

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Planning Committee 12 June 2019  
**AUTHOR/S:** Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development for  
Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire

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**Application Number:** S/0350/19/FL

**Parish(es):** Duxford (but also adjacent to Whittlesford boundary)

**Proposal:** Proposed erection of two new car dealerships / showrooms for occupation by Lancaster Porsche and Aston Martin (sui generis) incorporating (i) the sale of new and used cars plus parts storage and sales (ii) new means of access from the A505 including provision of a protected right turn lane into the site when approaching from the west, (iii) totem signs, (iv) servicing and MOT areas, (v) washing and car preparation / valet areas, (vi) display, staff and customer car parking, (vii) new internal circulation roads, cycle paths and footpaths, and (viii) hard and soft landscaping including provision of a 1.5m high mound on the western site boundary

**Site address:** Land south of A505 and west of SMT Great Britain, Duxford, Cambridge, CB22 4QX

**Applicant(s):** Jardine Motors Group

**Recommendation:** Delegated Refusal, subject to final comments from the Local Highways Authority

**Key material considerations:** Principle of development  
Economic and social role of the proposal  
Impact on character of the area and landscape  
Biodiversity and trees  
Design and appearance  
Residential amenity  
Highway safety and impact on network

**Committee Site Visit:** Yes

**Departure Application:** Yes (advertised) 13 February 2019

**Presenting Officer:** Rebecca Ward (Principal Planning Officer)

**Application brought to Committee because:** Significant departure from the Local Plan, Parish Council objections and significant local interest

**Date by which decision due:** 14 June 2019

## **Executive Summary**

1. Jardine Motors (Lancaster) have applied to the Local Planning Authority for the relocation of two car dealerships, Porsche and Aston Martin, from their current 0.8 hectare site in Harston to a 1.77 hectare greenfield site on the edge of Whittlesford Bridge. The reasons for the re-location are that the current site is too small to enable the business to operate efficiently and effectively. The applicants suggest that the delivery of the two new-dealership buildings, workshop and office spaces and other associated facilities would enable the business to continue operation in the district and within a competitive industry.
2. In terms of compliance with the Local Plan, the application site is located outside of the village development framework and in the open countryside. There are no other policies in the Local Plan that would support development of this scale/nature and therefore the proposal is considered to be a departure from adopted policy S/7 'Development Frameworks'.
3. Notwithstanding this position, officers have considered the scheme against criterion E/13 'New Employment Development on the Edges of Villages' given the applicant has relied on this position through the supporting documents. The officer assessment concludes that the proposal would fall short of meeting most of the criterion including an inadequate sequential site search. As such, even if it was concluded the policy was a relevant one to the nature of the proposal, it would still fail to meet the tests of the policy.
4. Given the site's location in the countryside, the scheme has been considered against the relevant character and landscape policies. The assessment concludes that as a result of the development there will be significant harm to the character of the area and the local landscape character. The proposed mitigation would not overcome the harm. The assessment also concludes that there will be an unacceptable loss of 'very good' Grade 2 agricultural land.
5. Regard has been given to third party representations, however, matters relating to increase of traffic and movement have been considered acceptable in principle by the statutory consultees. An update to members will be provided once the final consultations have been received on the design of the access. Other matters such as archaeology, ecology have also been considered acceptable subject to conditions.
6. In terms of the planning balance, the assessment concludes that the significant level harm would be caused to the environmental role of sustainable development would not be outweighed by the moderate economic and low level social benefits of the proposed development. The development is therefore not considered to be a sustainable one that the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) seeks to support. Officers therefore recommend to the Planning Committee that the application is refused.

## **Relevant Planning History**

7. Pre-application (July 2017) -The proposal would not be supported because it comprises a large-scale employment proposal in the countryside, wherein there is a negative policy presumption against unnecessary development and a clear objective of protecting the countryside for its own sake.

There are no planning applications of relevance to the application site, however, the

following applications are relevant and have been mentioned through the supporting documents:

S/2777/17/OL Land to the north of A505 - Outline application for up to 20 dwellings with all matters reserved for subsequent approval - Refused and dismissed at appeal

S/0238/16/OL and S/2584/17/RM Moorfield Road - Erection of up to 18 dwellings and associated infrastructure and works - Approved

S/1726/12/FL Land to the east of the Volo Depot - Development of new facilities for Welch's Transport Group incorporating storage and distribution building, vehicle sales, service, MOT and repair building, associated offices, customer car, staff car, truck and crane parking - Approved

