

WORSTEAD – PF/24/2474 - Demolition of part existing building and erection of new cold store together with associated plant room at Albert Bartlett Westwick, Station Road, Worstead, North Walsham

Major Development

Target Date: 25th February 2025

Extension of time: 28th July 2025

Case Officer: Alice Walker

Full Planning Permission

RELEVANT SITE CONSTRAINTS

Countryside

Landscape Character Assessment: Low Plains Farmland

Contaminated Land

HSE Major Hazards

The site lies within an area designated as a Major Hazard Site/pipeline by the Health and Safety Executive.

Landfill Gas Site

Areas Susceptible to Groundwater Flooding

EA Risk Surface Water Flooding 1 in 30 - Risk of Flooding (3.3% annual chance): 1 in 30

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

Reference PF/22/0463

Description Installation of LPG mounded tank

Outcome Approved

Reference PF/20/0453

Description LPG storage tank (capacity 25 tonnes) and container to house vaporiser

Outcome Approved

Reference PF/12/0121

Description Erection of extension to potato unloading bay and extension to acoustic screen

Outcome Approved

Reference PF/09/0711

Description Installation of odourous air treatment system

Outcome Approved

Reference PF/08/0801

Description Erection of acoustic screen

Outcome Approved

THE APPLICATION

Site Description:

The Westwick site has been used for food production for a number of decades, the site is currently used by Albert Bartlett for the processing and storage of potato products and has been since 2015. The application site (edged red) sits within the existing factory site and has

a total area of 0.34 Hectares, including access from Station Road. Development is constrained by the existing factory and the railway line.

Proposal:

Demolition of part existing building and erection of new cold store. The proposed development would provide the applicant with a new, high efficiency cold store which would hold up to 4000 pallets of frozen products at -20 degrees C, together with an associated plant room. The new store would completely replace the current on-site cold store and expand the on-site frozen storage capacity.

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

The application has been referred to committee at the request of the Assistant Director due to the application being 'a large building (primarily via its height) and having considered both the comments received on the application and the submission made by the applicant (e.g. within the 'Design and Access Statement') it is considered that the proposal raises important matters that should be discussed and determined within a Committee setting (i.e. rather than the decision being made via 'officer delegation')'.

CONSULTATIONS:

Worstead Parish Council - Objection due to concerns relating to lack of local public consultation prior to planning application. the height and scale of the proposed building and its visual impact. Concerns relating to information provided within submitted documents.

Sloley Parish Council - Objection due to visual impact and highways implications on residents and lack of economic benefits.

County Council Highways - holding objection due to concerns of potential intensification of use.

Economic And Tourism Development Manager- Support application due to significant local economic benefits.

Landscape - Object due to significant landscape impact and conflicts with EN 2 and EN 3.

Historic England - No comments

Network Rail - No response received at time of writing.

MOD Defence Infrastructure Organisation - No objection as the proposed development falls outside of MOD safeguarded areas and does not affect other defence interests.

Health & Safety Executive - No comments to make as the proposed cold store and associated plant room will have no significant effect on the numbers of people present in the consultation zone once the construction work has been carried out.

Environmental Health - No objection as existing site noise would be reduced as a result of the development.

Ward Councillor Penfold - No response received.

Ward Councillor Dixon - Objects due to lack of public consultation for a controversial application with significant local impacts. Agrees with Worstead Parish Council.

REPRESENTATIONS

38 letters of public representation were received in **objection** for the reasons summarised below:

- Height and scale of the proposed building are excessive
- Overshadowing and residential amenity impacts
- Detrimental visual and landscape impact
- Not in keeping with the local area
- Detrimental impact on highways
- Detrimental impact on wildlife and ecology
- Increased noise levels
- Heritage concerns
- Lack of public engagement
- Lack of information submitted
- Light pollution
- Inadequate justification provided

HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

Article 8: The Right to respect for private and family life.

