
- alterations to the materials palette - increased glazing and use of locally sourced and sustainable materials to lighten the visual context of the building and fit with the rural character of the area
- a revised parking area– setting it further into the site and away from the site frontage and providing a hedge to the site boundary for visual benefits and incorporating provision for a minibus and motorcycle parking to minimise parking levels to serve the various uses proposed for the site and widen parking offer

- use of a landscaped stone gabion structure- to reduce the visual impact of site works and infrastructure
- site access and servicing on site – alterations to the access and space within the car park and site to enable visibility and manoeuvring as commented upon in highways feedback
- reduced scale of the community room facility - to reflect likely uses by school groups (based on class sizes) and other groups
- a more landscaped and natural setting to the area around the site e.g. limiting potential hard-surfacing or paths or ancillary facilities (i.e. play equipment)

Analysis of Consultation Responses To Bank Top Farm Public Consultation

Consultation Leaflet issued to Bank Top Farm customers and local residents - provided below.

Map of distribution area - provided below.

From the consultation, 118 responses were received either via return of the completed questionnaire, email with written responses, or email with general comments.

In a small number of cases, there was duplication of responses between questions 1 and 2, in which case it was taken those respondents already bought meat from the farm. In addition, there were a small number of responses where not all questions were answered (for unknown reasons), however this was not of a level to materially alter the overall conclusions that could be drawn from the consultation responses.

Farm Shop and Café

- 58 respondents confirmed they already purchased from the farm
- 71 respondents confirmed that would like to purchase from the farm – only 2 responses outlined they would not wish to purchase from the farm
- 107 respondents (95%) supported a farm shop and confirmed they would like it to open during the week as well as at weekends
- 110 respondents (96%) confirmed they would like to be able to buy fresh meat in addition to the frozen products sold and 112 responses (99%) would support the offer of other local products alongside the meat products
- 109 respondents (94%) confirmed that they felt a permanent, wider ranging farm shop would enhance the local area
- 110 respondents (96%) confirmed they would support a small café at the site

From the consultation responses received, it is clear that there is significant support from existing customers and prospective local customers for the farm to extend the current meat sales and increase

the range of products on offer via a more formal farm shop as well as diversifying the facilities to be offered with particular reference to an on-site cafe.

It is also highly relevant that a requirement for off-road parking was confirmed in most responses received (112).

From the feedback, there were only two responses that were wholly negative, both being persons opposed to meat production and consumption in principle. It is however noted that at least four other respondents who identified as vegan/ vegetarian were supportive where the sale of other non-meat and fresh products could be supplied alongside the farm meat.

Other Comments

In addition to the overwhelmingly positive responses received to the specific questions posed, a number of wider supporting comments were made by respondents, a number of which are summarised in the table below.

- Would like to buy smaller quantities as live on own
- A farm shop would be fabulous for the village
- Not aware you did hampers – would like to support local and small businesses
- Think it is important to educate people on where food comes from
- Double yellow lines prevent ability to stop and visit the trailer.
- Haven't bought from the farm due to lack of off-street parking
- Would only work if located straight off the road
- We have to travel significant distance to access a good farm shop
- Interest in nature and the countryside has increased during covid – good to get people to the countryside
- Good to celebrate Lancashire produce
- A great idea – good luck with your proposals

Letters of Support to Previous Planning Application – provided below

- Smithybridge and Littleborough Save The Green Belt Group
- Paxtenement Cheese Company Ltd
- Reedys



Bank Top Farm *Better Taste, Less Miles*

Bank Top Farm, Hollingworth Road, Littleborough, Lancashire, OL15 0AU

Email: banktopfarm@btinternet.com Mobile: 07551942594 Telephone: 01706376574

We pride ourselves in only selling meat from animals which have been reared on our own farm

Dear Resident

We have been selling our produce direct from the farm for many years since our sons James started selling eggs and Peter bought his first pig from which he sold sausages at Littleborough Farmers Market. Since then, we have expanded the range of meat we sell direct from the farm to include beef, lamb and turkey and have established the mobile shop we tow to the bottom of the farm lane (Hollingworth Road) every weekend.

We are now progressing with plans to build a **permanent farm shop** at our farm to enable us to open throughout the week and to sell a wider range of fresh meat alongside other produce from local businesses.

We are also thinking of including a **small café** using our farm produced ingredients and other local goods, and a **community meeting room** which can be used by groups and schools in the Hollingworth and Littleborough areas.