S/1406/83/F Volvo BM Headquarters - Approved

### **National Guidance**

8. National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF)  
Planning Practice Guidance
9. **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Submission – Adopted September 2018**
  - S/1 Vision
  - S/2 Objectives of the Local Plan
  - S/3 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
  - S/5 Provision of New Jobs and Homes
  - S/6 The Development Strategy to 2031
  - S/7 Development Frameworks
  - S/10 Group Villages
  - CC/1 Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change
  - CC/3 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy in New Developments
  - CC/4 Water Efficiency
  - CC/6 Construction Methods
  - CC/7 Water Quality
  - CC/8 Sustainable Drainage Systems
  - CC/9 Managing Flood Risk
  - HQ/1 Design Principles
  - HQ/2 Public Art and New Development
  - NH/2 Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character
  - NH/3 Protecting Agricultural Land
  - NH/4 Biodiversity
  - NH/8 Mitigating the impact of development adjoining the Green Belt
  - E/13 New Employment Development on the Edges of Villages
  - E/23 Retail in the countryside
  - SC/2 Health Impact Assessment
  - SC/9 Lighting Proposals
  - SC/10 Noise Pollution
  - SC/11 Contaminated Land
  - SC/12 Air Quality
  - TI/2 Planning for Sustainable Travel
  - TI/3 Parking Provision
  - TI/8 Infrastructure and New Developments
  - TI/10 Broadband
10. **South Cambridgeshire LDF Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD):**

Open Space in New Developments SPD - Adopted January 2009  
Trees & Development Sites SPD - Adopted January 2009  
Landscape in New Developments SPD - Adopted March 2010  
Biodiversity SPD - Adopted July 2009  
District Design Guide SPD - Adopted March 2010

## Consultation

11. **Duxford Parish Council** - Object on grounds of landscape and traffic. In summary the following points have been raised, however, a full copy can be found in appendix 1:
  - The development would represent "Ribbon Development" along the A505.
  - The loss of valuable Grade 2 "Excellent" farm land. (ref Agricultural Land Classification)
  - Loss of open landscape that has previously been designated "Area of Best Landscape" and has been twice commented as a reason not to develop on by planning inspectors during appeals that were rejected in this area. See appeals E1/W0530/2/4/06 for S/1335/89/O and APP/W0530/A/00/1044479 for S/0385/99/O.
  - Any additional traffic to the A505 is to be avoided until significant improvement has been made to the local road network.
  
12. **Whittlesford Parish Council** - Objects to the application. In summary the following points have been raised, however, a full copy can be found in appendix 2:
  - The site is not designated for any type of development in period to 2031.
  - Loss of high quality agricultural land
  - Protection of green belt
  - Traffic
  
13. **Hinxton Parish Council** - Hinxton Parish Council wishes to register an objection to the application. In summary the following points have been raised, however, a full copy can be found in appendix 3 : The development would have an unacceptable and unmitigated impact on the landscape and on traffic.

The proposal would be contrary to the SCDL's recently adopted Local Plan, Policy NH/2 'Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character', in which it is stated 'Development will only be permitted where it respects and retains, or enhances the local character and distinctiveness of the local landscape and of the individual National Character Area in which it is located'.

The proposal would be contrary to the newly adopted Local Plan Policy T1/2 which states that: '3. Developers will be required to demonstrate they will make adequate provision to mitigate the likely impacts (including cumulative impacts) of their proposal...'
  
14. **Ickleton Parish Council** - Ickleton Parish Council voted unanimously to object to this Application and strongly recommends refusal. In summary the following points have been raised, however, a full copy can be found in appendix 4:
  - The site has not been allocated for development. Proposal would be contrary to the Development Strategy set out at Policy S/6, particularly point 4.
  - Policy S/7 is relevant, as the site is not within any development framework, neither is there a need for this business to be located in the countryside.
  - The site is part of an open area of Chalklands Landscape Character. This has

been designated as an “Area of Best Landscape.” Development of this site would intrude into open countryside.

- That opposite site incidentally has been the subject of a planning application (Ref, S/277/17/OL) for housing. This was rejected by SCDC, the rejection being subsequently upheld on appeal.
- In 2016 Volvo Construction was refused permission (Ref S/2296/16/AD) to erect a standalone illuminated pylon sign on their site boundary adjacent to the A505 in the east corner. The sign would have been 7.25m high, 4.7m wide and 0.57m in depth. It was considered to be inappropriate and detrimental to the visual character of the countryside.
- Policy HQ/1 Design Principles of the Local Plan 2018 would be breached by approving this application. Whatever the merits of the design of the Porsche and Aston Martin landmark buildings that are sought for the site, it cannot possibly be claimed that they preserve or enhance the character of the local rural landscape, or that they conserve or enhance important natural assets or their setting.
- We reject any comparison with the Welch’s and Volvo sites and any contention that the proposals would be nothing more than a continuation of those developments.
- Policy NH/3 Protecting Agricultural Land would be breached by approving this Application. The site has been farmed organically for several years, and is Best and Most Versatile agricultural land, an irreplaceable resource of national importance.
- The Application relies heavily on Policy E/13 which permits new employment development on the edges of villages. The site is neither adjoining nor very close to any development framework. It is so remote from the development framework of Duxford that the Applicant must refer to the development framework of Whittlesford Bridge when invoking Policy E/13.
- The proposal would have an unacceptable adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area and is not in scale with the location (Policy E/13 f). 8.53 is not relevant as this proposal is neither small scale nor sensitive.
- We find the criteria adopted in framing the search for other sites and the reasons for ruling out other locations in favour of this one to be so contrived as to invite ridicule. There are absolutely no reasons why this concern cannot relocate to a “respectable” business park site and continue to thrive. It does not need a site adjacent to a major highway for publicity purposes – Porsche and Aston Martin cars are hardly impulse buys, and potential customers will seek their local dealer out.
- The objectives of Policies S/2 and S/3 of the Adopted Local Plan are clearly not met in relation to this site, which can only be accessed via the A505. This is a busy and dangerous highway with no footway or cycle path on the side where this development would be located.
- Ickleton Parish Council is concerned over the potential for cumulative developments in this locality to have an adverse impact upon the flying operations at Duxford Airfield, and in particular on the Air Shows at IWM Duxford.