Article 1 of the First Protocol: The right to peaceful enjoyment of possessions.

Having considered the above matters, approval of this application as recommended is considered to be justified, proportionate and in accordance with planning law.

CRIME AND DISORDER

The application raises no significant crime and disorder issues.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

The application raises no significant equality and diversity issues.

LOCAL FINANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Under Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 the council is required when determining planning applications to have regard to any local finance considerations, so far as material to the application. Local finance considerations are not considered to be material to this case.

RELVANT PLANNING POLICIES

North Norfolk Local Development Framework Core Strategy (September 2008):

Policy SS 1 Spatial Strategy for North Norfolk

Policy SS 2 Development in the Countryside

Policy SS 4 Environment

Policy SS 5 Economy

Policy SS 6 Access and Infrastructure

Policy EN 2 Protection and Enhancement of Landscape and Settlement Character

Policy EN 4 Design

Policy EN 6 Sustainable Construction and Energy Efficiency

Policy EN 8 Protecting and Enhancing the Historic Environment
Policy EN 9 Biodiversity & Geology
Policy EN 10 Development and Flood Risk
Policy EN 13 Pollution and Hazard Prevention and Minimisation
Policy EC 3 Extensions to Existing Businesses in the Countryside
Policy CT 5 The Transport Impact of New Development
Policy CT 6 Parking Provision

Material Considerations:

Supplementary Planning Documents and Guidance:

Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (December 2008)
North Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment (January 2021)
North Norfolk Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (January 2021)

National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024):

Chapter 2 Achieving sustainable development
Chapter 4 Decision-making
Chapter 6 Building a strong, competitive economy
Chapter 8 Promoting healthy and safe communities
Chapter 9 Promoting sustainable transport
Chapter 11 Making effective use of land
Chapter 12 Achieving well-designed places
Chapter 14 Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
Chapter 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
Chapter 16 Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

North Norfolk Emerging Local Plan

The Council's Emerging Local Plan was subject to a further round of examination in April 2025 and, following receipt of the Inspector's letter dated 08 May 2025, subject to completion of required Main Modifications, six-week public consultation and completion of any additional modifications, the plan is expected to be found sound and adopted in Autumn 2025. At this stage, whilst the Emerging Local Plan is capable of attracting some weight for decision making purposes, this would be considered "limited" at this stage and, in any event, there are no specific proposed new policies that would lead to a materially different planning outcome than the policies within the existing Core Strategy documents.

Main Issues for consideration:

- 1. Principle of development**
- 2. Design, landscape and character of the area**
- 3. Biodiversity & Geology**
- 4. Historic environment**
- 5. Residential amenities**
- 6. Economic benefits**
- 7. Highways and parking**
- 8. Sustainable construction and energy efficiency**
- 9. Flooding and drainage**

1. Principle of development

Core Strategy Policy SS 1 sets out the spatial strategy for North Norfolk seeking to locate the majority of new development within the towns and larger villages, dependent on their local

needs, their role as employment, retail and service centres and particular environmental and infrastructure constraints.

The application site is located within the area identified as Countryside, Policy SS 2 of the Core Strategy states that in areas designated as Countryside development will be limited to that which requires a rural location and otherwise meets the listed criterion of development permissible under the policy. Extensions to existing rural businesses is permissible under this policy.

Core Strategy Policy SS 5 relates to the economy and supports the rural economy and extensions to rural business of an appropriate scale. Policy EC 3 also supports extensions to existing businesses in the countryside provided that it is of a scale appropriate to the existing development and would not have a detrimental effect on the character of the area. Given that there would be a significant landscape impact resulting from the proposed development, a conflict with this part of EC3 has been identified. This departure is considered in the planning balance section.

In terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), paragraph 85 states that planning decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, considering both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

Paragraph 88, which provides support for a prosperous rural economy, states the planning decisions should enable the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings.