We would appreciate a few minutes of your time to answer some short questions and help us to gather thoughts and views from the local community about our plans for diversifying the farm.

You can hand this survey back to us or alternatively you can email your response (scanned copy or written) to banktopfarm@btinternet.com

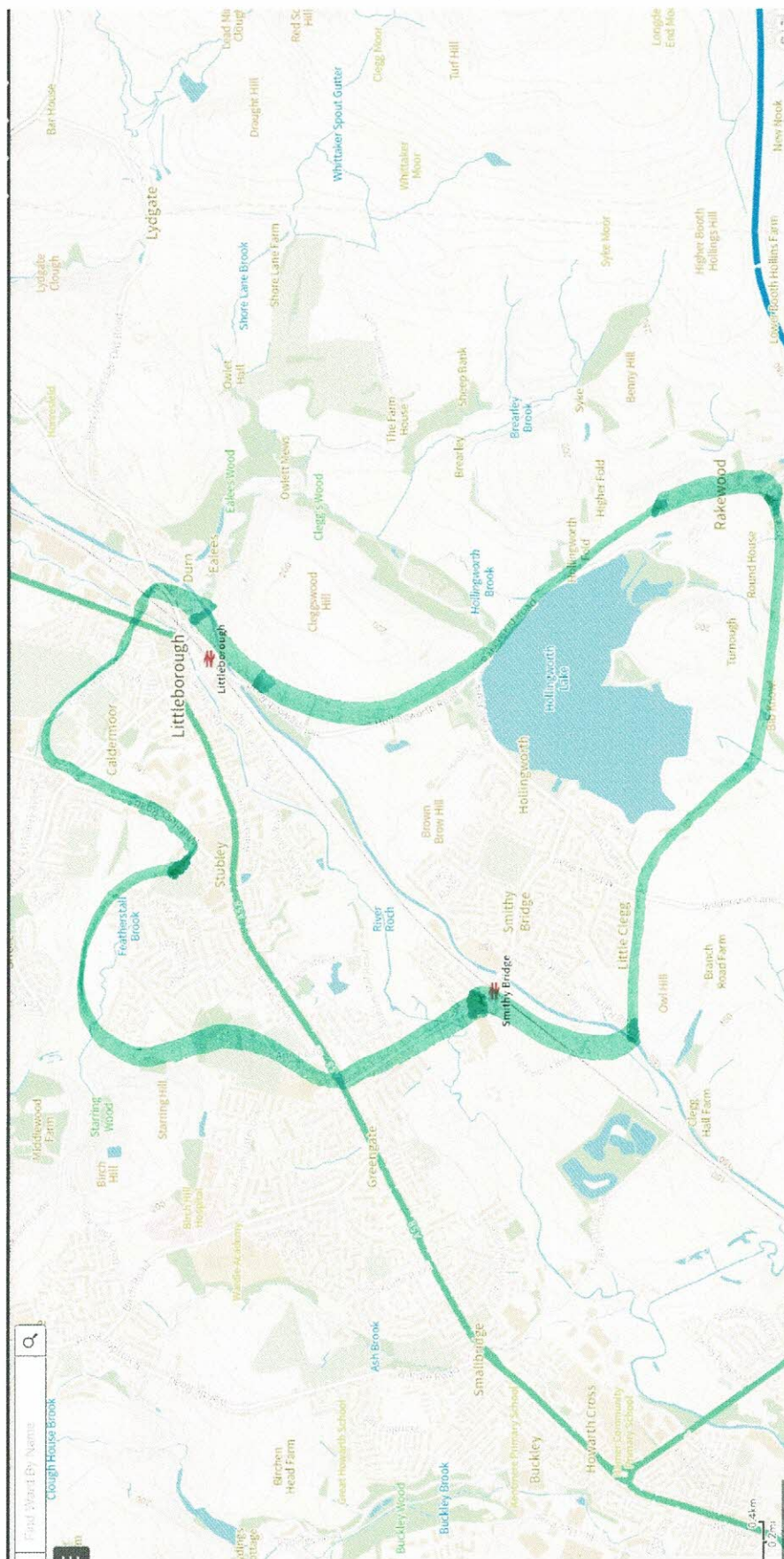
Your Name:

Your Postcode:

