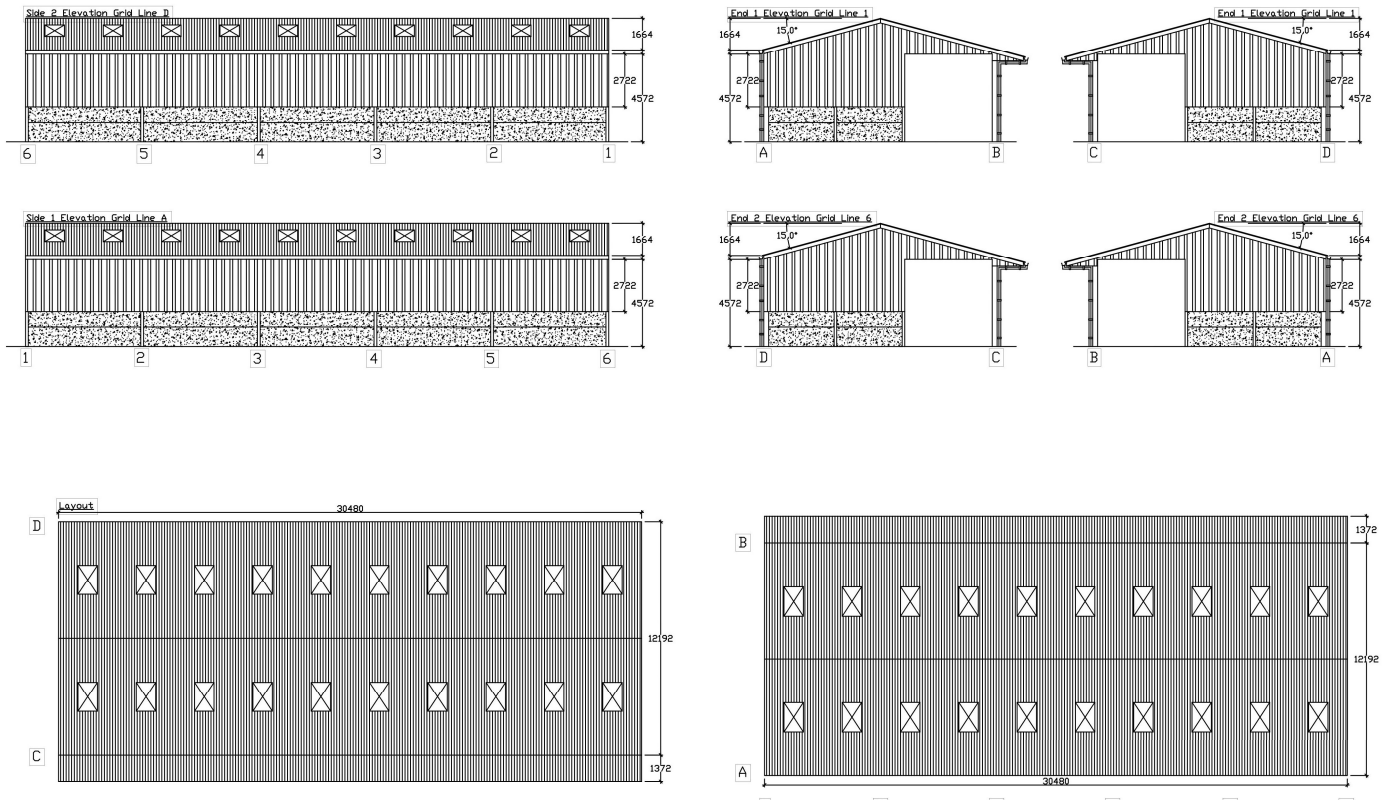


Erection of an Agricultural Livestock Building

btf



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1.0 Introduction

This statement has been made in support of an application for the erection of an agricultural livestock building at Commority Farm, Harvel Road, Meopham. Accordingly, the following documentation is included with this application.

- Proposed Site plan at 1:1,250 scale indicating the position of the proposed new building
- Existing Site plan at 1:1,250 scale showing the existing site
- Elevation drawings at 1:100 scale.
- Location Plan at 1:2500

The application site forms part of the wider farming business, A B Jones & Partners, which comprises a mixed farm amounting to approximately 202 Hectares (500 acres) employed in arable crop production and livestock rearing. The holding is loosely divided into 172 hectares of arable land and 30 Hectares of pasture. The farm business has traditionally been a tenant farm with an Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 tenancy over the holding known as Harvel House Farm, from which the farm has based its operations along with running a successful farm shop. In 2019 an application was made and granted for an agricultural storage building located on the freehold land within the farm's ownership to address the farm business continuing to lose rented buildings to development and alternative uses. The sole reasoning for the location of this farm building was that it was located within the only freehold land available to the business.

