



Planning Committee

13 October 2022

Report of: Assistant Director for Planning and Delivery

21/01223/FUL Change of use of former airfield land to use for the import, storage, and export (B8 use) of straw for commercial purposes; construction of weighbridge and welfare building (retrospective) at Saltby Airfield, Skillington Road, Sproxton

Corporate Priority:	Delivering sustainable and inclusive growth in Melton
Relevant Ward Member(s):	Councillor Alan Hewson (Croxton Kerrial)
Date of consultation with Ward Member(s):	15 November 2021
Exempt Information:	No

1 Summary

- 1.1 The site relates to a former airfield, approximately a kilometre east of the village of Saltby. Although some of the buildings associated with the airfield use have been removed the vast majority of the hard standing has been retained and these existing fixed surfaced areas are being used for the storage of the straw bales along with the existing internal road infrastructure.
- 1.2 The site is located within the open countryside. It is accessed off The Butts to the west and from Wyville Road to the north. Two straw storage areas exist within the site, the main storage area is located centrally between with two access points adjacent to the weighbridge, with a smaller straw storage area located to the south. The main straw storage area lies 750m to the east of Saltby.



Drawing Key

- Site Area
- Other Land Under Ownership
- Outer Boundary of Straw Storage Areas
- Weighbridge / Site Infrastructure

- 1.3 The site is connected to the wider highway network via the A607 which is located approximately 3.25km or 2miles north of the site.
- 1.4 As well as the currently unauthorised straw storage, the current uses of the Airfield include arable agriculture, agricultural storage and a glider club (Buckminster Gliding Club). Areas of crop planting also exist alongside the tracks and hard surfaced runways associated with the previous aerodrome use.
- 1.5 Planning application ref. 18/00703/FUL for change of use of former airfield runway to open storage (B8) use was refused on the grounds the proposed development would be inappropriate development within the countryside and would be akin to an industrial use within a rural location which would have an unacceptable adverse impact on the immediate and wider landscape by virtue of its use, scale, design and form. This decision was appealed, and the Planning Inspector considered the main issue to be the effect of the proposed development upon the character and appearance of the countryside. The Inspector dismissed the appeal concluding the proposal would have an adverse impact upon the character and appearance of the countryside.
- 1.6 The application seeks to utilise 7.3ha of land within the site for the importation, temporary open storage, and exportation of straw. The exported straw would be taken to Sleaford Renewable Energy Plant, a straw burning non-fossil fuel energy plant. A weighbridge has been provided within the site. A storage container within the site is used as a welfare building.
- 1.7 The site currently employs 3 full time members of staff, which can increase to 6 at peak periods.
- 1.8 The application seeks to support the running of the Saltby Estate agricultural operations through farm diversification. Farm diversification in support of existing agricultural operations is supported in planning policy terms. The NPPF is supportive of a prosperous rural economy including at para.84 b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. Para 85 recognises the use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.
- 1.9 The outbound HGV route from the site has been amended so that the A607 would be accessed via Hungerton, south of Denton rather than via Croxton Kerrial which would remain the inbound route to the site from the A607. The proposed hours of operation are Mondays to Fridays between 7.00am and 7.00pm with no working outside these hours or at weekends or on bank holidays. A maximum of 40 HGVs would visit the site on any single working day.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. Approval subject to conditions set out in Appendix C.

2 Reason for Recommendations

- 2.1 Saltby Airfield remains previously developed land where there are a number of agricultural and commercial uses in various locations around this site. The siting of this proposed straw storage is not too different to these and therefore not out of character with the area. With the imposition of relevant conditions, including restricting the hours of operation and

the daily number of vehicle movements, the development is deemed to not have a detrimental impact upon highway safety or residential amenity. There are no ecology or flood risk implications. Therefore, taking all of these considerations into account, on balance approval is recommended.

3 Key Factors

3.1 Reason for Committee Determination

3.1.1 This application is required to be presented to the Committee due to receiving objections to the application from more than 10 households, contrary to the recommendation in line with the constitution.