1. Have you bought meat from us previously? Yes / No
2. If you've not bought from us previously, would you like to buy meat and other products from us (or other local producers) at a farm shop at Hollingworth Road? Yes / No
3. Would you like the farm shop to be open during the week as well as weekends? Yes / No
4. Would you like to buy fresh meat direct from the farm? Yes / No
5. Would you support a small café on the farm? Yes / No
6. Would you like to be able to buy other local unique products (not available in supermarkets) e.g. artisan jams, pickles and cheeses (as supplied in our Christmas hampers)? Yes / No
7. Is there anything else you would like us to offer? *[Please provide comments]*
8. Would you support a facility to be used by local schools/groups to learn about food, food production, farming and the environment? Yes / No
9. Would you support this facility being used by other groups in the local community for meeting or event purposes? Yes / No
10. Are you involved with a group that might be interested in using the room/site? Yes / No
[Please provide comments]
11. Do you feel the proposed farm shop will enhance the local area? Yes / No
12. Do you think a farm shop with parking off the road would encourage you to visit the shop?
Yes / No

Have you any other comments about the proposal to diversify our farm with a permanent farm shop with café and community meeting room *[Please provide comments]*

Thank you for your comments, from all at Bank Top Farm.



Rachel Carney
Planning Officer
Rochdale Borough Council
Number One Riverside
Rochdale
OL16 1XU

Ref: Application 22/01216/FUL - Erection of farm shop with cafe and community room with access, parking, landscaping and other associated works | Bank Top Farm Hollingworth Road Littleborough Rochdale OL15 0AU

Dear Ms Rachel Carney

I am writing in regard to the above application for and on behalf of Smithy Bridge and Littleborough Save the Green Belt Group.

We fully support this application and believe that it is an important development in the preservation of our local green belt and the rural nature of our Pennine township.

Diversification of the farm will help to future proof the farms viability as a working farm. This farm rears animals for the food market. The animals are reared primarily outdoors in good conditions. The meat produced by the animals is sold directly from the farm to the public and at local markets meaning that the animal does not travel hundreds of miles to large meat processing plants.

The farm is contributing to our food security which the government has highlighted as a critical need, by providing locally produced food, The farm takes care of the land and the grazing of the animals preserves the nature of the countryside and the visual context of the wider farm area. Should the farmers not be allowed to diversify, there is always a danger that if the farmers were unable to continue with their business profitably, the land and farm could become degraded with visual harm or would fall into the hands of developers and housing be built on the land, with the inevitable loss of many acres of green belt land rather than the small amount needed for the proposed shop and small car park.

Furthermore we feel the shop would be a great and much needed amenity for both locals and the many visitors to Hollingworth Lake.

It will provide a much needed local outlet for farm fresh, healthy produce. Currently in Smithy Bridge and Hollingworth Lake we have only 2 small budget supermarkets which carry limited fresh food, the nearest larger Supermarkets being in Littleborough centre and Milnrow Village, both in excess of 2 miles away. Also, since the closure of the New Street Farm shop, people have to travel to Gordon Riggs in Walsden for such a facility which in reality is not a true farm shop as none of the food sold in the retail shop is produced by the garden centre as it is not a farm.

The proposed business will also contain a community room, providing educational resources for both children and adults, and a place for local clubs and society's to meet. Something we lack in Smithy Bridge as the Rowing and Sailing clubs don't rent out their community rooms for these kinds of meetings/ events.

The shop and café would also act as a visitor attraction and may provide a gateway for visitors to walk up to Littleborough centre, a long trek without a stop, which would in turn provide additional trade for the shops and businesses in Littleborough. The site is also accessible by bus to allow sustainable trips to the site.

We believe that the majority of local residents are in favour of the development as evidenced by the response on our Facebook group which attracted many favourable comments, plus we have evidence that following our post many people went onto the planning application on the Rochdale Council website to lodge their support.

The members of the Smithy Bridge and Littleborough Save The Belt Group Committee sincerely hope that you and your colleagues take this information into consideration when making your decision on this application.

Yours Sincerely,

Gill Bassam (Mrs)

For and on behalf of:

Smithy Bridge and Littleborough Save the Green Belt Group

Unit 9, Elder Court
Lions Drive,
Shadsworth Business Park,
Blackburn
BB1 2EQ
Tel: 07970 104864
lisa@reedys.co.uk
18th July 2023

Re: Bank Top Farm Shop Expansion

Both I and my team here at Reedy's Naturally wanted to offer our full support for your exciting plans for the Farm Shop at Bank Top Farm, Hollingworth Road, Littleborough, OL15 0AU.