The farming business has recently had the opportunity to purchase much of the tenanted farm known as Harvel House Farm, but as part of the agreement to purchase the farm, it lost the tenancy of the buildings and farmhouse at Harvel House Farm. As a direct result of this, the farm has lost the existing farm building complex. In 2023 an application was made for two agricultural buildings to establish a new farmyard at Commority Farm. The immediate concern at that date, having lost all of the farm buildings at Harvel House Farm, was storage space for machinery and tractors, fertiliser and sprays, as well as day-to-day implement and tool storage. These buildings have now been established and provided a base for the farming operations across the wider holding. With immediate storage requirements met, the farm is now seeking to address the lack of livestock accommodation, which it has yet to replace since the loss of Harvel House Farm.

The proposed farm buildings are sought predominantly to provide accommodation for the beef cattle herd. This application seeks to secure permission to establish the new livestock building within a suitable location, with access to main roads and being within sight of residential property, whilst utilising existing trackways for access and an established hardstanding yard area.

2.0 The site

The land at Commority Farm is now the base of operations for the farming business, A B Jones & Partners. As detailed within the previous application for general storage buildings, the reason for establishing Commority Farm is the access available on to Harvel Road, being a public highway of approximately 7m width of carriageway. In contrast, the former farmyard at Harvel House farm was located on Harvel Lane, being a largely single-track carriageway that made it difficult to ensure grain and livestock lorries etc could access the farm, as well as creating significant problems with tractor movements during harvest. In addition to the improved highway access of the proposed site, the land through which the site is reached is known as 'Searchlight field' formerly housing a WW2 searchlight and as such is covered with swathes of hardstanding and rubble. This provides a useful existing trackway to the proposed buildings without the need for further operational development.

The proposed location was chosen for two further practical reasons. The first being the proximity to an existing electricity supply, located immediately to the north of Deer Spring Wood. This negates the need to install substantial tracts of underground cabling at great expense. Furthermore, being located to the north of Deer Spring Wood ensures the buildings are within sight of residential properties, directly to the north, which provides some level of security over the farm buildings as it deters thieves. The two storage

buildings have now been built and Commority Farm now provides a suitable base of operations for the farming business, allowing it to prosper after losing Harvel House Farm.

3.0 Existing Buildings

The farm has recently lost the use of the existing farm buildings at Harvel House Farm, which comprised the following:

Building	Dimensions	Use
Covered Yard	465m ²	Livestock
Hay and Fodder Store	465m ²	Storage
General Store	465m ²	Storage & Seasonal Livestock

Now that the farm business has bought the wider farm holding, the agreement required the surrender of the tenancy over the farm buildings at Harvel House Farm. As such, as of November 2023, these buildings have ceased to be available to the farm.

The farm does benefit from a farm building applied for in 2019 and comprises a 24m x 18m (432m²) general purpose storage building applied for under application reference 20191160. At the time of application, this provided the only freehold land available to the applicant to build additional required storage. However, since the purchase of the land at Harvel House Farm, the applicant has established the buildings at Commority Farm. The initial two buildings satisfied the immediate requirement to have general storage for machinery and equipment, but the farm has yet to replace the lost livestock accommodation which is now the subject of this application.

The existing buildings at Commority Farm comprise the following:

Building	Dimensions	Use
General Store	413.43m ²	Storage
General Store	413.43m ²	Storage

4.0 Proposal

This planning application seeks to gain permission for a livestock building, to support the operations of the farm business. The proposed footprint of the building will measure 30.48m x 13.564m. The total footprint of each building is therefore 413.43m², with a proposed ridge height of approximately 6.236m and an eaves height of 4.572m. The height of the proposed building is designed to allow access into the building with modern tractors for mucking out, as well as ensuring sufficient ventilation, which is critical for livestock well-being. The building is to be constructed of Steel Portal Frame construction, with pre-cast concrete panel lower elevations and profile metal sheet upper elevations, beneath a pitched fibre cement sheet roof. One side elevation will remain open with a overhang roof which enables the provision of a feed passage undercover as well as ensure sufficient ventilation through the building.

