

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE April 2024

Case No: 23/02284/FUL

Proposal: Change of use from hardstanding storage area to container storage area.

Location: Agricultural Buildings, Depden Lodge Farm, Ermine Street, Godmanchester

Applicant: Godmanchester Self Storage (M B & R A) Jensen

Grid Ref: 526152 267171

Date of Registration: 24th November 2023

Parish: GODMANCHESTER

RECOMMENDATION - REFUSAL

This application is referred to the Development Management Committee (DMC), in accordance with the current Scheme of Delegation as the officer recommendation is contrary to that of the Parish Council.

1. DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

Site and Surroundings

- 1.1 The application site is a small collection of agricultural buildings and hardstanding to the West of the A1198 a single carriageway road from Godmanchester to Papworth Everard. The application site is 0.324 ha.
- 1.2 The site is accessed from the roundabout to the northeast of the site which joins the newly formed A1198 and A14 intersection along a small hard surfaced track.
- 1.3 The site is bounded by open agricultural land, partially screened by small but established trees and hedge line. The wider area is characterised by open farmland with ancillary agricultural buildings.
- 1.4 In terms of constraints the site does not fall within a Conservation Area, there are no Listed Buildings in the immediate vicinity and no protected trees. The site lies within Flood Zone 1 and comprised of Grade 2 agricultural land.

Proposal

- 1.5 This is a retrospective planning application to seek retention of a 'Change of use from hardstanding storage area to container storage area'.
- 1.6 The site currently has 55 blue shipping containers situated on the boundaries of the site to the north, south, and east and under the cover of the canopy of the agricultural building to the centre of the site. Each container is approximately 6 metres in length, 2.4 metres in width and 2.6 metres in height rented for private storage to paying customers. The proposal does not indicate any change in the colour of the containers nor specify the number of containers the site would be used for. The containers are sited on a mixture of concrete hardstanding that skirts the agricultural building and hardcore hardstanding to the boundaries of the site.
- 1.7 The proposed change of use application is accompanied by detailed plans that demonstrate the layout of containers on site. The plans show that to the south of the site 20 containers create a 48 metre long by 2.6-metre-high block, to the east 15 containers create a 36 metre long by 2.6 metres high block and to the north 10 Containers create a 24 metre long by 2.6 metre block. The remaining 10 containers are spread 6 beneath the canopy of the former agricultural building and 4 to the west of the site.
- 1.8 The current permitted land use is agricultural, and the proposal seeks to change that use to class B8 Storage.
- 1.9 The proposal seeks to maintain the current access from the roundabout to the northeast of the site which joins the newly formed A1198 and A14 intersection.
- 1.10 The site history includes a similar proposal submitted in November 2022 was refused by members at the May 2023 Development Management Committee for the following reasons;
 1. The proposed development site lies in the open countryside which would represent an encroachment of built development into the countryside, outside of the built-up area of any settlement. The proposal does not accord with any of the limited or specific opportunities for development in the countryside as set out within the policies of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan, which restrict development in the countryside to protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Furthermore, the proposed development would result in the loss of Grade 2 Agricultural Land for which exceptional circumstances have not been demonstrated. The proposal would therefore be contrary to the requirements of Policies LP2 and LP10 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan (2019). The proposed development is contrary also to Policy GMC of the Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan 2017 - 2036, due to its location and outside of the detailed settlement boundary. The

proposal does not seek to preserve and protect the most versatile agricultural land.

2. The proposed development by virtue of its design, scale and massing would appear as a prominent and alien feature in the countryside, failing to integrate with the surrounding landscape and failing to respect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The proposal would therefore be contrary to Policies LP10, LP11, LP12 and LP19 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan (2019).

3. The application contains insufficient submitted information to demonstrate that the proposal would not result in harm to the residential amenity of neighbouring buildings. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy LP14 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan (2019).

4. The application contains insufficient submitted information to enable the impact of the proposed development on the local highway network to be assessed. The proposal therefore fails to comply with the requirements of Policy LP17 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan (2019) and Section 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).

5. The application contains insufficient submitted information to demonstrate that the proposal would not result in harm to trees, hedgerows and hedges and would not result in harm to protected species or wildlife. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy LP30 and LP31 of the Huntingdonshire's Local Plan (2019), The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), the Habitats and Protected Species Regulations (2017) and the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).

1.11 This application has been accompanied by the following:

- Planning Statement
- Design and Access Statement
- Swept Path Analysis
- Responses to Landscape and Highways comments
- Lighting Report

1.12 Officers have scrutinised the plans and have familiarised themselves with the site and surrounding area.

2. NATIONAL GUIDANCE

2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023) (NPPF 2023) sets out the three objectives - economic, social, and environmental - of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF 2023 at paragraph 10 provides as follows: 'So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the

Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11).'

- 2.2 The NPPF 2023 sets out the Government's planning policies for (amongst other things):
- delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
 - building a strong, competitive economy;
 - achieving well-designed, beautiful and safe places;
 - conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.
- 2.3 Planning Practice Guidance and the National Design Guide 2021 are also relevant and are material considerations.

For full details visit the government website [National Guidance](#)

3. PLANNING POLICIES

- 3.1 Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (Adopted 15th May 2019)
- LP 1 Amount of Development
 - LP 2 Strategy for Development
 - LP 4 Contribution to Infrastructure Delivery
 - LP 5 Flood Risk
 - LP 6 Wastewater Management
 - LP10 The Countryside
 - LP 11 Design Context
 - LP 12 Design Implementation
 - LP 14 Residential Amenity
 - LP 15 Surface Water
 - LP 16 Sustainable Travel
 - LP 17 Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
 - LP 19 Rural Economy
 - LP 30 Biodiversity and Geodiversity
 - LP 31 Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows
 - LP 33 Rural Buildings
 - LP 37 Ground Contamination and Groundwater Pollution
- 3.2 Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan 2017 – 2036
Policy GMC1 'The importance of the countryside setting'
- 3.3 Supplementary Planning Documents/ Guidance
- Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD (2017)
 - Developer Contributions SPD (2011)
 - Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment (2007)
 - Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD 2017
 - Huntingdonshire Tree Guidance Note 3
 - Annual Monitoring Review regarding housing land supply.

Local For full details visit the government website Local policies

4. PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 19/00120/ENOTH – Enforcement Enquiry - Site operating as self-storage and storage of caravans that are being lived in without applying for permission.
- 4.2 22/00361/FUL - Change of use from hardstanding storage area to container storage area - REFUSED at DMC 24.05.2023

This application was refused due to

- *the principle of development within the countryside;*
- *the design, scale and massing in the countryside;*
- *insufficient submitted information to enable the impact of the proposed development on the local highway network to be assessed;*
- *insufficient submitted information to demonstrate that the proposal would not result in harm to the residential amenity of neighbouring buildings; and*
- *insufficient submitted information to demonstrate that the proposal would not result in harm to trees, hedgerows and hedges and would not result in harm to protected species or wildlife.*

5. CONSULTATIONS

- 5.1 Godmanchester Parish Council recommend approval with the following comment - This recommendation is based on the information available to the Planning Portfolio at the time of the meeting.
- 5.2 On initial consultation CCC Highways deferred the application for further information with the following comments.
- No information has been provided regarding the number of vehicle movements associated with the 55 containers and the number of movements when it was open storage.
 - It has not been stated whether the access is still used for agricultural vehicles.
 - No information has been provided for tracking showing the simultaneous use of two of the largest vehicles likely to use the site.