As well as providing opportunities for ensuring small businesses like ours continue to grow under the current difficult trading conditions I believe it helps to reconnect customers old and new with good quality locally produced food.

Once they've tasted the real thing, in my experience they rarely go back to mass produced and highly processed offerings.

I also feel it is a great way for the community to learn about food provenance and to have a chat to the people who actually rear, grow and make the food they are purchasing. Food shopping becomes a pleasure rather than a necessity!

We need more such places for the people of Rochdale and surrounding areas to visit.

On a more selfish note, this a great opportunity to supply a quality local farm shop in the Rochdale area. I am looking forward to supplying our range to you to complement the other products you sell.

Wishing you every success with your application

Best Regards
Lisa Reedy
Owner
Reedy's Naturally

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JANUARY 19, 2023

Bank Top Farm Shop

Bank Top Farm, Hollingworth Road, Littleborough, OL15 0AU.

Dear Pete and Ana,

Just to let you know, we fully support your application to create the new Farm Shop.

Further to allowing you to sell your produce direct to the public (both local Littleborough people and visitors to Hollingworth Lake), it also gives other local small farm producers such as us, the opportunity for you to sell our products all year round.

The new Farm Shop would be the perfect solution to sell local produce in Littleborough. Due to the location, this should lead to more employment and opportunities for all us local producers.

Good luck with the application.

Warm regards,

Carl Warburton

DIRECTOR, PEXTENEMENT CHEESE COMPANY LTD

Appendix 2 – Planning Policy

The Development Plan

Rochdale Core Strategy (2012)

The CS identifies the site as within the Green Belt and in proximity to the edge of the settlement boundary of Littleborough, which includes an area on the opposite side of Hollingworth Road for expansion of the settlement. Land along the Rochdale canal to the north is also identified as SSSI/ SAC.

A strategic objective of the CS is for a prosperous economy, including developing the rural and visitor economies particularly in the northern Pennine fringe.

Relevant policies of the CS comprise:

- SP1 – to promote the Borough as an attractive location in terms of jobs, housing, shopping, the environment, image, tourism and quality of life
- SP2 - to focus development in the Pennine fringe on inter alia the visitor and rural economy
- E1(L) –to promote complementary facilities and visitor attractions in and around Littleborough to draw upon and provide alternatives to the established recreation and leisure destination of Hollingworth Lake and provide support to the local economy and to promote connections, linkages and improvements including to the Akzo site (opposite the site)
- E2 - to support the creation and retention of successful businesses and increase jobs to enable a prosperous and lower carbon economy. There are a number of criteria to this policy including the aim to support other employment generating uses e.g. retail, leisure and tourism and, in the North of the Borough, aims to:
 - (b) promote and support small scale and other employment development that generates low levels of park hour journeys and commercial traffic
 - (d) focus on promoting development and facilities that support the visitor and local economy
 - (e) support rural economy (including through reuse of agricultural premises in the rural fringe wherever possible for appropriate employment uses)
- E5 – encouraging and supporting proposals that improve the visitor economy including where a need can be demonstrated (proposals only to be resisted if adverse impacts would affect the economy). With reference to growth areas listed, the site is within the South Pennine Moors area and Pennine Fringe visitor and heritage area on the Key Diagram, where development that can enhance the visitor attraction of the Hollingworth Lake area, building upon the attractions and destination area (criteria 6c) and supporting links between the Lake and other countryside attractions and Littleborough (6b) can be supported; the proposal is also in direct proximity to the Akzo site (opposite) where visitor facilities and improved links between the site and Hollingworth Lake/Littleborough are encouraged (thereby acknowledging the general tourism potential of the immediate surroundings)
- E6 – **to support, strengthen and diversify the rural economy** and where possible **increase rural employment**, including where it enhances the landscape; **supports facilities for tourism**, recreation and associated products and services for local communities and visitors in the north of the borough; **support agriculture** and other appropriate activities which help to sustain

economic activity whilst maintaining and improving the appearance and rural character of the borough's countryside. Proposals in the Green Belt will also be supported where in line with national policy and where delivers quality design and biodiversity, **supporting agriculture, the processing and marketing of local produce, provides for tourism and recreation**, and delivers environmental quality and sustainability (*Maybern emphasis*)