3.2 Relevant Policies

3.2.1 The Melton Local Plan (LP) 2011-2036 was adopted on 10 October 2018 and forms part of the Development Plan for the area.

3.2.2 The Design of Development Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was adopted on 24th February 2022.

3.2.3 The Croxton Kerrial Neighbourhood Plan (NP) has reached Regulation 14 stage but has not been formally adopted, therefore very limited weight can be afforded to this document.

3.2.4 The Local Plan is up to date and consistent with the latest revised versions of Government Guidance as contained in the National Planning Policy Framework.

3.2.5 Please see Appendix D for a list of all applicable policies.

3.3 Main Issues

3.3.1 Position under the Development Plan Policies

3.3.2 Impact upon the highway network and highway safety

3.3.3 Impact upon amenity

3.3.4 Impact upon ecology

3.3.5 Impact upon the character of the area

4 Report Detail

4.1 Position under the Development Plan Policies

4.1.1 The site lies to the east of the settlement of Saltby and Melton Local Plan policies SS1-SS2 apply. The settlement hierarchy set out in Local Plan Policy SS2 defines Saltby as a rural settlement. The site lies within the open countryside 450m from the closest dwelling to the southwest, The Sidings, Saltby Road and 800m to the west on The Butts. Policy SS2 states that within the open countryside, new development will be restricted to that which is necessary and appropriate in the open countryside.

4.1.2 Local Plan policy EC2 seeks to support economic development and allows employment growth in rural areas, by amongst other things, the diversification of existing farming businesses, dependant on the nature of activities involved, the character of the site, and accessibility.

4.2 Principle of Development

4.2.1 As well as Local Plan policy EC2 diversification of agricultural and other rural businesses is supported by paragraph 84 of the NPPF. The proposal comprises the diversification of the agricultural operations on the Saltby Estate, the rental income derived from the change of use of the land would benefit the existing farming enterprise ensuring its viability. It will create new jobs and safeguard existing ones.

- 4.2.2 Saltby Estate is an agricultural enterprise covering some 3000 acres growing a wide variety of arable crops including wheat and beet. Alongside this they have a large dairy unit. The land within the application is situated within the arable area of the farm.
- 4.2.3 Straw storage has taken place on the site to some degree since August 2017. It was initially stored on the site for the purposes of agriculture for example animal bedding and mushroom compost. The amount of straw stored on the site was significantly increased to provide an emergency store for Sleaford Renewable Energy Plant. The industrial scale of the storage within the site has resulted in a material change of use of the land from agriculture to storage and distribution.
- 4.2.4 The supporting text for policy EC2 indicates that such rural economic development proposals should either involve the re-use of existing redundant buildings or be entirely contained within an existing enclosed area with no significant adverse impact upon the area. The application site is not enclosed and is largely sited away from other built forms. However, straw storage is not an alien feature within the rural landscape and is not considered to be visually incongruous in the same way as a more general storage use.
- 4.2.5 The agricultural operations on the Saltby Estate would be diversified because of the proposed straw storage. As such the proposal is supported in principle in land use terms. Other matters including the character of the site and accessibility are discussed below.
- 4.3 Impact upon the character of the area**
- 4.3.1 Policy EN1 seeks to ensure that new development is sensitive to its landscape setting. Paragraph 170 of the NPPF indicates that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
- 4.3.2 The storage areas within the site are located a long way from any neighbouring buildings, the highway, or public footpaths. However, the straw stacks within the storage areas are visible across the site as there are long range views over the surrounding, fairly level fields. Although there are some earth bunds to the perimeter of the site, these are low in height and do not fully screen the storage areas. Additionally, the storage areas can be viewed by users of the neighbouring glider club and walkers who use the site informally.
- 4.3.3 The site has been used for the storage of straw since 2017. Straw bales are produced through agricultural processes and are a familiar feature within the open countryside. The scale of the straw storage within the application site exceeds what would be deemed necessary for agricultural use. Notwithstanding this, the proposal is uniform in design with the straw bales neatly presented, the straw bales would not be stacked over a maximum height of 10 metres measured from the adjacent ground level, and a maximum of 42,000 bales would be stored on the site at any one time, all recommended to be secured by conditions.
- 4.3.4 Existing areas of hard standing have been utilised for their storage and to enable access to them. The weighbridge and the welfare building are low in height, and the welfare building is small in its scale and these features are predominantly screened from views outside of the site.
- 4.3.5 It is not uncommon to see former airfields in storage use, including The Airfield, Dalby Road, Melton Mowbray which is used for storage housing 54 storage containers, with planning permission ref.21/00759/FUL recently being granted for the erection of a further