The applicant has subsequently provided information to address the initial comments received from CCC Highways who now support the proposal in terms of highway safety subject to conditions to mitigate the effect of the proposed development upon the public highway.

- 5.4 Environmental Health were consulted and raised no objections.

5.5 HDC Arboricultural Officer was consulted and raises objections to the proposal as is of the opinion the proposal would cause harm to the trees given the close proximity.

5.6 Landscape Officers were consulted and raised the following concerns and requirements of the application.

- Lack of clarity on the visual effects of the proposed development as unclear to what extent the containers are visible below and through the canopies of the trees and the blue colour of the containers are incongruous with their surroundings.

RECOMMENDATION: A visual survey of the site is undertaken by a suitably qualified landscape consultant, to establish any mitigation that may help in better integrating the proposed development with the rural landscape.

- Concern that the containers have been stored within the root protection areas of existing trees, and that this may have an impact on the health of the trees over time.

RECOMMENDATION: A tree survey and arboricultural impact assessment should be submitted to help inform decision-making on this matter. We recommend that the council's tree officer is consulted on this matter, but in landscape terms we would not be supportive of proposals that could lead to the loss of existing trees due to impacts on landscape character.

- Mitigation proposals are likely to include moving the containers outside of the root protection areas, and additional native hedgerow planting to the outer perimeter of the site.

- The submitted 'Change of Use – Lighting' document by Green Environmental Consultants suggests that the site and its surrounds are not likely to be highly attractive to bats, and as such the lighting scheme is not likely to disturb roosting, foraging or commuting bats. Environmental records support this assessment, and as such we do not have any concerns regarding the lighting as installed, and latterly adjusted by the assessing ecologist.

- In terms of biodiversity enhancement/net gain, environmental records suggest white letter hairstreak butterflies are present in the area.

RECOMMENDATION: To help support this rare species, we recommend new mixed native hedge planting should include min 20% Elm. The hedges should be maintained at a height of under 3m to prevent it from becoming susceptible to Dutch Elm Disease.

6. REPRESENTATIONS

- 6.1 One comment has been received in objection of the application as follows;
- Highway safety.

7. ASSESSMENT

7.1 When determining planning applications, it is necessary to establish what weight should be given to each plan's policies in order to come to a decision. The following legislation, government policy and guidance outline how this should be done.

7.2 As set out within the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (Section 38(6)) and the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (Section 70(2)) in dealing with planning applications the Local Planning Authority shall have regard to have provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations. This is reiterated within paragraph 47 of the NPPF (2023). The development plan is defined in Section 38(3)(b) of the 2004 Act as "the development plan documents (taken as a whole) that have been adopted or approved in that area".

7.3 In Huntingdonshire the Development Plan consists of:

- Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (2019)
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2021)
- Relevant Neighbourhood Plans - Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan (2017)

7.4 The statutory term 'material considerations' has been broadly construed to include any consideration relevant in the circumstances which bears on the use or development of the land: *Cala Homes (South) Ltd v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government & Anor* [2011] EWHC 97 (Admin); [2011] 1 P. & C.R. 22, per Lindblom J. Whilst accepting that the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the Development Plan, paragraph 2 confirms that it is a material consideration and significant weight is given to this in determining applications.

7.5 The main matters for consideration are:

- The Principle of Development
- Design, Visual Amenity, and the impact upon the Character of the Area
- Impact on Heritage Assets
- Impact upon Residential Amenity
- Highways Safety, Parking Provision and Access
- Biodiversity
- Trees
- Flood Risk
- Accessible and Adaptable Homes

- Water Efficiency
- Other issues

The Principle of Development

- 7.8 Policy LP1 and LP2 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan deals with sustainability and the strategy for growth in the district and states that sustainable levels, locations and forms of development will be sought in accordance with the stated objectives and policies of the plan. (i.e. - to concentrate development in locations which provide, or have the potential to provide, the greatest access to services and facilities and encourage limited development for rural communities to support social and economic sustainability). Policy LP2 goes further and states that the locations for growth will be within the four spatial planning areas which are designated reflecting their status as the district's traditional market towns and most sustainable centres. Huntingdon including Brampton and Godmanchester and the strategic expansion location of Alconbury Weald are included as one of the four spatial planning areas where the majority of employment and retail growth will be focused.
- 7.9 In determining the relevant policies in which to consider the application the location of the site has been assessed within the guidance laid out within Huntingdonshires Local Plan to 2036.
- 7.10 The Local Plan (Page 53) includes the following definition with regards to the built-up area: *“A built-up area is considered to be a distinct group of buildings that includes 30 or more homes. Land which relates more to the group of buildings rather than to the surrounding countryside is also considered to form part of the built-up area”*.
- 7.11 Pages 53-55 of the Local Plan set out guidance on frequently arising situations to establish if sites fall within a built-up area. In assessing this application, it is considered that the following interpretation is relevant *“The built-up area will exclude isolated properties or areas of ribbon and fragmented development which are physically and visually detached from the main built form”*.
- 7.12 The site is located approximately 1.5 miles to the south of Godmanchester and 1.6 miles West of Hilton and is clearly both physically and visually detached from the main built form of both Godmanchester and Hilton. It is therefore considered that the application site primarily relates to the open countryside and relevant to the application of Policy LP10 (The Countryside) of Huntingdonshire’s Local Plan as set out further below.
- 7.13 Policy LP10 relates to the countryside and seeks to support a thriving economy while protecting the character of existing settlements and recognising the intrinsic character of the surrounding countryside. It goes on to state that development in

the countryside will be restricted to the limited and specific opportunities as provided for in other policies of this plan.

All development in the countryside must:

- a. seek to use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value:
 - i. avoiding the irreversible loss of best and most versatile land (grade 1 to 3a) where possible; and
 - ii. avoiding grade 1 agricultural land unless there are exceptional circumstances where the benefits of the proposal significantly outweigh the loss of land;
- b. recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; and
- c. not give rise to noise, odour, obtrusive light or other impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.

7.14 Policy GMC1 of the Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan (2017) states that:

Development in the Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan Area shall be focused within or adjoining the settlement boundary. Development outside the settlement boundary is classified as being in the 'open countryside'. Development in the 'open countryside' will only be acceptable where it is a use which is appropriate to the open countryside and should seek to preserve and protect our best and most versatile agricultural land and land of local environmental value including, but not limited to, The Godmanchester Nature Reserve at Cow Lane 12, The East Side and West Side Commons in Godmanchester and the Ouse Valley.

7.15 Policy LP 10 states that development will be restricted to the limited and specific opportunities as provided for within the other policies within the local plan. LP 19 supports businesses with a genuine need to be located in the countryside, to assist farms to maintain their viability and to set out the Council's approach to proposals for other businesses in the countryside and LP33 which supports the conversion of rural buildings. Therefore policies LP19 and LP33 are considered relevant policies for consideration of providing those limited and specific opportunities for this application to be assessed.

7.16 It is considered that, although the proposal involves placing shipping containers on the ground and no foundation works are required, the scheme is not a temporary one. Therefore, it is considered that the scheme would be contrary to Policy LP10 part a. and Policy GMC1 of the Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan (2017) as it results in the irreversible loss of Grade 2 Agricultural

land. LP 10 also requires that all development must recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. This criterion would remain a point of issue which is discussed in the following sections of this report.