15. **Pampisford Parish Council** - Pampisford Parish Council objects to this application.

See appendix 5 :

- This is a greenfield site, containing good agricultural land
- The proposed application is not in the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan as a site for employment
- There could be safety issues in respect to the approach to Duxford Airfield, it is on the flight path
- Access across the A505 is not possible at this point, so all traffic coming from

the M11 will need to travel passed the site as far A505/A1301 roundabout, to then return on the other carriageway. The congestion on the A505 is such that for much of the working day this will be very slow.

- 5. U-turns at the Moorfield Road junction could be dangerous and should not be included as possible

16. **Sawston Parish Council** - Although this is an application for Duxford Parish Council we wanted to comment as we feel it will have an impact on Sawston and the surrounding villages. We discussed this at our meeting last night and wish to make the following objections/comments see appendix 6:

- Concern with the ever increasing Highways issues, increased traffic (the increased traffic from the proposed developments around this area have not been taken into account)
- Impact on the countryside
- Not within the development framework
- Concerns over further traffic constraints on the A505 corridor
- Not agricultural related

17. **Urban Design Officer** - Objection. Officers are not in a position to support the proposals from an urban design perspective, as they do not fully meet paragraph 127 of the '*National Planning Policy Framework*' (2018) (NPPF) and policy HQ/1 (Design principles) (d) and (h) of the '*South Cambridgeshire Local Plan*' (2018). The proposals are not considered satisfactory for the following reasons:

1. The siting of the two car showrooms in relation to the A505 road in terms of building line / set back distances and how this differs from the siting of the neighbouring Volvo building.
2. The height of proposals in relation to the context of the lower neighbouring building when considering the position of the proposed buildings at a sensitive.
3. Concern about the dark, blank appearance of the south elevation of the Aston Martin car showroom when viewed from the south of the site.
4. Concern about the long parking bays lacking planting strips at intervals to provide relief and soften the impact of parked cars and to make the site more inviting and attractive for customers and employees.

18. **Landscape Officer** - Objection (see memo dated 12 March 2018). In summary, the proposal would adversely harm rather than positively contribute to the rural character and visual / visual amenity of the area. The proposed development would be contrary to Policies HQ/1 Design Principles and Policy NH/2: Protecting and enhancing landscape character.

The development would not respect and retain, or enhance the local character and distinctiveness of the local landscape. There would be an unacceptable adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area, which is defined by the existing rural character with large low lying arable fields.

19. **Tree Officer** – To be confirmed.

20. **Ecology Officer** – Final comments to be confirmed

21. **Sustainability Officer** - No objections. I've now read through the Energy Efficiency and Sustainable Development Report provided by the applicant in association with the above mentioned application. The applicant appears to have a good understanding of the relevant policies relating to energy and carbon emissions and suggests they will

use the energy hierarchy in their approach to reducing these. The applicant proposes to include solar photovoltaics and air source heat pumps (for both heating and cooling), in a bid to meet the minimum 10% carbon reduction required by local plan policy CC/3.

To ensure the development meets the appropriate standards (including BREEAM 'very good', the following conditions to ensure policy compliance: carbon reduction statement and BREEAM pre-construction, BREEAM post-construction.

22. **Archaeology Officer** - No objections (comments dated 14 May 2019). The site has been subject to an archaeological trial trench evaluation, undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation agreed with the Historic Environment Team (Historic Environment Record reference ECB5522). No further site works are required. However, we recommend that the reporting and post excavation requirements are secured through the inclusion of a negative condition.
23. **Anglian Water** - No in principle objections (see memo dated 8 March 2019) . Assets affected: No assets owned by Anglian Water or those subject to an adoption agreement within the development site boundary.

Waste Water treatment: The foul drainage from this development is in the catchment of Sawston Water Recycling Centre that will have available capacity for these flows.

Used Water Networks: The development will lead to unacceptable risk of flooding downstream. Anglian Water will need to plan effectively for the proposed development, if permission is granted. The applicant has not identified a connection point or discharge rate if a pumping regime is to be implemented as our topography survey suggests. We therefore request a condition requiring an on-site drainage strategy.