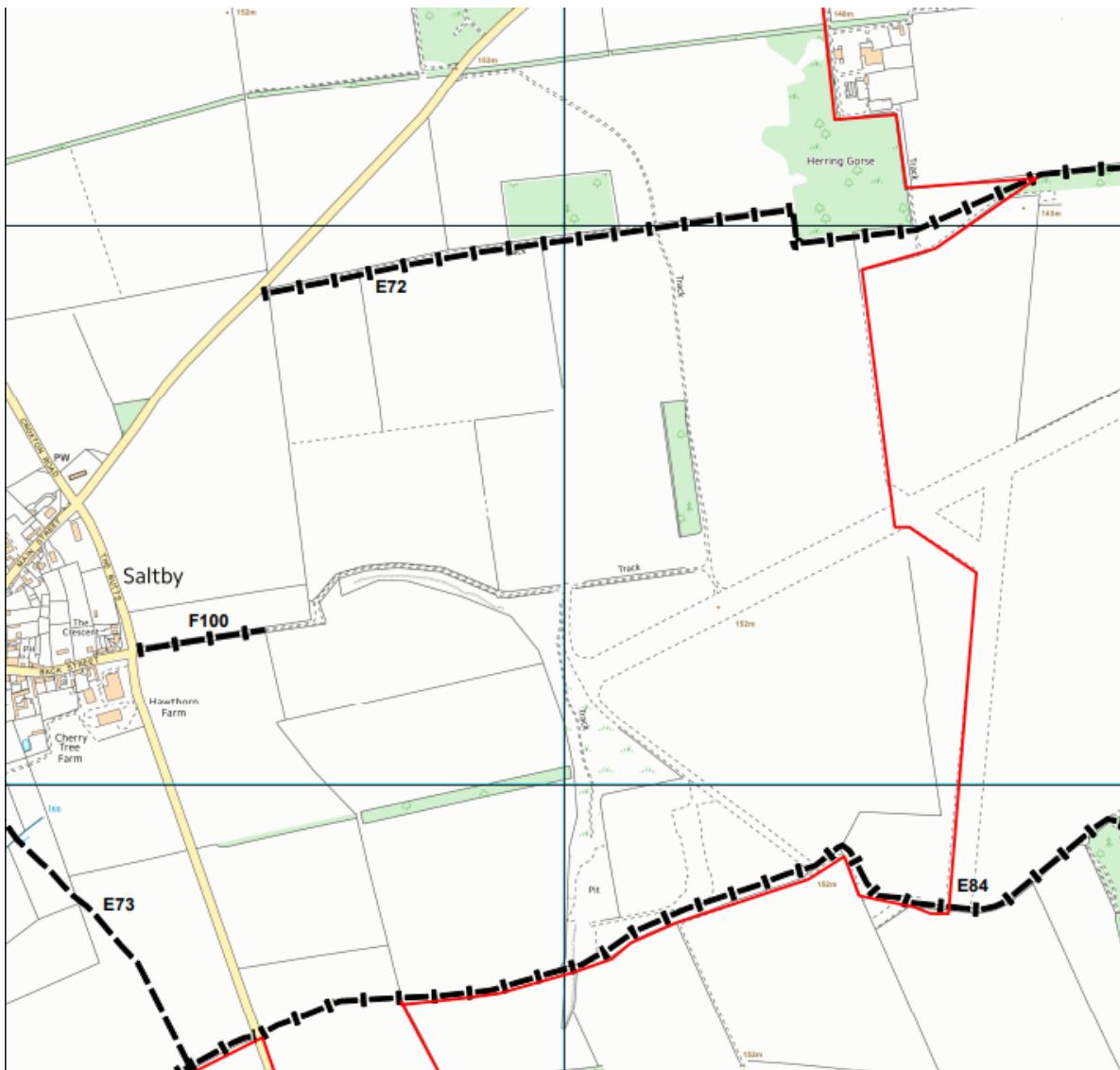
56. Unlike the previously refused scheme for the open storage of prefabricated houses, as outlined above, it is not considered that the storage of straw bales is an incongruous feature within the landscape.