- 7.17 Policy LP19 states that a proposal for business uses (Class B) will only be supported where it fulfils the requirements of one of the following categories:
- a. It is within a defined established employment area;
 - b. It immediately joins and is capable of being integrated within an Established Employment Area;
 - c. It involves the reuse of land in use or last used for business uses; or
 - d. It involves the reuse or replacement of existing buildings as set out in Policy LP33 'Rural Buildings'.
- 7.18 Introductory paragraph 6.19 of Policy LP19 explains that the purpose of the policy is to promote a vibrant rural economy to support businesses with a genuine need to be located in the countryside, to assist farms to maintain their viability and to set out the Council's approach to proposals for other businesses in the countryside.
- 7.19 In terms of meeting the criteria laid out in LP19, the application site is not located within a defined established employment area as defined within LP18 (Established Employment Areas) of the local plan; does not immediately join or is capable of being integrated within an Established Employment Area; does not involve the reuse of land in use or last used for business uses; and does propose to reuse or replace an existing building as set out in Policy LP33 'Rural Buildings' as discussed below.
- 7.20 LP33 states a proposal for the conversion of a building in the countryside that would not be dealt with through 'Prior Approval/ Notification' will be supported where it can be demonstrated that:
- a. the building is:
 - i. redundant or disused;
 - ii. of permanent and substantial construction;
 - iii. not in such a state of dereliction or disrepair that significant reconstruction would be required; and
 - iv. structurally capable of being converted for the proposed use; and
 - b. the proposal:
 - i. would lead to an enhancement of the immediate setting; and

ii. any extension or alteration would not adversely affect the form, scale, massing or proportion of the building.

A proposal for the replacement of a building in the countryside will be supported where criteria a, i to iii above are fulfilled and the proposal would lead to a clear and substantial enhancement of the immediate setting.

7.21 The proposal seeks for a change of use to the exterior of the building for the storage of containers and does not seek to convert the central barn itself. Therefore, it is considered not to therefore would not comply with the criteria set out in LP33.

7.22 Policy LP19 goes on to state that a proposal for farm diversification will be supported where it has demonstrated that it is complementary and subsidiary to the ongoing agricultural operations of the farm business and it meets criteria e-h below.

e. opportunities to reuse existing buildings have been fully explored; and replacement or new build are only proposed where it can be demonstrated that no suitable reuse opportunities are available;

f. any opportunities to make more efficient use of land within the existing site boundary are not suitable for the proposed use;

g. it avoids the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grade 1 to 3a) particularly Grade 1 where possible and should use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value; and

h. the scale, character and siting of the proposal will not have a detrimental impact on its immediate surroundings and the wider landscape.

7.23 The applicant has provided no information to support the farm diversification criteria e - g of policy LP19 and in any event, the site would remain contrary to criteria h of the policy which requires that development scale, character and siting will not have a detrimental impact on its immediate surroundings and the wider landscape, which is discussed in the following sections of this report.

7.24 It is noted that the application refers to a container storage unit that is sited 0.6 miles to the north of the site at Bleakley Farm of a similar nature. Officers have reviewed this site and planning history and note that application 18/00385/FUL for a Partial Retrospective - Change of use from builders' storage to Self-Storage container storage facility including siting of 146 containers (97 retrospective) and storage of 3 caravans was issued in May 2019. This application was presented by LPA officers to members of the DMC meeting with a recommendation of approval, as a

departure from the local plan. The DMC members voted in favour of the proposal and permission was given.

- 7.25 As such the application is a material consideration of this application and has been assessed as below.
- 7.26 Application 18/00385/FUL was submitted and assessed as an extension of an existing business of use class B. The application in front of members and currently under determination would not fall within the same category as detailed in the sections above. Application 18/00385/FUL is therefore not directly comparable to the application in question and given little weight as a material consideration.
- 7.27 For the reasons outlined above, refusal reason 1 of 22/00361/FUL has not been addressed.
- 7.28 In conclusion, the proposal lies with the countryside and fails to seek to use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value to avoid the irreversible loss of best and most versatile land and fails to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The proposal is unable to be considered under the limited and specific opportunities provided for by other policies within the local plan as set out in policy LP10 of the local plan, as the proposed dwelling fails to meet the criterion set out in policies LP19 and LP 33. There is not considered to be a genuine need for this storage use to be located in the countryside and as the site does not form part of an existing farm, it is considered the proposal would not constitute farm diversification. Neither is the proposal considered to be an expansion of an existing business, as the storage use proposed is unrelated to the agricultural use of the site. As such, the principle of development fails to accord with policies LP2, LP10, LP19 and LP33 of Huntingdonshires Local Plan to 2036, is contrary to Section 12 of NPPF (December 2023) and Policy GMC1 of the Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan. The principle of development is therefore considered to be unacceptable.

Impact upon the Character of the Area

- 7.29 This application seeks retrospective planning permission for the change of use of hardstanding storage area to container storage area.
- 7.30 As previously detailed the site sits within the countryside forming part of a larger agricultural unit.
- 7.31 Policy LP11 of the Local Plan states that a proposal will be supported where it is demonstrated that it responds positively to its context. Policy LP12 states that new development will be expected to be well designed and that a proposal will be supported where it can be demonstrated that it contributes positively to the

area's character and identity and successfully integrates with adjoining buildings and landscape. The above policies are reinforced by Paragraphs 128 (d) and (e) and Paragraph 135 (b) and (c) of the NPPF that seek to maintain an area's prevailing character and ensure development is sympathetic to local character.

- 7.32 The National Design Guide (2020) sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice. It covers the following: context, identity, built form, movement, nature, public spaces, uses, homes and buildings, resources and lifespan.
- 7.33 The HDS Design Guide (2017) is relevant to the application proposals, in particular chapter 4 and sections 3.7 and 3.8. The guide states that the size, shape, and orientation (the form) of a building can have a significant impact upon its surroundings. The scale, massing and height of proposed development should be considered in relation to that of adjoining buildings, the topography, pattern of heights in the area and views, vistas, and landmarks.
- 7.34 Notwithstanding the above, Policy LP10 of the Local Plan states that all development in the countryside must recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and not give rise to impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.
- 7.35 Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD (2007) has nine identified landscape character areas of which this site sits within the area defined as Southeast, Claylands. The key characteristics of the area are described within the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD as including "Subtle variations in topography, including valley sides, gently undulating landform and plateaux, sparsely settled with few villages and tall hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees are a distinctive feature in the central part of the area. Woodland cover increases towards the south". The site and area surrounding the site reflect these characteristics.
- 7.36 The containers are industrial in appearance of block form and although sat close within the surrounds of a large agricultural building, appear alien features in what is otherwise a rural location within a fairly flat open landscape. This is further exasperated by the colour palette chosen (blue) which is visible through current hedging and tree line which is less effective in screening the containers in the winter months.
- 7.37 Landscape Officers have commented in consultation that the application lacks clarity on the visual effects of the proposed development and it is unclear to what extent the containers are visible below and through the canopies of the trees and the blue

colour of the containers are incongruous with their surroundings. As such the Landscape officer recommended that a visual survey of the site is undertaken by a suitably qualified landscape consultant, to establish any mitigation that may help in better integrating the proposed development with the rural landscape.