2. Design, landscape and character of the area

Policy EN 2 states that proposals should be informed by, and be sympathetic to, the distinctive character areas identified in the North Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment and features identified in relevant settlement character studies. Development proposals should demonstrate that their location, scale, design and materials will protect, conserve and, where possible, enhance, the special qualities and local distinctiveness of the area, gaps between settlements, distinctive settlement character, landscape features, visually sensitive areas, nocturnal character, the setting of, and views from, Conservation Areas.

Policy EN 4 states that all development will be of a high-quality design and reinforce local distinctiveness. Design which fails to have regard to local context and does not preserve or enhance the character and quality of an area will not be acceptable. Proposals will be expected to have regard to the North Norfolk Design Guide.

The proposal seeks the demolition of a small part of the existing building and removal of an area of plant and stored materials in the southeast corner, along with the erection of a cold store and plant room with an internal floor area of 1,400sqm and an external floor area of 1,526sqm. The cold store has a maximum height of 34.6m above ground level, which is 6.2m higher than the existing flue located immediately to the north-east. The scale of the proposed building has been determined by the site area available within the existing industrial site and the most efficient layout of racking to accommodate the required 4,000 pallets of finished goods.

The proposed cold store would be a steel-framed structure clad externally with steel-faced composite panels which form an insulated envelope in conjunction with the roof. The proposed colour scheme would be a mid-grey at low level and light grey to the upper portion to break up the main elevations. These colours have been proposed to reduce solar gain as well as

being similar to those used on existing buildings within the site. The plant room walls would be formed in unpainted, fair-faced concrete blockwork to provide a high level of sound insulation. The shallow pitch roof covering would be finished with a light grey membrane similar to that of the proposed cold store.

Landscape Effects

A Landscape and Visual Appraisal (FPCR, February 2025) was submitted in support of the application. Consideration of the baseline landscape resource is made through reference to the defined Landscape Types as classified in the National Character Area 79, North-east Norfolk and Flegg and the North Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment (2021 SPD) (Low Plains Farmland).

The Low Plains Farmland Landscape Type is characterised by an open, rural, arable landscape with large fields and low hedges and a network of quiet rural lanes. North Walsham is the main settlement with other built form comprising small rural villages and dispersed farmsteads. Defined valued features include a strong rural character with a sense of remoteness and tranquillity with dark night skies and quiet rural lanes, historic parks and designed landscapes, woodland cover and remnant semi-natural habitats, historic market towns and villages and long views with church towers as landmark features.

In assessment of the landscape effects, the Appraisal relies on the presence of the two existing chimney stacks to diminish the magnitude of change that would result from the construction of the proposed development. The relatively enclosed location of the site is also used to claim limited long-range views from the surrounding landscape as is the degree of visual separation between the development and St Mary's church tower in Worstead. A Moderate Adverse long-term effect on the localised landscape is concluded, with Minor Adverse effects on the overall Low Plains Farmland Landscape Type.

Officers consider that impacts have been under-assessed due to the extremely large scale of the proposed development. The two flues already rise well above the surrounding tree canopies. The building is 6.2m taller than the existing flues and considerably larger in mass. Although viewed with the stacks, the building will introduce a large prominent and incongruous feature into a predominantly undeveloped rural landscape. Although located within the existing industrial complex, many of the existing buildings are of a much lower height and are not at all discernible from a distance. The proposed building will therefore be viewed predominantly only with the two flues for context.

As set out above, Policy EN 2 requires that the location, scale, design and materials of development proposals will protect, conserve and enhance the key characteristics and valued features of the defined Landscape Types. Given the expansive open undeveloped arable setting and the scale of the proposed development, Officers consider that this proposal would not be compliant with the aims of the relevant policy criteria and this would weigh against the grant of planning permission.

Visual Effects

The visual effects of the proposed development are assessed by way of a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) and assessment at selected viewpoints. The ZTV demonstrates that views to the development would intermittently be gained, particularly from up to 5km distant to the south-east and the north and north-east of the site.