24. **Contaminated Land Officer** - No objection. The site appears to be relatively low risk in terms of contamination, having never previously been developed, and is not being developed into a sensitive end-use. However there is an existing Volvo depot to the east that may be a source of potential contamination and as such, it is recommended that a Phase I Desk Study be carried out to assess potential risks from contamination associated with the proposed redevelopment. If this information is not made available prior to determination of the planning application, please attach a condition to the decision notice for full contaminated land survey.
25. **Local Highways Authority Development Management** - To be confirmed
26. **Local Highways Authority Transport Assets Team** - Holding objection (see memo dated 11 March 2019). Insufficient detail has been presented to make a sound assessment. The below issues related to the Transport Statement will need to be addressed before the transport implications of the development can be fully assessed.
  - Proposal Description: Details of site set back requested for A505 widening
  - Traffic Data: Accident data should be sought from CCC accident data records
  - Assessment Scenarios and Traffic Growth: Site access junction assessment required
  - Mitigation: To be agreed
27. **Highways England** - No objections.
28. **Natural England** - No comments.

29. **Environmental Health Officer** - No comments received.
30. **Lead Local Flood and Water Authority** - Objection see memo dated 13 May 2019 and 31. The LLFA have considered the Flood Risk Assessment and SuDs strategy, GD Partnership Limited WE/18011 dated 29/03/2019 and Site Plan, Jardine Motors Group P211 dated 23/02/2017.
- According to the Surface Water Drainage Strategy displayed in the FRA, a swale fed by a pipe is proposed to convey surface water in to the existing ditch to the south-east of the site. However, the proposed pipe and swale lies outside of the red-line boundary for this site. If the area of land is not owned by the developer permission must be gained from the third-party landowner in order to develop on this stretch of land.
  - Significant surcharging and/or flood risk during 1 in 2 year event is unacceptable
  - Two sets of Micro-drainage calculations have been provided of the Flood Risk Assessment and SuDS strategy. It is not clear what each set of calculations refers to.
31. **Drainage Engineer** - No objections. The proposal is considered to be acceptable subject to condition for a detailed surface water and foul water drainage scheme.
32. **Environment Agency** - No objections (See memo dated 5 March 2019). The site is above a principal aquifer a secondary aquifer and is located within a groundwater source protection zone. The application should include planning conditions for the disposal of foul drainage, surface water and scheme to treat and remove suspended solids from surface run-off.
33. **Designing Out Crime Officer** - Supports this Application.
34. **Campaign to Protect Rural England** - CPRE Cambridgeshire & Peterborough objects to this application. The proposed site is not designated for development in the South Cambridgeshire Adopted Local Plan 2018 ("the Local Plan 2018"). The proposed site adjoins the Green Belt and no attempt has been made to minimise the impact on the Green Belt. Development would breach of Policy NH/8 of the Local Plan 2018.

The proposed site is part of a wider open area of Chalklands Landscape Character which is designated an "Area of Best Landscape". CPRE is concerned that the development would set a precedent for further intrusion into this area of open countryside to the south of the A505 and towards Duxford village. The site is part of a valued landscape and should therefore be protected in accordance with the NPPF and Policy NH/2. It is not an urban area as the applicant tries to characterise it in its submission.

The proposed site consists of best and most versatile farmland. Its permanent loss would be a breach of Policy NH/3: "Protecting Agricultural Land" of the Local Plan 2018 and the guidance provided by Section 15 of the NPPF.

The proposed development is significantly outside the Development Frameworks of the nearest villages, Duxford and Whittlesford, and presents a risk of encouraging further development towards Duxford which would interrupt the open views towards the village. This is not consistent with Policy S/7: "Development Frameworks" of the Local Plan 2018. The proposed development is not consistent with Policy E/13 of the



Local Plan 2018, New Employment Development on the Edges of Villages.

It is in any case almost inconceivable that customers for expensive cars will travel to and from the site in other than a private car. There will be significant car traffic generated by the need for test drives. The Imperial War Museum has made arrangements with riparian landowners to forbid public access to ground to the south of the runway during flying displays. The southern zone is considerably safer than the land directly under the flight path where development is proposed.

### **Representations**

35. Approximately 13 letters of objection have been received. The letters can be viewed on the Councils website. The following comments have been raised:

Highways and Network:

- Impact to the local highway network due to increase in vehicle movements to and from the site. Congestion is already evident in the area in the morning peak hour.
- Cumulative impact of the development alongside proposals for Whittlesford Transport Hub, Genome Campus, Agritech, Uttlesfords New Village should be considered to identify any improvements to infrastructure.
- Highway safety concerns with the proposed access from the A505.
- Proposal encourages the use of the private car and not inline with sustainability.
- No footway-cycleway access to the application site

Local Plan/sequential test:

- Site is not a sustainable location for this type of employment
- Site is not designated in the Local Plan for proposed use
- Sequential test has not exhausted.
- Additional sites that should be considered include: Wyvale (Melbourn), Sawston Trade Park and Sawston carshow-room should be considered.
- Volvo and Welch's should not set precedent.
- Alternative smaller sites should be considered. The facilities could be split to find a better site.

Character of the area and other linked matters:

- Impact on the character and appearance of the area and the chalkland landscape.
- Impact on biodiversity on and around the site.