- 7.38 The applicant has responded to comments made by the Landscape Officer detailing that it is 'impossible to see the containers from any distance away, as they are surrounded by a deep border of mature woodland' and 'no containers have been placed within the tree line though some are under the canopy'. The applicant has declined to submit a visual survey due to the unfair expense of doing so where a further container storage unit with blue painted containers sits less than a mile from the site.
- 7.39 Therefore refusal reason 2 of 22/00361/FUL has not been addressed.
- 7.40 As such, it is considered that the proposed development fails to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, fails to respond positively to its context, fails to contribute positively to the area's character and identity, and fails to successfully integrate with the adjoining open landscape and is therefore contrary to Chapter 12 of the NPPF (2023) and Policies LP10, LP11 and LP12 of the Local Plan.

Impact on Residential Amenity

- 7.41 Policy LP14 of the Local Plan states a proposal will be supported where a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of the proposed development and maintained for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings.
- 7.42 A site visit was carried out by the case officer, and it was noted that a dwelling house to the East of the main farm buildings and container storage area. This dwelling uses the same access as that of the proposal and is approximately 115 meters from the closest container. Officers consider that the increased volume of traffic using the access road and visits to the location would potentially cause harm to the current and future occupiers of this dwelling by noise and light from the security lighting present.
- 7.43 The application includes a lighting report produced by 'Green Environmental Consultants' which details that the lights are of PIR design, compliant with the tolerances prescribed in the Institute of Lighting Professionals and turn off after 60 seconds of illumination and angled to within the area of the stored containers only. Officers have noted the above and consider that the details submitted are sufficient to maintain a satisfactory level of residential amenity for the adjacent dwelling.
- 7.44 Notwithstanding the above, Officers consider that the type, illuminance level and constraints of the area lit should be secured

by condition to protect the residential amenity of the adjacent dwelling.

- 7.45 Officers have not been provided with the hours of operation for the site and it is considered that frequent trips to the site by vehicles during unreasonable hours would cause harm, by noise, to the residential amenity of occupiers of the adjacent dwelling. Officers consider that the imposition of a condition detailing hours of operation would be relevant to the planning and the development if permitted and necessary to secure a satisfactory level of residential amenity.
- 7.46 As such, subject to condition, it is considered that the proposed development would maintain a high standard of amenity for all occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings and therefore accords with Policy LP14 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan in this regard.

Access and Transport

- 7.47 Policy LP17 of the Local Plan states that a proposal will be supported where it incorporates appropriate space for vehicle movements, facilitates accessibility for service and emergency vehicles and incorporates adequate parking for vehicles and cycles. It requires a clear justification for the space for vehicle movements and the level of vehicle and cycle parking proposed to be provided.
- 7.48 Officers acknowledge the representations received in relation to the affect on highway safety from third parties.
- 7.49 The applicant includes a swept path analysis and a response to the Highways officer from the applicant relating to the initial consultation process. The applicant details that additional traffic to the site would be approximately 5 vehicles per week and that the entrance is utilised by both paying customers of the storage facility and agricultural vehicles.
- 7.50 CCC Highways have reviewed the submitted details and have comments that

“Following a careful review of the documents provided to the Highway Authority as part of the above planning application I have noted that tracking and additional information regarding the type and number of vehicles using the access has been provided.

The vehicle numbers are acceptable however the tracking shows that the vehicles will be using the 'hardcore' area on the northwestern side of the access. It appears that passing vehicles are already doing this as the concrete track is only 4.5m wide and the kerb and verge have been over-run. This could result in loose

material being deposited onto the carriageway which could lead to a loss of control by two wheeled vehicles.

To prevent this the access should be hard surfaced for a minimum width of 6m for a length of 10m from the carriageway edge. The section of the access within the public highway should be constructed to a specification agreed with the local highway authority. Our Asset Information Searches team will be able to provide a record of the highway boundary Highway searches Cambridgeshire County Council”

CCC Highways have recommended a number of conditions to mitigate the effect of the proposal on the highway should the application be given permission.

- 7.51 Whilst the applicant owns adjoining land, and the site consists of a large area of hardstanding, there is no indication of parking provision for vehicles making use of the proposed storage containers.
- 7.52 Although the use is not considered to generate significant traffic volumes simultaneously, the lack of clarity and certainty regarding space available for parking means that the Local Planning Authority is unable to be satisfied that the proposals would not lead to a detrimental impact upon the neighbouring properties. However, officers consider that the provision of parking could be secured by condition should the application be given permission.
- 7.53 Given the above and subject to the appropriate conditions, it is considered that the proposal demonstrates it would provide safe and suitable access to the highway and able to protect the safe function of the highway and meet the needs of existing and future occupiers. Therefore, the proposed development is considered to be acceptable with regard to Parking and Vehicle Movement and accords with Policy LP17 Huntingdonshire’s Local Plan and Section 9 of the NPPF (December 2023).

Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows

- 7.54 Policy LP31 of the Local Plan states a proposal will be required to demonstrate that the potential for adverse impacts on trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows has been investigated.

“Where investigations show that such adverse impacts are possible a statement will be required that: a. assesses all trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows that would be affected by the proposal, describing and assessing their value; b. sets out how the details of the proposal have been decided upon in terms of their impact on the value of trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows and how adverse impacts will be avoided as far as possible, or if unavoidable how they will be minimised as far as possible.”

“A proposal will only be supported where it seeks to conserve and enhance any existing tree, woodland, hedge or hedgerow of value that would be affected by the proposed development. In such cases the proposal will be expected to make reference to and follow the guidance contained in the Council's A Tree Strategy for Huntingdonshire (2015) or successor documents.

Loss, threat or damage to any tree, woodland, hedge or hedgerow of visual, heritage or nature conservation value will only be acceptable where:

- c. it is addressed firstly by seeking to avoid the impact, then to minimise the impact and finally where appropriate to include mitigation measures; or
- d. there are sound arboricultural reasons to support the proposal.

Where impacts remain the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location must clearly outweigh the loss, threat or damage. Where loss, threat or damage cannot be fully addressed through minimisation and/ or mitigation measures the proposal may be supported if alternative measures such as reinstatement of features, additional landscaping, habitat creation or tree planting will compensate for the harm and can be implemented and established before development starts.”

- 7.55 Officers have noted that there are established trees and hedgerows that bound the site to the North, South and East on which the root systems potentially have the hardcore hardstanding laid with containers atop. Whilst it is acknowledged that the central hardcore has been laid some time, it does appear that some peripheral hardcore on which containers are sited is new to the East and West of the site.
- 7.56 The application is accompanied by a letter from David Brown Landscape Design detailing the effect of the hardcore on the surrounding trees. In summary, Mr Brown states that the hardcore has been in place for some time and that the trees and hedges are in good health and condition. Concluding that the containers are using the same hardstanding and that there is no risk of harm to the root systems, and crowns of the retained trees and hedgerows. Mr Brown states the containers provide protection from damage to the trees in the future.
- 7.57 HDC Arboricultural Officer comments that “If the hardcore has been laid over the existing ground surface the risk is compaction of the soil, physical root damage through crushing and a reduction in oxygen available to the tree roots. This can lead to a long term decline of the tree.

If there has been soil strip, there is a high probability of significant rooting mass being lost. This removed the trees ability to absorb water, nutrients and oxygen. If larger structural roots have been severed there is the risk of trees collapsing in strong winds.

