

Application 260450: Westwood Park Home Farm, London Road, Great Horkesley

1. This representation from Great Horkesley Parish Council (GHPC) urges that Colchester City Council

(a) requires that a planning application be submitted in respect of the proposed conversion to commercial use of the agricultural buildings identified on the plan numbered 2575/10A and

(b) investigates whether ongoing work elsewhere on the site, apparently to create new buildings, requires planning consent.

Conversion of existing buildings (a)

2. GHPC is aware that under certain circumstances conversion of agricultural buildings to a commercial use may take place without planning consent. In the case of relatively remote agricultural buildings, which are common, the new commercial uses could then take place without an adverse impact on neighbours. The Westwood Park Home Farm agricultural buildings are not in the least remote: there are two dwellings so close that they are unavoidably shown on the applicant's plan numbered 2575/10A and perhaps another ten close enough that residents can already hear noise from construction activities the site. The current application reveals that the need to consider the impact of the eventual use of the buildings on the lives of the occupants of these dwellings is recognised, but in the absence of a formal conditional planning consent, there will be no effective means by which those eventual uses can be regulated and enforced by the planning authority. Furthermore, once commercial use is established, the former agricultural buildings could be sold to new owners who did not recognise the need.

3. The following are matters which would be investigated were there a formal planning application and which in some cases could be regulated by condition:

- Noise: in order to ensure that the occupants of dwellings within earshot of the site are not subjected to noise nuisance from the site, the nature of the commercial activities should be controlled, as should the hours in which they can take place, for example between 0700h and 1900h. There should be no working on Bank Holidays, Sundays or Saturday afternoons. The same restrictions should apply to vehicles entering or leaving the site.
- Traffic: Plan 2575/10A shows 43 parking spaces, suggesting activity far in excess of that which was normal when Westward Park Home Farm was an agricultural business. There needs to be a highway impact assessment and liaison with the highway authority to establish how the site can be safely connected to the public highway, taking into account the anticipated increased usage. In this connection, it appears that the old farm accesses have already been widened, presumably to accommodate the large construction vehicles now visiting the site. There should also be a requirement that there be only one link to the site, because two egresses onto London Road will increase the likelihood of an accident occurring.

- During weekdays, twice daily, London Road comes particularly busy with commuter traffic rat-running between villages in south Suffolk and the car park at North Station. The applicant should provide a professionally-compiled report on this to inform the design of the formal site entrance and the placement of signage on London Road to make passing drivers aware of the new source of vehicles.
- Horses: There are several established stables on or just off London Road. Outside of commuting hours, ridden horses are a common sight on the road. It is also part of a popular route for recreational cyclists. A significant increase in off-peak traffic would constitute a significant hazard to these legitimate road users, especially in the sections of the road which are little more than one vehicle wide. In this context HGVs would be particularly hazardous, so a single route to the main road network for these should be agreed as part of a planning consent and highway signage installed to enforce it.
- Heritage impact: Seven listed buildings have access onto the 750m length of London Road to which the new commercial site would be connected. A formal application would enable the likely impact on these properties to be established and for appropriate mitigation to be provided.
- Asbestos: It is understood that some of the old building on the site have been rooved or partially rooved with asbestos sheeting. There is currently no submitted evidence that the necessary plans for safe removal and disposal of this have been approved. This is already a legal requirement that could be reinforced as part of a conditional planning consent.
- Wildlife: Another concern is the impact of the current construction activity on wildlife, particularly on bats, which dwell in many old buildings in Great Horkesley. It may be particularly significant on this site because the buildings are thought to have been out of regular use for at least a decade. While disturbing a bat habitat is already illegal, a formal application would enable the likely impact of the conversion on the ecology of the area and appropriate mitigation to be obtained. (Five species of bat are known to inhabit All Saints' Church, some 2.3km from the site.)

Construction activity not covered by application 260450 (b)

4. GHPC has now received reports that since November 2025 there has been significant new build on land adjacent to the old stables. Whilst it is recognised that in certain circumstances this could be taking advantage of permitted development rights, activity in new buildings here would unavoidably increase, for example, the noise nuisance and impact highway of the whole development. For the reasons set out above, unless there are relevant permitted development rights that cannot be set aside, the planning authority should use its powers to bring this activity to an immediate halt and require that it too be the subject of a formal planning application. Since the two building activities are effectively taking place on the same site, reports supporting the respective planning applications on, for example, noise and traffic generation, should naturally consider the combined impact on the neighbourhood and those people and animals who live there.