### **Site and Surroundings**

36. The application site as defined on the submitted plan extends to 1.77 hectares and comprises open undeveloped agricultural land. The application site is located to the south-eastern edge of Whittlesford Bridge. It is within the Duxford Parish boundary, however, is adjacent to the Whittlesford Parish boundary.
37. The site lies outside of any settlement development framework boundary, but lies close (and to the south) of Whittlesford Bridge boundary. The site is therefore in the countryside for planning purposes. The site is within a Flood Zone 1 low risk (not within a Flood Zone 2 or 3) and is not in the setting of any heritage assets.
38. To the north of the application site is the A505, which is a trunk road that carries vehicles between the M11 and the A11 along with localised journeys. Beyond this is

an open undeveloped land. To the south is a field edge tree-belt along beyond which is open undeveloped agricultural land.

39. To the east of the site is the Volvo SMT (Services Machinery Trucks) GB Customer Support Centre. There is some existing tree coverage to the shared boundary with the Volvo SMT. The SMT provides workshop space for the serving of the machinery, storage building for machinery parts, and small sales/yard area and office floor space for general administration functions of the company. As per planning history, Volvo appears to have been located on the site since 1980s.
40. To the east of the Volvo site, is a site occupied by Welchs Transport Ltd. Welchs operates a general haulage and logistics business from the site and have been located there since January 2015 when the facility was built following the grant of planning permission.

### **Proposal**

41. Jardine Motors (now trading as Lancaster) who have submitted the application originated as a family run car dealership in East Anglia. The company now represents 20 manufactures, operating in more than 70 locations across the UK. Other sites in close proximity to Cambridge include; Bury St Edmunds, Letchworth and Peterborough.
42. In particular, they have been operating from a site in Harston. The two dealerships currently on the Harston site are Porsche and Aston Martin. The applicant has confirmed that the site is no longer fit for their business needs being too small and they need to re-locate to expand and adapt to the changing business model. Their current site in Harston is therefore being marketed for alternative employment uses, albeit this is not part of this application. The company proposes to relocate to this larger application site to accommodate the needs of the dealerships.
43. The Porsche garage will be a building of 3,195 sqm (Gross Internal Floor Area) including a mezzanine area of 855 sqm (GIA). The smaller dealership will be occupied by Aston Martin and will be a building of 1,843 sqm (GIA). The proposal also includes a structure for dry preparation/valet and wash bays of 260sqm (GIA) which will be used by both dealerships. There will be 287 parking spaces on the site and within the site there will be compound areas which will be bounded by 2.4m screens to control access.
44. The site will be accessed from the A505 at its north-western point and a perimeter road will run down the western boundary. The access will include a protected right turn lane into the site when approaching from the west. The exit from the site will be left turn only. The proposal also includes hard and soft landscaping through the site and landscape buffer of approx. 10.5m to the western boundary.

The application was amended on 29 April 2019 the following changes were made:

- The 1.5m high mound on the western boundary has been removed
- A wider corridor of planting is proposed along the western perimeter that will create a woodland belt
- The provision of woodland trees and hedgerow planting on the southern and eastern boundary.
- Reduction in car parking
- Additional footpath/cycleway link
- Update Highways assessment

- Update Landscape note
- Update flood risk assessment
- Update archaeology assessment
- Updated contamination assessment

### **EIA Screening**

45. The proposed development would be considered as 'Schedule 2' development under the EIA regulations. The application has not been screened for EIA development in advance of submission. However, based on consultation responses to the application the nature of the impacts would be comparable to most urban development projects as such it would not require a Environmental Statement to be submitted.

### **Planning Assessment**

#### **Economic and Social Role**

#### **Environmental role**

#### **Sustainability of the location**

82. Adopted policy TI/2 Planning for sustainable travel states that development must be located and designed to reduce the need to travel, particularly by car, and promote sustainable travel appropriate to its location, site has sufficient integration and accessibility by walking, cycling or public and community transport and for larger developments of this nature, maximise opportunities for sustainable travel.
83. Whittlesford is identified as a Group Village under policy S/10 of the adopted Local Plan. The proposed development will bring approximately 70 jobs to the immediate locality; albeit the Planning Statement confirms that many of these positions are expected to be filled by existing staff members. Appendix 1 of the Planning Statement shows the employee distribution list with employees living in various locations through the district and into neighbour authorities.
84. In terms of the wider network catchments, Whittlesford Bridge is served by a regular rail service between Ely, Cambridge and London. The station is located 10 min walk/ 4 min cycle from the site. A bus service (city 7) operates an hourly service from Duxford Road, Whittlesford. The bus stop is a short walk from the site. For these reasons, it would be reasonable to conclude that due to the location of the site future employees have reasonable access to sustainable forms of travel.
85. Whilst this might be the case for employees who travel to the site on a regular basis, given the principle behind the proposal as a car dealership the majority of customers are likely to travel to the site by private vehicle. As such, there are some shortfalls in achieving this policy but on balance the proposal would generally accord with policy TI/2.