Both scenarios will impact on the trees and lead to a decline in vitality, which will be displayed as sparse canopies, dieback of the branch tips and prolific deadwood. These symptoms are likely to take several years to show.

The applicant has not provided a Tree Survey, Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Tree Protection Plan in order to fully apprise the impacts. I am of the opinion the proposal would cause harm to the trees given the close proximity, which is against Policy 31 – Trees & Woodland, and should therefore be refused”.

- 7.58 Therefore refusal reason 5 of 22/00361/FUL has not been addressed.
- 7.59 In conclusion, the containers and hardcore have been laid within the root protection zones and within the canopy of the boundary trees of the site. The applicant has declined to submit a Tree Survey, Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Tree Protection Plan in order to allow officers to assess the long terms impacts on the trees on site. Therefore, it is considered that the proposed development fails to seek to conserve and enhance any existing tree, woodland, hedge or hedgerow of value that would be affected by the proposed development and is therefore contrary to Policy LP31 of Huntingdonshire’s Local Plan in this regard.

Ecology and Biodiversity

- 7.60 Policy LP30 of the Local Plan requires proposals to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity have been investigated and ensure no net loss in biodiversity and provide a net gain where possible, through the planned retention, enhancement and creation of habitats and wildlife features, appropriate to the scale, type, and location of development. Paragraph 8.12 of the Local Plan points out that in order to ensure the quality of the assessment it should be completed by an appropriately qualified specialist.
- 7.61 The application site is situated in the countryside and surrounded by open fields however the containers are sat within an extended area of hardstanding of which any biodiversity present at the time of the laying of additional hardcore and placing of containers will now be lost. Therefore, the opportunity to preserve any biodiversity connected to the land beneath the hardcore has passed.
- 7.62 In terms of biodiversity in the wider area, environmental records suggest white letter hairstreak butterflies are present.
- 7.63 Landscape Officers have been consulted with regard to the application and make a recommendation to help support the rare butterfly species, a new mixed native hedge should be planted to

include a minimum of 20% Elm and thereafter maintained at a height of under 3m to prevent it from becoming susceptible to Dutch Elm Disease.

- 7.64 The applicant has responded to Landscape Officer comments and agrees to plant the hedgerow in line with the officer's recommendation. Details of which can be secured by condition should the application be given permission.
- 7.65 Officers note that the application includes a lighting report produced by 'Green Environmental Consultants' which details that the lights are of PIR design, compliant with the tolerances prescribed in the Institute of Lighting Professionals and turn off after 60 seconds of illumination. In addition, the report states that the lights are angled such that there is no light emitted into the trees and hedgerows to the rear of the containers. The report confirms that the site is not a highly valued route for commuting bats and that winter months when the lights will mostly be in use, would be a time of hibernation for such creatures.
- 7.66 In conclusion, the retrospective nature of the application means that any potential biodiversity loss or preservation cannot be assessed. The application is supported by a report that details the site does not fall within bat roosting route and supports the lighting angle and luminance to prevent impact on any potential biodiversity. The landscape officer has identified the presence of a rare species of butterfly and has recommended the planting of hedges to assist in the retention of the species in the area. The above can be secured by condition. Therefore, subject to conditions, the application is considered unlikely to cause significant impact on the remaining biodiversity and would not result in harm to protected species or wildlife. On balance, subject to the above conditions, the proposal would meet the aims of Policy LP30 of the Huntingdonshire's Local Plan, The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), the Habitats and Protected Species Regulations (2017) and the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023).

Flood Risk

- 7.67 Policy LP5 of the Local Plan to 2036 and The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021) paragraphs 167 and 168, states proposal will only be supported where all forms of flood risk have been addressed.
- 7.68 The site lies within Flood Zone 1 which means that it has a low probability of fluvial flooding. The proposal involves the change of use of an agricultural building and land to the commercial siting of storage containers - which is classified as 'Less Vulnerable' development. This type of development is considered to be acceptable in Flood Zone 1 and accordingly Exception or Sequential Tests are not required.

- 7.69 As such, it is considered that the proposed development accords with Policy LP5 of the Local Plan to 2036 and The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021) paragraphs 167 and 168.

Conclusion and Planning Balance

- 7.70 The application is retrospective as 55 containers are already on site and the use as storage is taking place. The proposal seeks to retain the containers on site and hardstanding within a former agricultural site for the use by paying customers for storage.

- 7.71 The previous application under planning reference was refused for the following reasons which has not been fully overcome.

1. The proposed development site lies in the open countryside which would represent an encroachment of built development into the countryside, outside of the built-up area of any settlement. The proposal does not accord with any of the limited or specific opportunities for development in the countryside as set out within the policies of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan, which restrict development in the countryside to protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Furthermore, the proposed development would result in the loss of Grade 2 Agricultural Land for which exceptional circumstances have not been demonstrated. The proposal would therefore be contrary to the requirements of Policies LP2 and LP10 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan (2019). The proposed development is contrary also to Policy GMC of the Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan 2017 - 2036, due to its location and outside of the detailed settlement boundary. The proposal does not seek to preserve and protect the most versatile agricultural land.

2. The proposed development by virtue of its design, scale and massing would appear as a prominent and alien feature in the countryside, failing to integrate with the surrounding landscape and failing to respect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The proposal would therefore be contrary to Policies LP10, LP11, LP12 and LP19 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan (2019).

3. The application contains insufficient submitted information to demonstrate that the proposal would not result in harm to the residential amenity of neighbouring buildings. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy LP14 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan (2019).

4. The application contains insufficient submitted information to enable the impact of the proposed development on the local highway network to be assessed. The proposal therefore fails to comply with the requirements of Policy LP17 of the

Huntingdonshire Local Plan (2019) and Section 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).

5. The application contains insufficient submitted information to demonstrate that the proposal would not result in harm to trees, hedgerows and hedges and would not result in harm to protected species or wildlife. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy LP30 and LP31 of the Huntingdonshire's Local Plan (2019), The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), the Habitats and Protected Species Regulations (2017) and the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).

7.71 When taken as a whole, it is considered that the proposed development would result in an unacceptable form of development in the countryside that:

- would result in an unacceptable encroachment of development into the countryside;
- would result in the unjustified loss of an existing agricultural building and land;
- would not recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside given the scale and siting of various storage containers and ;
- fails to demonstrate that the proposal would not result in harm to trees, hedgerows and hedges.

7.72 There are very limited economic benefits of the proposal given the nature of the proposed business. The identified harm therefore outweighs any such benefits.

7.73 Having regard to all relevant material considerations, it is concluded that the proposal would not accord with local and national planning policy. Therefore, it is recommended that planning permission be refused.