- C8 – to support the provision of community facilities
- P2 – to protect and enhance the borough's character and countryside, including requiring new development to integrate successfully with natural features, and for sustainable development including reference to accessibility, climate change/ flood risk, landscape and design
- P3 – for high standards of design
- G1 –encouraging development in accessible locations
- G2 – encouraging energy reduction in design of new development
- G4 – reflecting national Green Belt aims including the demonstration of very special circumstances for development
- G6 – sustaining the green infrastructure including encouraging sustainable tourism and wider access from urban areas, and protecting and enhancing land management
- G7 - biodiversity (or geodiversity) interest and land management
- G8/ G9 - flood risk mitigation and consideration to land conditions
- T2 – locating development where good access to public transport is available or can be provided and effective provision for cyclists, pedestrians and people with impaired mobility
- DM1 – outlining general development management criteria including good design, accessibility, amenity, minimising pollution and ground instability risk, and ensuring appropriate landscaping

Places for Everyone

The plan includes provision for a large housing allocation and Green Belt release opposite to the site (North of Smithy Bridge JPA22).

Policy JP G 10 follows national guidance for Green Belts and also outlines that positive and beneficial use of the Green Belt will be supported where this can be achieved without harm to its openness, permanence or ability to serve its five purposes; matters also considered include enhancement of green infrastructure functions, such as improved public access and habitat restoration and helping to deliver environmental and social benefits to residents.

General policies for sustainable development and quality in design and sustainable access are included in the plan, including JP-P1 and JP C1.

Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied.

It establishes sustainable development having '*three overarching objectives*' which are economic, social and environment objectives (para. 8). It confirms these objectives '*are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways*'. In respect of the economic role, there is aim for a strong, responsive and competitive economy and to support growth and innovation.

The NPPF supports the conditions for businesses to invest, expand and adapt and places significant weight on the need to support economic growth and local business needs and wider opportunities for development (para 81).

It also recognises that there are locational requirements for some sectors, and that sites for local business needs in rural areas may be beyond existing settlements (para 85).

Further, it fully supports the sustainable growth and expansion of business in rural areas including diversification of agricultural and land-based businesses and sustainable rural tourism and leisure development that respect the character of the countryside (para 84).

It is also outlined that the sequential approach should not be applied to applications for small scale rural offices or other small scale rural development (para 89).

New buildings in the Green Belt are recognised to be inappropriate (unless for a range of uses) but can be approved if very special circumstances are demonstrated and the potential harm to the Green Belt including to its openness and purposes, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Other elements of national policy of relevance to the proposal include the aims for good design, low carbon development and enhancements to biodiversity.

Other key matters within the NPPF relevant to the proposals include:

- promoting walking, cycling and use of public transport (para. 104)
- for development to add to the overall quality of the area, '*including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting*' (para. 130)
- to assist with protection and enhancing landscapes and trees and biodiversity including via opportunities for net gain (para. 131 and 180); and
- to accord with aims for climate change and minimising flood risk in terms of locations of development and energy efficiency/ good design (para. 153 and 157).

Supplementary Planning Documents

1.1 Relevant SPD to the proposal comprise:

- Biodiversity and Development (2008)
- Design and Planning Process
- Climate Change and Adaption (2012)

Research - Diversification as a Means of Farm Support

It is clear from recent and current research that farm diversification is an increasing trend and requirement as economic and farm support mechanisms change.

Harper Adams University in combination with the Farm Retail Association have undertaken a large-scale research programme (2021/22) on the issues and benefits of the farm retail sector and highlighted

the growth of the sector in recent years and its contribution to the rural economy via income (£1.4bn) and jobs (c25,000) with over 1,500 farm shops now present in different scales and forms.

It considers the growth of the sector and that farm shops offer a different experience to high street shopping through the quality of their produce and their standard of service, differences that are increasingly appreciated by customers.

Research by the University of Aberystwyth (2022) also considered diversification within the agricultural sector as a method for farm businesses to break even and make profits more consistently as traditional farming strategies, particularly in small-medium enterprise farms (SMEs), which act as the core of most rural landscapes, struggle to achieve net profit gains without the addition of government subsidy schemes such as the basic payment scheme (BPS). It confirms that diversification is regularly highlighted as a method of capturing alternative financial gains and that in 2012 it was noted that 50% of UK farms gained some form of income from non-farming diversification. This is now likely to have raised with the types of diversification also expanding from farmers markets and veg boxes to farm shops and farm experiences.