#### **Impact on the landscape character, visual amenity of the area**

86. One of the six key objectives of the Local Plan policy S/2 is to 'protect the character of South Cambridgeshire including its built and natural heritage. New development should enhance the area and protect and enhance biodiversity' and 'to deliver new developments that is high quality and well designed with distinctive character that reflects the location'. Policy S/7 goes on to support development within village frameworks and on brownfield sites in order to protect the countryside from gradual

encroachment.

87. Policy NH/2 seeks to ensure that all new development protects and enhances the local character and distinctiveness of the local landscape and character area of which it is located. Policy HQ/1 seeks to ensure development responds to the local context and respecting local distinctiveness, compatible in its locations
88. The application is accompanied by a Landscape Visual Appraisal (as amended on April 2019) and Site location plan 02 Rev C, Site plan 03 Rev L, Indicative landscape principles 8224-L01 Rev B, Block Plan 11 Rev C (amended). The applicant concludes that the proposal would not result in any unacceptable long-term harm on the landscape character and visual amenity of the area.
89. The site comprises an open agricultural field, located within a largely rural area. It is relatively level with open countryside to the south and west of the site. This site along with adjacent fields positively adds to the open and rural character of the area. Along with the woodland belts to the east and south.
90. The site lies in an area which has no national or local designation and as such does not fall within the scope of the valued landscapes under Paragraph 170a of the revised Framework. At national level, the site lies within the National Character Area defined as 87 East Anglian Chalk by Natural England. The East of England Landscape Framework identified a broad range of landscape character types with the site lying in the 'lowland village chalk lands'. At a local level, the proposed development would be located in Landscape Character Area B: Chalklands (South Cambridgeshire District Council Design Guide SPD, 2010).
90. 87 East Anglian Chalk by Natural England. The East of England Landscape Framework identified a broad range of landscape character types with the site lying in the 'lowland village chalk lands'. At a local level, the proposed development would be located in Landscape Character Area B: Chalklands (South Cambridgeshire District Council Design Guide SPD, 2010).
91. This area is defined by large arable fields and strong rural character with a distinctive landform of smooth rolling chalk hills and gently undulating chalk plateau. Villages in this area typically have strong historic linear forms typically abutted by fields or woodlands that contribute to the rural character of the area, although this is disrupted by major transport corridors such as the A505 and M11.
92. Given the typography of the site and the immediate surroundings, the site is not highly visible in the wider landscape, however, on a more local level, given the scale of development, the proposal would represent a substantial encroachment of built development in the countryside. Officers consider that the open field, together with the adjoining fields provide a significant contribution to the character and appearance of this part of the village and an important contribution to the rural landscape setting. An inspector came to a similar conclusion on the adjacent site which was for 22 dwellings dismissed on 29 August 2019 (APP/W0530/W/18/3195084).
93. The detailed drawings indicate the erection of two new car dealerships / showrooms with landscaping upon the western boundary and vehicular access off the A505. The proposals will be illuminated in the evenings for both security and marketing purposes. The proposal also includes mass parking areas and marketing signs. The applicant has included some landscape mitigation works inclusive of;
  - Ornamental shrub planting upon the northern boundary
  - 5m landscape buffer to the southern edge
  - 5m landscape buffer to the western edge
  - Additional tree planting through the site
94. The positive contribution the open land has to the character of the area would be largely lost by the proposed development and given the specific nature of the use

would result in urbanisation of the countryside which would not be satisfactory mitigation by the soft landscaping.

95. For the same reasons, the proposal would also alter the intrinsic nature of the area and causing a significant harmful effect on the local landscape character. Whilst mitigation has been proposed around some edges of the development to assist in integrating the proposal into the character of area, these proposal would not overcome these adverse effects. In addition the applicant confirms in paragraph 3.13 of the Planning Statement that the dealerships site needs to have some 'visual prominence'. The applicant in this statement therefore accepts that at a local level it will be an obvious new development.
96. The proposed development would therefore be contrary to policy S/2 'Objectives', S/7 'Development Frameworks', HQ/1 'Design Principles' and policy NH/2 'Protecting and enhancing landscape character' which seeks to ensure all new development is of a high quality design that preserves or enhances the character of the area, respects the local context and local distinctiveness and would not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the village and landscape character.
97. The proposal would also conflict with the aims of the NPPF (2019) which should seek to secure high quality design (paragraph 124) that are sympathetic to the local character and landscape setting (paragraph 127). The harm is considered to be significant given the scale of the scheme, however, this will need to be weighed against the economic and social benefits of the proposed scheme in the planning balance.

#### **Loss of Agricultural Land**

98. The land is in agricultural production and is part of a wider area of land classified as Grade 2 'Very Good' by Natural England on the Land Classification map. This land is designated the best and most versatile agricultural land below Grade 1 'Excellent'.
99. In terms of loss of agricultural land, policy NH/3 of the adopted Local Plan states that planning permission will not be granted for development which would lead to the irreversible loss of Grade 1, 2 or 3a agricultural land unless the site is allocated in the Local Plan or there are sustainability considerations and the need for the development are sufficient to override the need to protect the agricultural value of the land.
100. The proposal would clearly fail to protect a significant area of Grade 2 value soil as the development would result in the loss of some of the best and most versatile agricultural land permanently from the district. The planning balance in the conclusion of this report will ultimately assess the sustainability of the site and whether there are sufficient material considerations to allow built development on the application site.