8. RECOMMENDATION – REFUSAL for the following reasons:

8.1 The proposed development site lies in the open countryside which would represent an encroachment of built development into the countryside, outside of the built-up area of any settlement. The proposal does not accord with any of the limited or specific opportunities for development in the countryside as set out within the policies of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036, which restrict development in the countryside to protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Furthermore, the proposed development would result in the loss of Grade 2 Agricultural Land for which exceptional circumstances have not been demonstrated. The proposal would therefore be contrary to the requirements of Policies LP2 and LP10 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

- 8.2 The proposed development is contrary to the Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan 2017 to 2036, Policy GMC1: The importance of the countryside due to its location and outside of the detailed settlement boundary. The proposal does not seek to preserve and protect the most versatile agricultural land.
- 8.3 The proposed development by virtue of its design, scale and massing would appear as a prominent and alien feature in the countryside, failing to integrate with the surrounding landscape and failing to respect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The proposal would therefore be contrary to Policies LP10, LP11, LP12 and LP19 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan.
- 8.4 The proposed development, by virtue of the placement of containers on the root protection zones of the surrounding trees and insufficient information submitted for officers to assess the likely impact on the longevity of the trees, fails to accord with policy LP31 of Huntingdonshires Local Plan to 2036.

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CONTACT OFFICER: Andrea Dollard

Parish Comments

Planning Application 23/02284/FUL

Location Agricultural Buildings Depden Lodge Farm Ermine Street

Work requested Change of use from hardstanding storage area to container storage area

Response Date 20 December 2023

Recommendation: Recommend

This recommendation is based on the information available to the Planning Portfolio at the time of the meeting