5.0 Agricultural Justification

The Farm requires livestock buildings to replace those lost at Harvel House Farm, that are yet to be replaced. The building is required primarily to house the cattle herd. Prior to losing the buildings at Harvel House Farm the business housed 110 cattle, 350 breeding ewes with lambs, 250 turkeys and a number of pigs for fattening. Upon losing the buildings, and establishing the yard at Commority Farm, the business has had to significantly reduce its' stocking numbers without the infrastructure to house them and switching to an extensive operation. Whilst this has enabled the business to continue in the short-term and bridge the disruption of moving from Harvel House Farm, it is not sustainable in the long-term. As such the business is seeking a livestock building which will enable the farm to begin to restore its livestock enterprise.

Below is set out the stocking requirements for the livestock numbers at Commority Farm:

Commority Farm - Livestock Stocking Rates

Cattle

1-2 year old finishing: bedded house including a proportion of feeding passages

Number of Cattle	Floor Space Per animal		Floor Area Requirement	
	m2	ft2	m2	ft2
Prior to loss of Harvel House Farm Buildings	110	4.8	528	5610
Presently	62	4.8	297.6	3162
Intended by 2026	110	4.8	528	5610

Sheep

Breeding Ewes with Lambs: Buildings with no internal passages

Number of Ewes	Floor Space Per animal		Floor Area Requirement	
	m2	ft2	m2	ft2
Prior to loss of Harvel House Farm Buildings	350	1.9	665	7000
Presently	280	1.9	532	5600
Intended by 2026	350	1.9	665	7000

Turkey

Finishing Turkeys (Christmas)

Number of Turkeys	Floor Space Per animal		Floor Area Requirement	
	m2	ft2	m2	ft2
Prior to loss of Harvel House Farm Buildings	250	0.46	115	1225
Presently	0	0.46	0	0
Intended by 2026	250	0.46	115	1225

As can be seen from the below stocking rates, the building is clearly required to accommodate the livestock numbers on the farm and are reasonably necessary for the agricultural business to continue, and indeed restore their business from the disruption of losing Harvel House Farm.

Whilst the farm buildings are required and designed for accommodating livestock, they will also be used for storage of tractors and machinery when the livestock are turned out onto fresh pasture in the spring.

A list of machinery that was formerly stored at the existing buildings under cover at Harvel House Farm is listed below:

New Holland 945 Baler	McConnell Balepacker
McCormick LB 8.70 big baler	Claas 250 round baler
Claas 250 disc mower	Claas 320 rake
Massey Ferguson 540 tedder	Fendt 5255L combine with 5.4m header
Konskilde grain cleaner	Kuhn Precis 1100 fertiliser spreader
Knight 24m sprayer	McHale round bale silage wrapper
Agromet 9 tonne trailer with sheep food	AS Marston trailer with pig food
Ransomes potato planter	

Much of the above has now been stored under cover at Commority Farm within the buildings granted permission in 2023. Nonetheless, there is a considerable amount of further machinery stored outside as listed below:

Massey Ferguson 6490 tractor	Cousens potato ridger
Massey Ferguson 6616 tractor	Howard potato bed former
Massey Ferguson 5420 tractor	140 wooden potato boxes
Massey Ferguson 6160 tractor and loader	Lemken Europal 5 furrow reversible plough
Manitou MLT 630 telehandler	Lemken 110 three furrow reversible plough
Massey Ferguson 34 combine harvester and 5.m header	Weaving 3m Sublift
Shelbourne Reynolds Stripper header	Weaving 4m folding discs
Grimme potato harvester	Parmiter 3m discs
Bomford 6m folding pigtail harrow	Kvernland 4m folding combination cultivator
Parmiter 9m folding arable harrows	6m folding chain harrows
Opico 6m folding ring rolls	Blench 3 leg subsoiler
Upton 3m flat roll	Krone 3m power harrow
Maschio Nordsten 3m power harrow drill combination	Kockerling AT400 min till drill
Konskilde 4 row maize drill	Accord Fertiliser spreader
5000 litre slurry tanker and injector	AS Marston dung spreader
AS Marston 10 tonne grain trailer	Massey Ferguson 10 tonne grain trailer
Marshall 16 tonne grain trailer	Bale trailers x 3
Ifor Williams TA510 livestock trailer	Ifor Williams 12 ft flat trailer
2000 litre water bowser	Bomford Kestrel hedgecutter
Kidd 3m flail topper	RSL tree shear on Hyundai LT14
Proteck 900s post knocker	Wider Muli 4wd tool carrier
Toyota Hilux Dropside	Isuzu D-max pickup
Mercedes 1317 livestock wagon	Renault Magnum grain wagon
Stock of gates, hurdles, netting and fencing sundries, steel stocks and timber	Dual wheels and spare wheels
Tractor attachments, e.g. loader buckets and forks, weights etc	Weaving 759 pan mixer

Furthermore there is a range of further implements and less wearing machinery which is also stored outside including presses, sheep, cattle and pig handling equipment and more, but these are generally considered to be durable enough to remain outside.