#### **Biodiversity**

101. The application is accompanied an Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) (PJC Consultancy, January 2019) and a GCN eDNA Assessment (PJC Consultancy, May 2018) in support of this application.
102. The documents have identified the arable field margins to the north and east of the site, and the dense scrub on the western boundary as important areas of habitat with the field margins qualifying as Habitats of Principle Importance. The reports also identify that reptiles, breeding birds, and commuting bats are likely to be constraints to works. The eDNA assessments confirmed there are no Great Crested Newts currently within the waterbody to the east of the development; however the aforementioned

habitats could be suitable for their terrestrial.

103. The Councils Ecologist has reviewed the details and is in general agreement with the assessments provided, however, did raise concerns with the indicative Landscape Principles plan (FPCR, January 2019) as the report did not take into account any of the recommendations of the PEA into account. The Landscape Principles plan has since been amended to include ecological features in accordance with the PEA and there are no further objections from the Ecological Officer.
104. The proposal would therefore accord with NPPF (2018) paragraph 170, 174, and 175, and the Adopted South Cambridgeshire District Council Local Plan Policy NH/4, which requires development to enhance, restore and add to biodiversity with opportunities should be taken to achieve a net gain in biodiversity through the form and design of development.

### **Layout, Design and Appearance**

105. The layout, design and appearance of the buildings have been mostly designed around the general operations of a car dealership. This includes forecourt for sale vehicles to the front of the site, parking areas to the rear and two dealership showrooms. The Urban Design Officer has raised objections to the application on the grounds that the layout of the buildings do not;
  - respond to the set back distances to the siting of the Volvo Head Quarters on the adjacent site
  - concern that the dark, blank appearance of the south elevation of the Aston Martin Showroom when viewed from the south of the site
  - concern about the long parking bays lacking planting strips
106. In terms of the siting of the buildings, they will be located forward of the main building of the Volvo Head Quarters. Whilst having a softer frontage to the A505 would be preferable with features such as a pond, the nature of the use requires road-side presence. In any instance whether the building is located in this position or further back on the site is not going to make a material impact to the scheme as it would still negatively encroach into the countryside.
107. The design/appearance of the buildings are utilitarian. They offer a simple practical design for the functioning of a car dealership. In isolation the design/appearance is not unacceptable for its intended use, however, in the context of the local area the proposal is not considered to make a positive contribution because the proposal would still negatively encroach into the countryside.
108. As mentioned in the character section of this report, the proposal as a whole would not therefore comply with policies HQ/1 that seeks to ensure the delivery of high quality development that is sensitive to its surroundings.

### **Flood Risk and Drainage**

109. The application is accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment and Surface Water Drainage Strategy by GDP dated 8 January 2019 and amended 29 March. The application site is in a Flood Zone 1 and therefore is considered as having low probability of flooding.
110. The proposed scheme involves the development of greenfield land into a partially hard-paved site. The proposed drainage system will include a porous sub-base underneath the external car

parking and display areas and the access road. Surface water generated from the site will be stored in the sub-base and restricted via a Hydrobrake to 2.7 l/s. This system will then convey water through a swale and discharge surface water into the ditch located to the south of the site. The showroom buildings will have raised FFL, hence ensuring no ingress of surface water during an extreme flooding event.

111. Insufficient information has been submitted to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Lead Local Flood and Water Authority that the development will not increase the risk of flooding on-site and elsewhere. This is because according to the micro-drainage modelling, surcharging and flood risk will occur during a 1 in 2 year event. This is unacceptable to the LLFA and would increase the risk of flooding elsewhere. The proposal does not therefore comply with the requirements of policy CC/8 which requires developments to have an appropriate sustainable surface water drainage system.

112. In terms of foul water, Anglian Water has confirmed that the Sawston Recycling Centre has capacity to treat the flows of the development site. The applicant has not identified a connection point or discharge rate if a pumping regime is to be implemented and therefore AW have request a planning condition is included for a foul water drainage strategy. Officers consider the condition is reasonable and necessary and will be applied to any decision notice to ensure the scheme accords with policy CC/7 of the Local Plan.

### **Highway Safety**

113. The application is supported by a Transport Statement by TPA and technical note dated April 2019.
114. A new junction on the A505 is proposed as part of the development proposal, providing access for vehicles entering from and egressing to, the A505. The proposed access junction incorporates a ghost right-turn, restricting right-turning from the site. In addition, as part of the development proposal, single-lane duelling with central reservation island is proposed on the A505 adjacent to the proposed junction, facilitating right-turns into the application site. A new 3m wide cycleway/footway will stretch along the frontage of the site and join up with Moorfield Road.
115. Given that the site location does not currently generate vehicle trips, the quantum of trips associated with the proposed development will be additional to the local highway network. The overall increase in the number of trips on the wider highway network would be the difference between the total number of trips to the site and those associated with the existing dealership.
116. The Local Highways Authority and Highways England have considered the suitability of the access, junctions within the village, junctions onto the A505 and the slip-road onto M11 taking into account this increase in commercial floor space (and together with other permitted schemes in the area). They consider the identified traffic generation will be insignificant and will likely be imperceptible. However, final comments are awaited and an update to members will need to be provided, The proposal would therefore comply with 109 of the National Planning Policy Framework which seeks ensure development has an acceptable impact on highway safety and would not cause a severe unacceptable residual cumulative impact on the road network.