Development Management Committee



Scale = 1:2,500

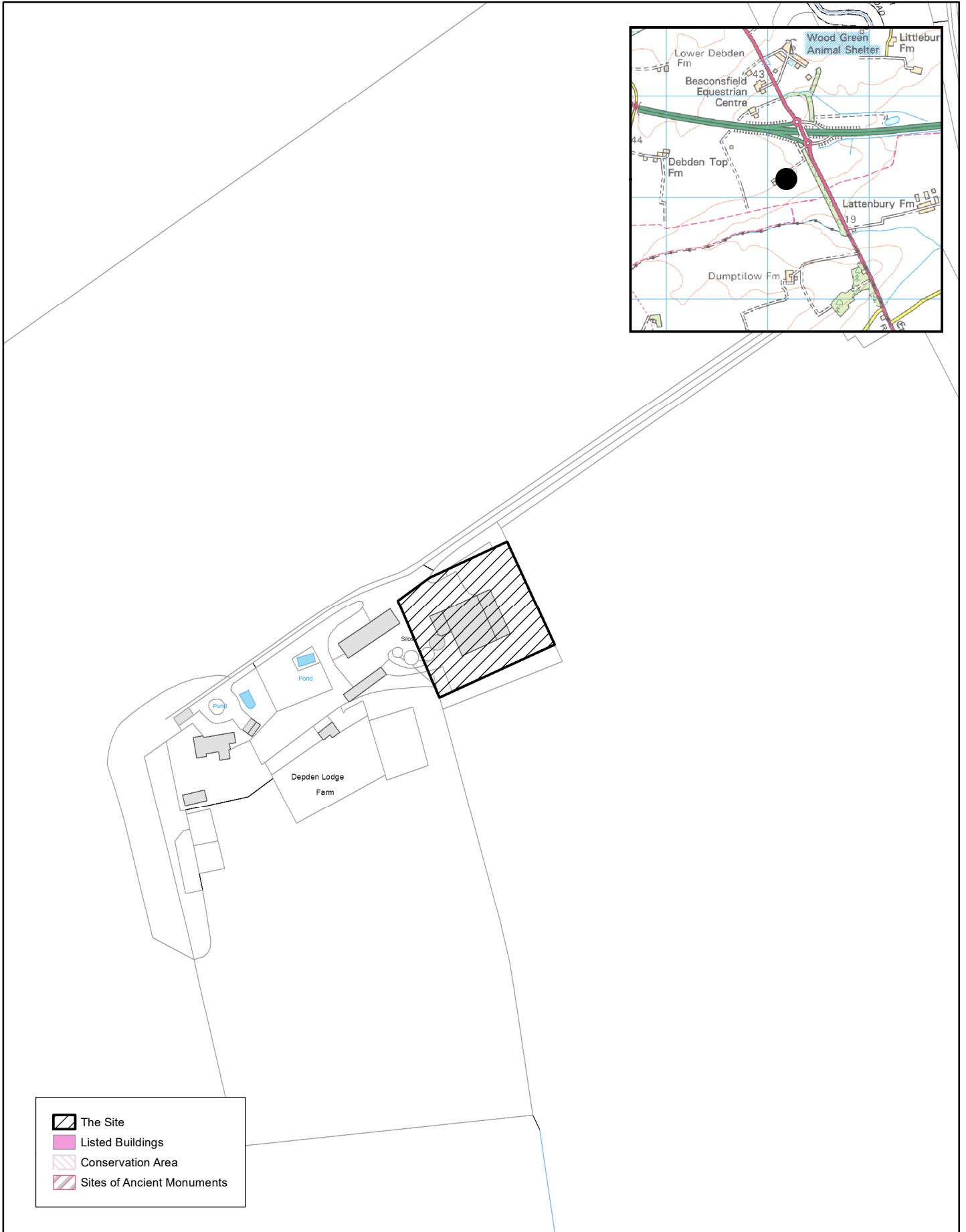
Date Created: 07/05/2024

Application Ref: 23/02284/FUL

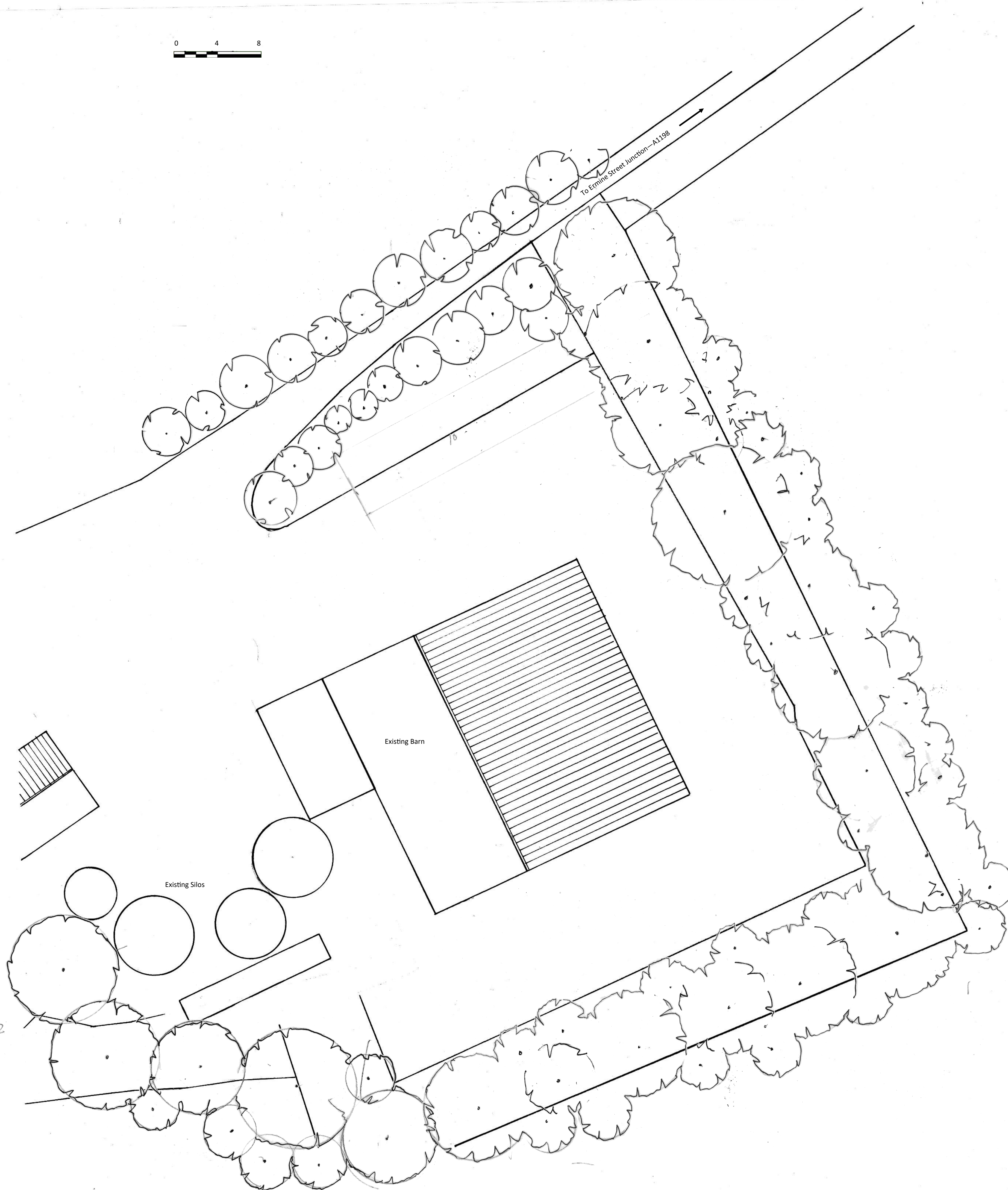
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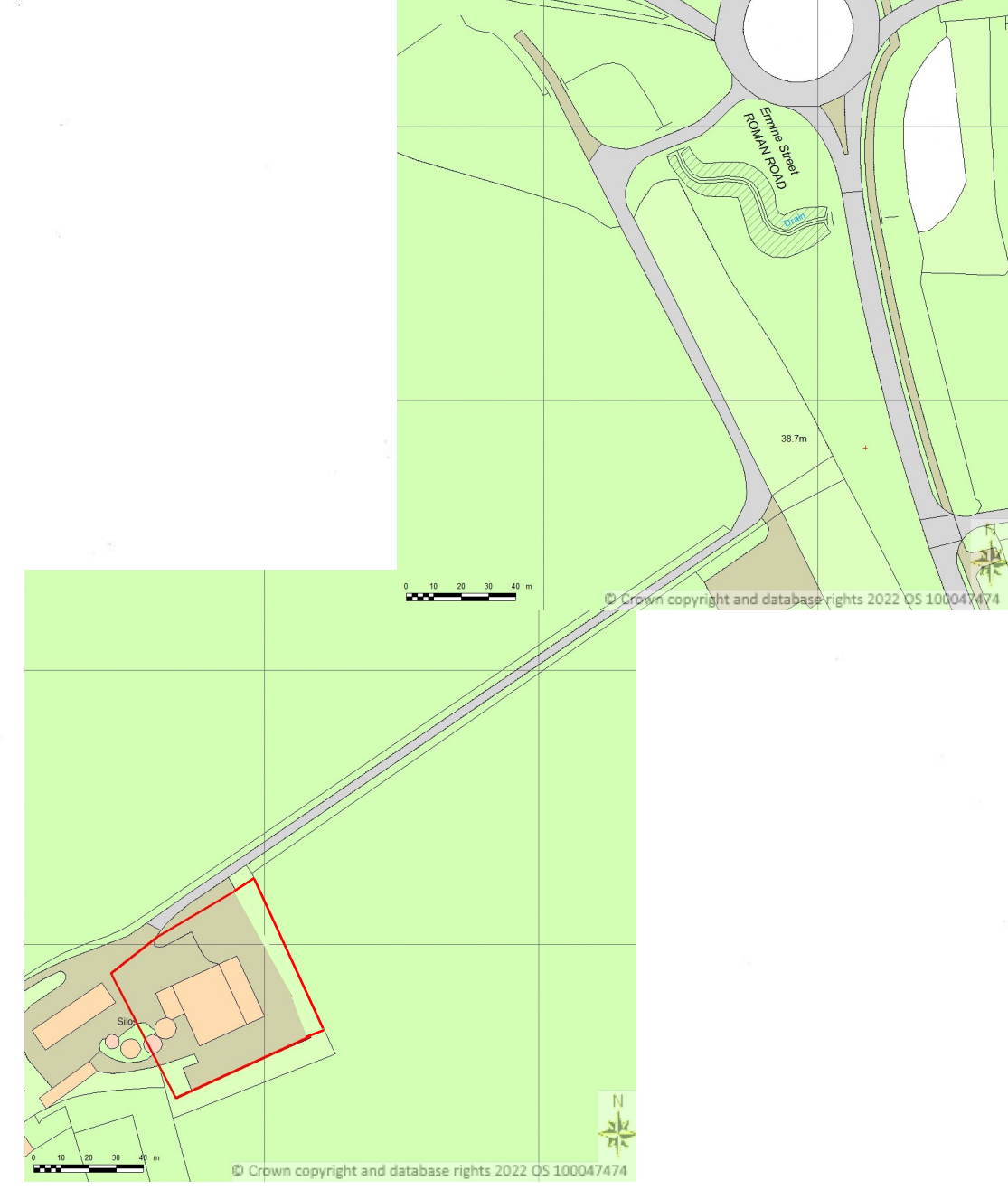
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- The Site
- Listed Buildings
- Conservation Area
- Sites of Ancient Monuments



SITE LOCATION PLAN
 AREA 5 HA
 SCALE 1:2500 on A4
 CENTRE COORDINATES: 526224, 267225



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Client
 Godmanchester Self Storage

Job Title
 Change of use from hardstanding storage area to container storage area.
 Depden Lodge Farm,
 Lattenbury Hill,
 Godmanchester,
 Huntingdon PE28 9PA