4.4 Highway Safety

- 4.4.1 The NPPF Paragraph 111, which advises that "Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe." No definition of severe is provided. However, as outlined in the response from Lincolnshire County Council the Planning Inspector decisions regarding severity share common considerations:
- The highway network is over-capacity, usually for period extending beyond the peak hours.
 - The level of provision of alternative transport modes.
 - Whether the level of queuing on the network causes safety issues.
- 4.4.2 In view of these criteria, Lincolnshire Highways and the Lead Local Flood Authority do not consider that this proposal would result in a severe impact with regard to the NPPF. This view is welcomed by Leicestershire County Council as the Local Highway Authority (LHA). The LHA advise that, in its view, the impacts of the development on highway safety would not be unacceptable, and when considered cumulatively with other developments, the impacts on the road network would not be severe.
- 4.4.3 It has been demonstrated that an articulated vehicle would be able to access/egress both access points in a forward gear. Suitable visibility splays in accordance with the speed limit effect at the corresponding site access frontages can be achieved subject to amendments to the site boundary, on land which is within the Applicant's control. It is recommended that the provision of the required visibility splays is secured by condition.
- 4.4.4 With regards to the proposed re-routing the LHA do not consider it would be necessary in highway safety terms or enforceable. It is noted that Wyville Road is an unclassified road, and the proposed routing generally includes roads of a narrower width than the current route; there are no highway safety issues, and Croxton Road supports HGV movements beyond those associated with Saltby Airfield.
- 4.4.5 Regarding trip generation and traffic impacts of the proposed development it is understood that trip generation is highly seasonal, with peak trips taking place in the harvest period of September annually. Analysis of data from previous years showed that on average, during September 2020, the site generated approximately 40 HGVs per day equivalent to 3 HGV movements per hour. Of the annual HGV trips generated by the site around 10% of these two-way movements relate to the existing agricultural operations. Based on the data provided during the September peak the proposed storage use, as a worst case scenario, would generate an average of 200 two way trips per week; with no trips being generated during other months. The applicant has indicated that vehicle movements could be limited to a maximum of 40 HGVs visiting the site on any single working day.
- 4.4.6 The proposed site layout would provide sufficient parking and turning provision alongside appropriate operational measures. It is considered that the development will be self-

contained and not result in overspill to the local highway network. The site access and layout would also provide a suitable access for emergency vehicles.

- 4.4.7 Public Bridleways E72 and F100 run through the site and E84 is located just to the south, as shown on the plan below, yet it is not considered that the enjoyment of the Bridleways would be significantly affected.



- 4.4.8 Concerns have been raised in letters of objection from local residents relating to highway safety, both regarding the safety of the site access, and the impact of the vehicles on the safety of the wider road network. A report completed by ADC Infrastructure on behalf of Hungerton Farms, a neighbouring landowner, has been reviewed by the LHA. The LHA dismiss the comments that the proposal fails to promote sustainable transport modes, it misses the nuances of para.111 of the NPPF. It is not considered feasible for a site associated with the transport of straw between rural areas to promote sustainable transport methods. Although the ADC Infrastructure report states there, 'would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety' it provides no further information regarding safety but instead focuses on capacity.
- 4.4.9 As the application is retrospective, its impact on highway safety can be reviewed. The site has been in operation since 2017. Personal Injury Collision (PIC) data for the most recent

five years has been reviewed, two PICs were identified which were both recorded as 'slight' occurring in separate locations with no discernible links between the collisions or with the site. It is therefore concluded that the proposed development will not exacerbate any known highway safety considerations.