### **Impact to Residential Amenity**

117. Whilst there will be an noticeable intensification to the site and this intensification is

likely be experienced from the closest properties, there is considered to be suitable separation and mitigation treatments to not cause significant or adverse impact on residential amenity existing properties along Moorfield Road or Royston Road to warrant the scheme for refusal in accordance with policy HQ/1, SC/10 and SC/12 of the adopted Local Plan.

### **Other Matters**

118. Matters relating to archaeology, archaeology, and contaminated land have been considered by the Councils representative consultants and the details are considered to be acceptable subject to the imposition of planning conditions.
119. The applicants mention the Welch's site and identify that this was given consent based on the circumstances of the company. The application was decided in 2015. The original Welch's site in Stapleford had ongoing environmental issues (noise and movement down small terraced lanes) and had been allocated in the Local Plan for housing. The considerations were therefore material different to the application we now have before us.

### **Planning Balance and Conclusion**

120. Paragraph 8 of the NPPF requires the social, economic and environmental objectives of sustainability to be considered together.
121. The appellant considers that the proposal would provide social and economic benefits through providing construction jobs, provision of new and re-located jobs in the district and the financial spend that would result some of which might go into the local economy. These economic benefits weigh in favour of the proposal and to which officers have attached moderate weight to given the employment numbers generated.
122. In environmental terms, the appellant states that the scheme's design, landscaping, ecological enhancement, noise mitigation measures and the accessibility to services by other means of transport than the car would amount to environmental benefits and would help reduce emissions and mitigate climate. However, given the nature of the use for a car dealership, generation of additional movements, its location on a greenfield site and loss of agricultural land only limited weight should be given to any of the benefits suggested.
123. By virtue of there location, scale, bulk and mass together with the substantial areas of hardstanding for car parking, the development would encroach into the current open undeveloped countryside. The proposal would be excessively prominent in its location, resulting in the loss of open, rural countryside and cause harm to the visual amenity of the area. This harm would therefore be significant. The mitigation proposed would fail to overcome this harm. As such the development would not conserve the landscape and scenic beauty of the countryside. Additional environmental harm is also caused as the proposal does not currently present a sustainable surface water drainage scheme and as proposed this could cause flood risk elsewhere.
124. Whilst the NPPF places great weight on the economic benefits that a scheme might bring, the NPPF also places great weight on the conserving environmental aspects. Overall the development would cause significant harm to the area's character and appearance, in addition to flood risk, this harm would conflict with the environmental dimensions of sustainable development and conflict with policies E/13, HQ/1, NH/2, and NH/3 of the adopted Local Plan.



125. Accordingly the material considerations presented by the applicant do not in this instance outweigh the conflict with the policies in the development plan when read as a whole. The application is therefore recommended for refusal.

### **Recommendation**

126. Refusal for the following reasons;

1. The proposed development would be located outside of the village development framework and within the open countryside. The proposed site has not been allocated in the Local Plan, Neighbourhood Plan, nor is the scale of the development supported by other policies in the Local Plan. The development is therefore contrary to Policies S/2, S/5, S/7 and E/13 of the South Cambridgeshire District Council Local Plan (2018) which amongst other matters seek to protect the character of South Cambridgeshire including its natural heritage and deliver new developments that are high quality with distinctive character that reflects there location.
2. The proposal for a two car dealerships by virtue of there location, scale, bulk and mass together with the substantial areas of hardstanding for car parking, the development would encroach into the current open undeveloped countryside. The proposal would be excessively prominent in its location, resulting in the loss of open, rural countryside and cause harm to the visual amenity of the area. The mitigation proposed would fail to overcome this harm. For these reasons, the development would fail to preserve or enhance the local character of the area and would have an unacceptable adverse impact on the countryside and landscape character. The development is therefore contrary to paragraphs 8 and 170 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019); Policies S/2, S/7, E/13, HQ/1 and NH/2 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2018).
3. The site comprises 1.77 hectares of grade 2 'very good' agricultural land that is currently in agricultural production. The proposed development would represent a significant loss of 'the best and most versatile agricultural land' as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework. The application does not demonstrate that sustainability considerations and the need for development in this location are sufficient to override the need to protect the agricultural value of the land. Consequently, the development would cause significant and irreversible loss of agricultural land and farmland biodiversity contrary to: paragraphs 11 and 170 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019); Policy NH/3 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2018).

### **Background Papers:**

The following list contains links to the documents on the Council's website and / or an indication as to where hard copies can be inspected.

- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018
- South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's)
- Planning File Reference: S/0350/19/FL

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