Some of the viewpoints requested by officers including a long-range view from Dilham Road approaching Worstead from the east and from the public footpath to the north, Worstead FP1 have not been included in the viewpoint selection.

Of the 14 different types of visual receptor identified (including residents, road, rail and Worstead station users, visitors to St Mary's church, users of the recreation ground in Worstead), all were predicted to experience long term Adverse Effects as a result of the proposed development.

One group (residents on Station Road) were predicted to experience long term Moderate/Major Adverse Effects, seven groups are expected to be impacted by long term Moderate Adverse Effects and six groups to be impacted by Minor-Minor/Moderate Effects.

This demonstrates a considerable degree of visual harm resulting from the development.

There is no analysis of the visual effects from each of the ten identified viewpoints (A to J), nor is there any cross referencing of the effects from these viewpoints with the relevant type of receptor which renders the viewpoints fairly unhelpful. However, the Photomontages which have also been provided are useful in giving an accurate depiction of how development would sit within the landscape.

It is accepted that distant views of the development would be intermittent due to intervening vegetation and landform, but the extremely large scale of the building means that these intermittent views would be more frequent and far reaching, detracting from the historic church towers that are the predominant defining landmark features in this relatively flat arable landscape.

Mitigation

The only direct mitigation of visual impact is the finish appearance of the 34.6m tall building. The upper section is proposed to be a Grey White non-reflective finish (RAL 9002) with matching rainwater goods, and the lower section a darker grey (Agate Grey RAL 7038). The darker section is intended to marry with the surrounding tree canopy height so that from distant views it blends more effectively with the darker vegetation from the right height and the upper section is paler to blend with cloud cover. Photovoltaic panels are proposed on the roof, and these would be screened by a parapet wall.

No vegetation will be removed to facilitate the development and no planting is proposed.

Officers consider that the development would result in landscape and visual harm that will be most adverse in close proximity to the site and would reduce in effect moving away from the site. Given the extremely large scale of the proposed building, the effects would be experienced from numerous locations over a considerable distance from the site (up to 5km). This would be moderated to some extent by topography and intervening vegetation, but adverse landscape and visual effects will be permanently experienced, and in this regard, there would be conflict with Core Strategy Policy EN2. This conflict will need to be weighed in the planning balance.

3. Biodiversity & Geology

The Council has a duty under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 to have full regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity which extends to being mindful of the legislation that considers protected species and their habitats and to the impact of the development upon sites designated for their ecological interest.

Core Strategy Policy SS 4 states that areas of biodiversity interest will be protected from harm, and the restoration, enhancement, expansion and linking of these areas to create green networks will be encouraged.

Policy EN 9 states that all development should protect the biodiversity value of land and buildings and minimise the fragmentation of habitats, maximise opportunities for restoration, enhancement and connection of natural habitats and incorporate beneficial biodiversity conservation features where appropriate. Proposals which cause a direct or indirect adverse effect to nationally designated sites, other designated areas or protected species will not be permitted unless:

- *they cannot be located on alternative sites that would cause less or no harm;*
- *the benefits of the development clearly outweigh the impacts on the features of the site and the wider network of natural habitats; and*
- *prevention, mitigation and compensation measures are provided.*

The policy also states that development proposals that would be significantly detrimental to the nature conservation interests of nationally designated sites will not be permitted.

The proposed development is located within the existing active industrial site. With regards to The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, the application has been screened out of the Schedule 1 and 2 as it does not meet the threshold to require an Environmental Impact Assessment.

Officers consider that given the location and nature of the proposed development, protected habitats and species are unlikely to be affected and so there is no requirement for Ecological Assessments to have been submitted.

In relation to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), the application site is considered to be de minimis.