- 4.4.10 Prior to the proposed use the site was used in part for the storage of straw for agriculture, this along with other farming operations associated with the site generating an average of 84 tractor with trailer movements per week. Based on recorded vehicle movements the average across the year the proposal generates 40 HGV movements per day (1 every 18 minutes), with the maximum recorded HGV movements being 86 per day (1 every 9 minutes) since operation began. Around 10% of these movements continue to be for agricultural purposes.
- 4.4.11 Overall, for the reasons outlined above, it is considered that the proposal's impact upon highway safety would not be severe.

4.5 Impact upon residential amenities

- 4.5.1 Separation distances of 800m between the main straw storage area, and 450m between the smaller storage area, and the closest residential properties exist. The storage of the straw bales generates little in the way of noise, odours or general disturbance. For these reasons the storage itself is not considered to have an undue impact upon local occupant's amenities. The vehicle movements associated with the proposed use however, do represent an intensification over and above the existing agricultural use; and have the potential to impact upon residential amenity.
- 4.5.2 Firstly it is important to recognise that at its peak, in September 2020, the greatest number of two way vehicle movements generated by the straw storage use was 86 in one day, 7 vehicles per hour. As set out in the submission this level of activity formed part of a one-off event to fully stock the site with straw bales, which is unlikely to be a repeated. The purpose of the storage within the site is to function as an emergency store for the Sleaford Renewable Power Station. In the future vehicle movements associated with the site would still involve a level of seasonality, peaking in line with the September harvest when a degree of re-stocking would take place, and if the emergency store was required to provide straw to the power station. However, the number of HGV vehicle movements associated with the straw storage, and their hours of operation, could be controlled by planning conditions. The submission suggests hours of operation for the storage business could be limited to 0700 to 1900 Monday to Friday, and a maximum of 40 HGVs would visit the site on any single working day which is considered reasonable.
- 4.5.3 As set out in the submission, there are very large periods of the year where there are absolutely no vehicles, associated with the proposed straw storage use, at all coming to or from the site. The hours of operation would provide clear guidance as to the extent of permitted operations. However, it is important to recognise that the site is a working agricultural unit and any conditions relating to the straw storage activities would not apply to the Estate's normal agricultural activities.
- 4.5.4 Nonetheless this increase in vehicle movements to and from the site would impact upon the amenity of nearby residential properties as a result of noise and vibrations. Of relevance are those properties located on Saltby Road, Croxton Kerrial immediately to the south of the junction with the A607. These dwellings are located close to the highway and so large vehicles passing by would result in general noise and disturbance to the

detriment of their amenity. Dwellings located on The Butts opposite the southern site access would be similarly impacted. This identified harm could be mitigate by the re-routing of outbound vehicles from the site which would no longer be routed to the A607 via The Butts or Croxton Kerrial, reducing the potential impact of vehicle movements by 50%. Further to this, as outlined above, HGV movements to and from the site could be controlled by planning conditions including restricting their timing and numbers. The purpose of these controls would be in the interests of residential amenity rather than highway safety.

- 4.5.5 Although the proposed routing would not be justified in highway safety terms it would benefit the amenity of neighbouring residential properties. It would not be possible to control the direction of travel of HGV's associated with the proposed development beyond the application site by planning condition. For the same reason it would not be possible to require all straw/hay deliveries to the site to be sheeted; or for regular road sweeping to clear straw which may have been deposited on the highway. However, the applicant may wish to set these controls as part of a site, or operational management plan.

4.5.6 Proposed vehicle routing



- 4.5.7 The site access's also serves an existing agricultural business, and given its rural location there are several surrounding agricultural enterprises; therefore, there is an existing situation where large agricultural vehicles use the roads adjacent to and surrounding the site. Owing to this existing situation and given future vehicle movements would be acceptable it is considered that the proposal would not have an adverse effect on the amenity of neighbouring occupiers. In addition to this, strict operating times and limits to vehicle movements could be secured by condition to ensure that no unreasonable disturbance results from this use change.
- 4.5.8 In reality, there are very large periods of the year where there are absolutely no vehicles at all coming to or from the site but the suggested hours are considered a reasonable approach to provide clear guidance as to the extent of permitted operations and protect residents from any perceived disturbance in the evenings, early mornings and at weekends. It is of course important to also highlight that the site is a working agricultural unit and any conditions relating to the hay storage activities would of course not apply to normal agricultural activities.