The farm has a significant inventory of machinery owing the range of produce it makes. Priority is currently given to machinery owing to its value, or greater susceptibility to weather and rust, or with more technical components that require being stored in weather-proof conditions. Furthermore, the farm is subject to legal requirements to ensure that all fertiliser is stored under cover and behind locked doors. As stocks of fertiliser deplete, the space created allows for the storage of further machinery.

The proposed livestock building will greatly increase the farm ability to accommodate it's livestock and enable them to re-establish their stocking numbers which were subject to considerable disruption in the move from Harvel House Farm. Furthermore, when emptied within spring months, it will further serve as machinery and general storage. As such, it is considered they are reasonably required for agricultural purposes.

6.0 Flood risk

The Environment Agency Flood Risk Map indicates that the proposed site falls within Flood Zone 1 which means the site is considered to be at low risk from flooding.

7.0 Designations

The site does not fall within any environmental, heritage or landscape designations. The site is not subject to any planning or special designations. The land does fall within the London Area Greenbelt.

The Site itself is free of the following constraints:

- National Park;
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB);
- Conservation Area;
- Regional/Country Park;
- SSSI or other locally designated wildlife sites (SNCI);
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- Ponds and watercourses
- Groundwater Protection Zone

8.0 Planning History

We have undertaken a search of the Local Authorities planning portal and found the following applications pertinent to the application site:

Reference	Application	Decision	Date
20230643	Application for a determination as to whether prior approval is required for the erection of 2no agricultural storage buildings	Prior Approval Not Required	28 th June 2023

There are no other applications pertinent to this application site.

9.0 Planning Policy

The relevant Planning Policy can be found within the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy and the Local Plan First Review (1994) – Saved Policies.

On a national level, the relevant policy can be found within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023.

The Gravesham Local Plan Saved Policies are relevant in relation to provision of Agricultural Buildings.

Policy RS1 states that all development permitted at villages and small rural towns and in the open countryside should be well designed; appropriate in location, scale, density and appearance to its surroundings; acceptable in highway and infrastructure terms; have particular regard to countryside conservation policies; and preserve and where possible enhance the character, amenity and functioning of settlements and the countryside and in the Green Belt will be subject to Policy MGB2.

Policy MGB2 requires that within the Green Belt, there will be a strong presumption against permitting new development outside the presently defined extent of urban areas and the present built-up extent of any village, unless it conforms with the open recreation functions of the Green Belt or is directly related to agriculture or other uses appropriate to a rural area. Any development approved within the Metropolitan Green Belt will be required to be sited and designed so as to maintain the open character of the area.

Policy RS6

Development will not normally be permitted in rural Kent other than at the villages and small rural towns unless:

- (i) it is demonstrated to be necessary to agriculture, forestry, the winning or import of materials or other land use essentially demanding a rural location; or
- (ii) it relates to an acceptable change of use of redundant buildings, where the change would provide the best reasonable means of conserving the character, appearance, fabric and setting of buildings which are of architectural or historic interest, or whose loss would be detrimental to the character of the countryside; or
- (iii) it consists of the acceptable re-use or redevelopment of the existing built area of redundant institutional complexes; or
- (iv) it relates to the acceptable rebuilding or modest extension of a dwelling currently in residential use in an appropriate location; or
- (v) it is the provision of public or institutional uses for which the rural location is justified; or
- (vi) it is for businesses provided for under Policy RS5.

All such development will also be subject to Policy RS1.

The proposed buildings are required for agricultural purposes and have been sited adjacent to the existing buildings at Commonory Farm so as to reduce the spread of development within the countryside. The site is well shielded by the adjacent woodland and is designed in a utilitarian agricultural style, expected within such a location.

The NPPF is supportive of development of agricultural buildings:

Paragraphs 88 & 89 of the NPPF seeks to support a prosperous rural economy through sustainable growth and expansion of rural businesses.

Paragraph 154 states that Local Authorities should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. However, exceptions include buildings required for agricultural and forestry.

10.0 Conclusion

We consider the above proposal is reasonably necessary for agriculture and in accordance with local and national planning policy. For the reasons outlined in this statement, the council are respectfully asked to grant permission for this development.