4. Historic environment

Policy EN 8 of the Core Strategy states that development proposals should preserve or enhance the character and appearance of designated assets, historic buildings/structures, monuments, landscapes and their settings through high quality, sensitive design. Where required, development proposals affecting sites of known archaeological interest will be required to include an assessment of their implications and ensure that provision is made for the preservation of important archaeological remains. This policy also seeks to ensure that the character and appearance of Conservation Areas is preserved, and where possible enhanced, encouraging the highest quality building design, townscape creation and landscaping in keeping with these defined areas.

It should be noted that the strict 'no harm permissible' clause in Local Plan Policy EN 8 is not in full conformity with the guidance contained in the latest version of the NPPF. As a result, in considering the proposal for this site, the Local Planning Authority will need to take into consideration the guidance contained within Chapter 16 of the NPPF as a material consideration. A number of these requirements are alluded to below, including the requirement to balance any less than substantial harm to a designated heritage asset against the public benefits of the development.

Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) 1990 (LBCA) states that with respect to any buildings or other land within a conservation area, in the exercise of relevant functions under the Planning Acts, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (LBCA) places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a

Listed Building, or its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest it possesses.

Whilst the application site itself does not directly affect designated heritage assets, there is the potential for indirect impacts upon the setting of nearby assets resulting from the scale and massing of the proposal.

In respect of the Grade I listed Church of St Botolph, Grade II* listed Old Hall Farm and its Grade II listed barn, Grade II listed Lacey Farm and the Worstead Conservation Area, Officers broadly concur with the findings of the submitted Settings Appraisal document in which it is considered that no harm would be caused to their setting or overall significance. The remaining assets are discussed in more detail below.

Grade I listed Church of St Mary

In respect of this important asset, Officers also do not disagree with the general analysis of the stage 2 assessment. Equally, officers are mindful of the definition of setting within the NPPF which includes the line; *"Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve"*.

Therefore, whilst there is currently relatively little intervisibility between the application site and the church, and the proposed building would not currently block or impinge upon any key or designed views of the listed building, circumstances can change where vegetation is concerned, not only seasonally but also in terms of disease and loss.

Consequently, a building of the scale proposed would have the potential to challenge the primacy of the heritage asset when viewed from certain public receptors to the south and west. Even if this were to be happen, however, the level of harm would be relatively modest in real terms given the separation distance between the application site and asset. Nonetheless, this potential to move from a purely landscape impact to a heritage impact will be factored into the overall planning balance.

Grade II listed Swan Cottage & New Lane Cottage

Situated closer to the application site, these two buildings are modest and characterful vernacular cottages. Since their construction, rather than an entirely rural context, the backdrop to both buildings is now in part informed by utilitarian structures and infrastructure. Trees now surround the properties to screen the neighbouring factory, however the tree cover provided is only seasonal.

Looking at the impact of the existing factory, at present the majority of the existing structures on site are low rise and do not have a significant upstanding presence above the intervening planting (which also includes that to the west of the train track). The exceptions to this are the flues which project above the height of the tree line. These, however, are relatively slender in their form and although clearly intrusive within the landscape, are not excessively so.

By contrast to the flues, the proposed development would create additional height and significantly more high-level solidity and volume. The result would be a monolithic edifice which would tower above its surroundings and would dwarf the listed buildings. Whilst the tree cover would provide a partial filter (depending upon the time of year), it is considered that the proposed building would loom large in the background of both buildings.

On this basis, officers take issue with the Settings Appraisal where it concludes that the *"proposed development will therefore result in no harm to the significance of these two grade II Listed Buildings"*. Indeed, rather than concentrating on the views eastwards out of the factory, Officers would attach equal (if not more) weight to the westward views out from the cottages. Here, the presence of a disproportionately sized new build in the background would

influence and detrimentally affect the experience and enjoyment of these heritage assets over and above the current impact of the factory.