4.6 Ecology

- 4.6.1 The application seeks retrospective permission for the storage of straw on existing areas of hard standing. Concerns have been raised in letters of objection received from local residents that the transportation of straw would result in some shedding along the roadside which would be detrimental to protected species, in particular grass verges designated sites of scientific interest (SSSI). Natural England, the technical consultee, have provided advice specifically on this matter and raised no concerns.
- 4.6.2 The shedding of loose material from vehicles to and from the site has also been addressed by the applicant. On site practices are in place which seek to ensure vehicles are swept before leaving the site so that loose debris is likely to be very minimal. A planning condition requiring this practice to be maintained formally has been suggested to further mitigate harm. In addition, the applicant runs regular sweeping vehicles along the Saltby Road and Wyville Road to remove any debris that does remain

4.7 Flood Risk/Drainage

- 4.7.1 As outlined above the straw bales are stored on existing areas of hardstanding. The site is located within flood zone 1 and is not an area at high risk of surface water flooding.

4.8 Other Matters

- 4.8.1 It has been questioned in letters of representation received, including from neighbouring parish councils, if the development proposed is EIA development. EIA development is defined under The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 as: development which is either— (a) Schedule 1 development; or (b) Schedule 2 development likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location. The proposal would not represent development under either Schedule 1 or 2 of the EIA regulations. Had an EIA been required guidance suggests two rules should be followed when searching for the significance of highways impacts including: road links where traffic flows are predicted to increase by more than 30% (or where the number of heavy goods vehicles is predicted to increase by more than 30%); or any other specifically sensitive areas where traffic flows have increased by 10% or more. However, as the proposal is not EIA development there is no need to assess the application further under the EIA guidance.

- 4.8.2 Concerns have been raised in letters of objection relating to the site as a potential fire hazard given the amount of straw stored on the site. Planning policies and legislation do not directly cover fire risk. In this case the safe storage of straw bales is covered by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The planning system should not duplicate other regulatory requirements, including those relating to fire safety, or seek to secure them using planning conditions.
- 4.8.3 Part of Saltby is covered by a conservation area, a designated heritage asset. The distance between the proposed storage areas, and the nature of the proposed development is such that it is not considered that the proposal would impact upon the setting of the conservation area.
- 4.8.4 The applicant has made it clear that the straw / hay storage activity is a very important aspect of the Estates operation, but it does not wish to see this result in any unreasonable impacts upon the villages of Saltby and Croxton Kerrial. The scheme has therefore been amended to introduce controls and working practices which would mitigate harm, resulting in an acceptable scheme.

5 Consultation & Feedback

- 5.1 Site notices were posted, and neighbouring properties consulted.
- 5.2 125 objections have been received from 110 households

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 Not applicable

Financial Implications reviewed by: N/A

7 Legal and Governance Implications

- 7.1 Legal implications have been included in the main body of the report. No specific issues are identified. Legal advisors will also be present at the meeting.

Legal Implications reviewed by: Tom Pickwell (Solicitor)

8 Background Papers

- 8.1 Planning application ref.18/00703/FUL - Change of use of former airfield runway to open storage (B8) use
- 8.2 Planning appeal ref. APP/Y2430/W/18/3213585

9 Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix A Summary of Statutory Consultation responses
- 9.2 Appendix B Summary of Representations Received
- 9.3 Appendix C Recommended Planning Conditions
- 9.4 Appendix D Informatives
- 9.5 Appendix E: Available Development Management Policies

Report Author:	Helen White, Planning Development Officer
Report Author Contact Details:	01664 502419 helenwhite@melton.gov.uk
Chief Officer Responsible:	Peter Baguley, Assistant Director for Planning

Chief Officer Contact Details:

01664 502359
pbaguley@melton.gov.uk