Drawing Title
 Block Plans as existing
 and
 Site Location Plan

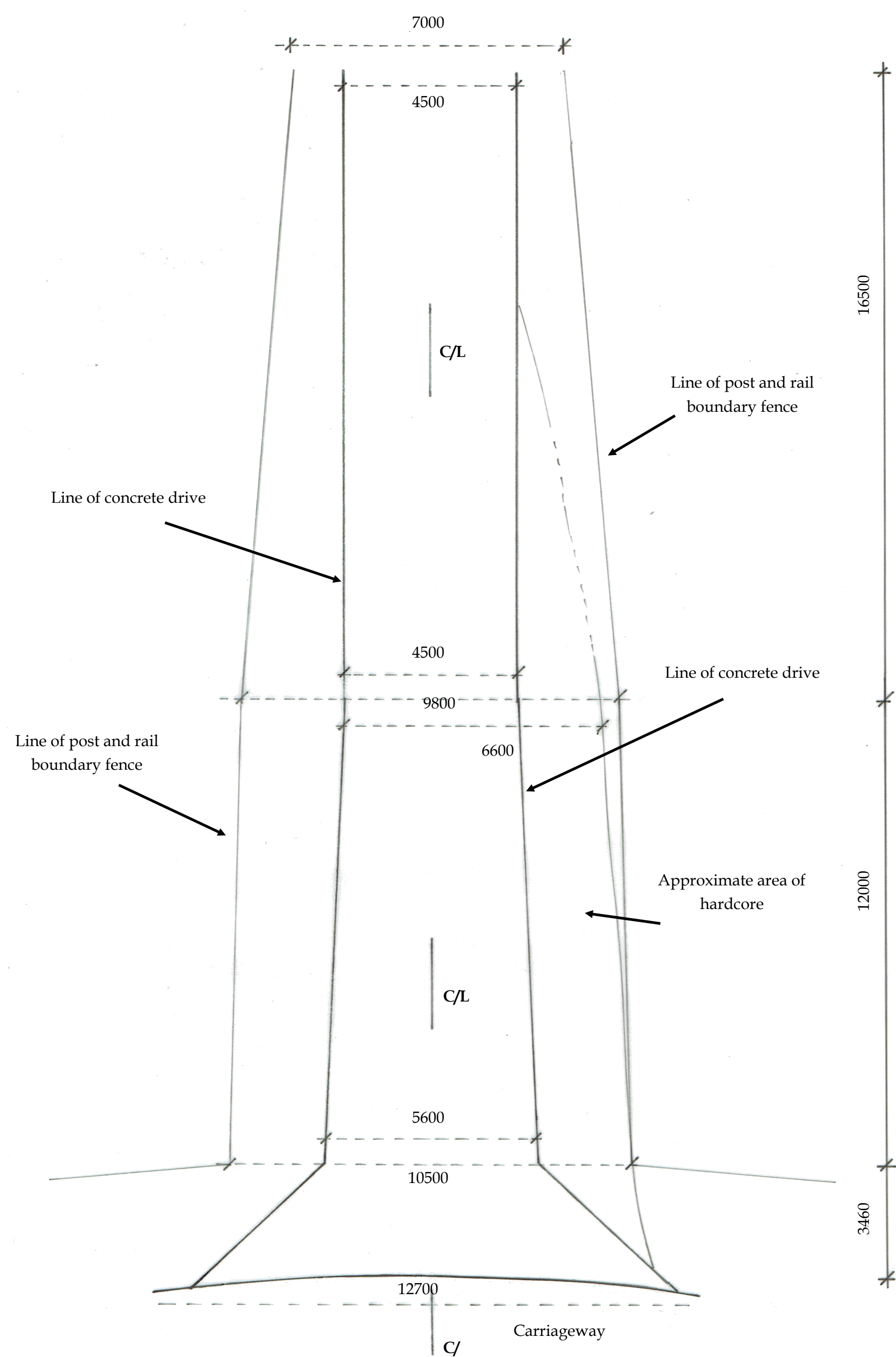
Scale 1:200 & 1:2500

Date 23rd January 2022 Drawn By jk

Dwg. No.	Rev.
012122	

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 Godmanchester Self Storage

Job Title
 Change of use from hardstanding storage area to container storage area.
 Depden Lodge Farm,
 Lattenbury Hill,
 Godmanchester,
 Huntingdon PE28 9PA

Drawing Title

Layout of existing site entrance

Scale 1:100

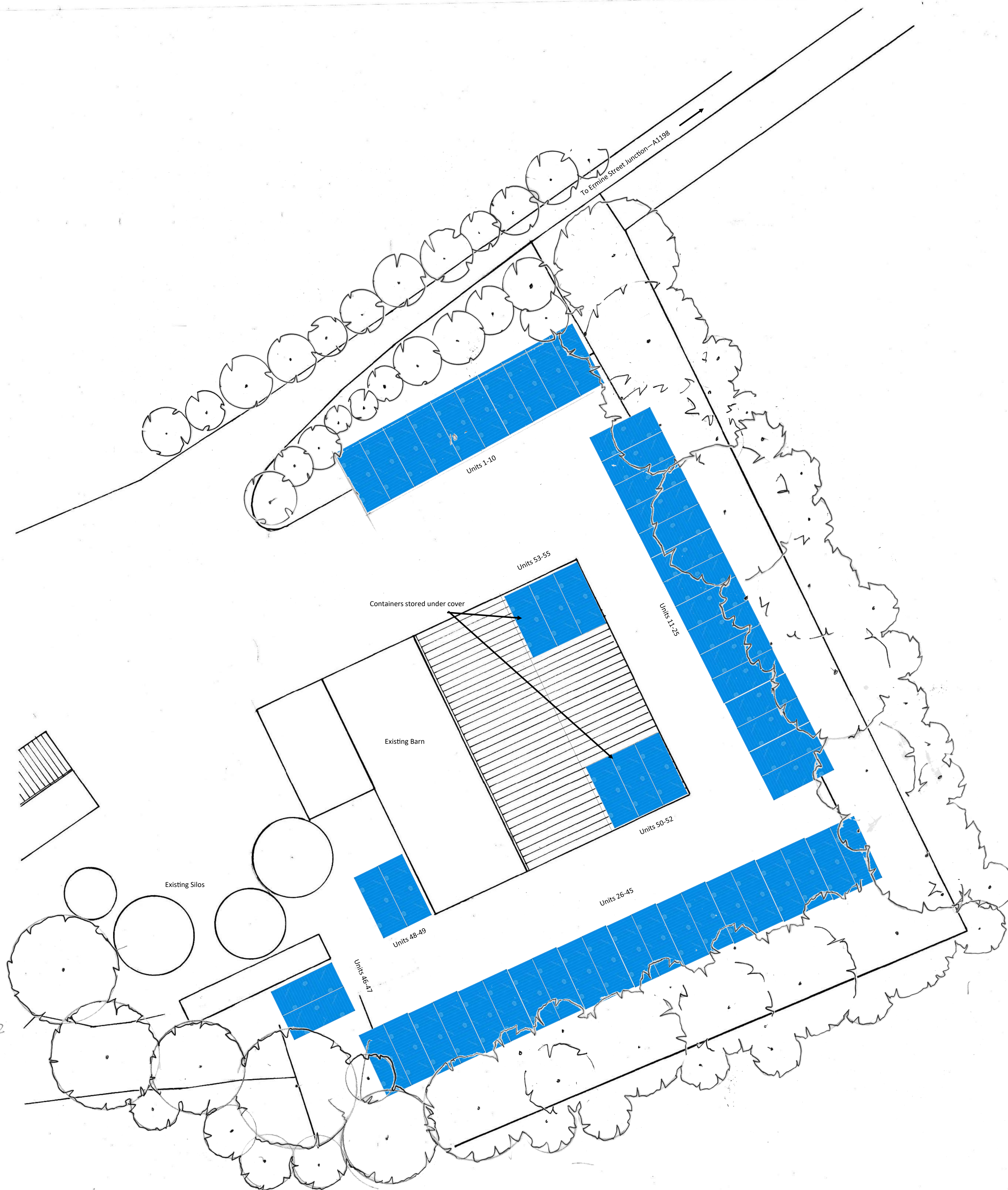
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 062122

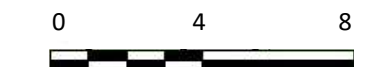
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20ft x 8ft (2.43m x 6.09m) container



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Client: Godmanchester Self Storage

Job Title: Change of use from hardstanding storage area to container storage area.
 Depden Lodge Farm,
 Lattenbury Hill,
 Godmanchester,
 Huntingdon PE28 9PA

Drawing Title: Block Plans as proposed

Scale: 1:200

Date: 23rd January 2022 Drawn By: jk

Dwg. No.	Rev.
022122	

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