In terms of quantifying the magnitude of this harm, it falls in the 'less than substantial' category for NPPF purposes. Within this wide classification, allowance must be made for the impacts being indirect and directional, and for the current presence of the factory and railway line. Hence the harm would lie towards the lower end of this spectrum. However, as stated in paragraph 212 of the framework, great weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets irrespective of the level of harm. Therefore, an approval can affectively only be issued in the event of the identified harm being outweighed by other materials considerations or public benefits accruing (para 215 refers).

Given that harm to heritage assets has been identified, as set out above, the duties placed on the Council under Section 66 and Section 72 of the LBCA will need to be given careful consideration as part of the planning balance.

5. Residential amenities

Policy EN 4 states that proposals should not have a significantly detrimental effect on the residential amenity of nearby occupiers. Policy EN 13 states that all development should minimise and reduce forms of pollution and development will only be permitted where there are not unacceptable impacts on general amenity, health and safety of the public and air quality, amongst other matters.

Paragraph 3.3.10 of the North Norfolk Design Guide states that residents have the right to adequate privacy levels, nor should new development lead to any overbearing impacts upon existing dwellings. Existing residents should also be kept free from excessive noise and unwanted social contact. To ensure a degree of privacy between neighbouring properties guidance minimum separation distances are set out within this section of the document.

Loss of privacy/ Overbearing/ Overshadowing

There is not considered to be any unacceptably adverse impacts in terms of loss of privacy or overlooking from the proposed development as there are no windows and the store would not be manned.

In terms of overshadowing and overbearing, the proposed cold store would be located at the rear of the site to the southeast. The nearest residential properties are located on Station Road to the front of the site. whilst the 34m tall building would be clearly visible it is unlikely to be overbearing to the residents of Station Road given the separation distances and the existing factory and boundary treatments acting as a buffer.

The application is supported by a shadow study which shows the impact of development on the nearest residential dwellings along Station Road. In any month, approximately 4 dwellings out of the 23 along Station Road are affected by overshadowing. These properties are largely affected by the development in the mornings during winter months, when the sun is lower in the sky. The submitted report demonstrates that the shadow leaves the boundary between Albert Bartlett and the dwellings at the latest by 10:40 in December and 10:15 in January. This reduces each month, by March the shadow has left by 07:39 and by June there is no overshadowing of those dwellings. The full timings are set out in the table below.

Month	Time shadow leaves the boundary	Month	Time shadow leaves the boundary
January	10:15	July	06:04
February	08:02	August	07:09
March	07:39	September	08:22
April	07:10	October	09:36
May	06:00	November	09:52
June	No Shadow	December	10:40

The Law Commission 'Rights of Light' 2014 report states that 'The legal system recognises the value of natural light inside buildings, but because available space is finite it has to strike a balance between the importance of light and the importance of the construction of homes and offices, and the provision of jobs, schools and other essentials.

BRE guidance sets out the British standard in relation to daylight / sunlight requirements. BS EN 17037 domestic requirement for sunlight recommends that an indoor space should receive a minimum of 1.5 hours of direct sunlight on the equinox. It is also recommended that at least half of an assessed outdoor area should receive at least two hours of sunlight on the equinox. Given a small number of properties on Station Road would be affected for a maximum period of 2 hours and 36 minutes of the day, and this would be either during the early mornings or during the winter months when there is generally less sunlight, the impact is considered on balance to be acceptable.

Noise

The application is supported by a Noise Impact Assessment prepared by Adrian James Acoustics June 2025.

Albert Bartlett's Westwick factory is situated next to a group of approximately 30 houses, 1 km south-west of the village of Worstead in Norfolk. The houses back on to the north-west boundary of the factory. The other site boundaries are bordered by farmland. The nearest dwelling to the south-east is a former crossing keeper's cottage on Broad Road, approximately 300 m from the site. There is also a holiday let in woods approximately 100 m east of the site boundary. There is a railway line along the eastern site boundary. The north-west area of the factory site consists predominantly of offices and storage facilities. The noisiest processes are generally situated in the east and south-east of the site.

The proposed works would see the existing cold store and associated plant removed and replaced. The representative background sound level to the rear of houses on Station Rd was established by unattended measurement. The background level is 43 dB LAF90,T when the factory is running during the week and 37 dB LAF90,T at weekends. The representative background sound level at all nearby receptors is dictated by sound from the factory which runs day and night. Dwellings on station Road are subject to slightly lower background levels at the weekend. The representative background sound level to the east is dictated by the odour scrubber fan which runs during the week and at weekends.

The representative background sound level at the former keeper's cottage on Broad Road was determined from attended measurements and is 41 dB LAF90,T during the week and at weekends. The representative background sound level at New Lane Cottage was determined by calculation and is 48 dB LAF90,T during the week and at weekends. The specific sound level of the new noise sources was found using a CadnaA model. The combined specific level of the new sources would be 20 dB(A) at the houses on Station Road, 36 dB(A) at the former keeper's cottage and 43 dB(A) at New Lane Cottage.

The BS 4142 assessment methodology indicates that there would be a low impact as the

rating level is below the background sound level at all nearby dwellings.

Environmental Health Officers have considered the report and would not object given the proposed noise levels would be less than existing.

Odour

In 2009 permission was granted for the installation of an odourous air treatment system. The proposal seeks only to upgrade and expand the on-site cold storage facilities which are already present on the site, given there would be no additional production/ processing of food products there is not considered to be any additional odour concerns as a result of the proposed development.

6. Economic benefits

Whilst the application seeks purely to increase and improve the cold storage facilities on the site, there would be economic benefits associated with the proposal.

The Design and Access Statement states that since taking over the Westwick site in 2015 the applicant has invested more than £25m in new machinery and building refurbishment to upgrade site standards and working conditions and to improve product quality and capacity.

It is anticipated that the site would use around 65,000 tonnes of potatoes at Westwick in 2024-25, with some 39,000 tonnes (around 60% of the total) being grown on local farms within a 50-mile radius. The value of this local spend is around £10m a year with East Anglian farmers and supporting businesses. Sourcing potatoes within this radius also minimises the distance that local farmers have to travel in order to deliver potatoes to a processing facility, with other plants being located further afield in the UK.

Albert Bartlett provides 344 full-time equivalent jobs at the Westwick site, as well as directly and indirectly supporting farmers, suppliers, hauliers, contractors and many other local businesses. The Site relies on assistance and support from outside contractors to maintain the safe, efficient operation of the site. Locally Albert Bartlett uses around 15 major local contractors and their spend within them exceeds £3m each year, with a further £2.3m to smaller, bespoke contractors.

Given the proposal seeks additional storage which would be unmanned and entirely mechanised, it is not proposed that there would be any increase to employee numbers as a result of the proposed development. There is also no capacity to process additional goods at the site and therefore production levels would not increase beyond what is undertaken now.

However, should it become unviable for the applicant to continue to produce and store their frozen potato products on the site as existing, then it is anticipated that the production volume would transfer to Europe using potatoes grown on the Continent.

Economic Growth Officers support the application as it is recognised that the proposal would bring operational efficiency and energy savings to the business. More widely, it is acknowledged that the applicant contributes around £50m a year to the local economy from the Westwick site through labour pay rates, potato procurement, local business support and investment into local community projects, with a projected turnover of £75m.

Officers consider that the economic benefits of the proposal would attract substantial positive weight in favour, which need to be weighed in the planning balance.

7. Highways

Core Strategy Policy CT 5 requires development to be designed to reduce the need to travel and to maximise the use of sustainable forms of transport appropriate to its particular location and to provide safe and convenient access for all modes of transport, including access to the highway network. Proposals should be served by safe access to the highway network without detriment to the amenity or character of the locality. The expected nature and volume of traffic generated by the proposal should be accommodated by the existing road network without detriment to the amenity or character of the area or highway safety.

As set out above, paragraph 89 of the NPPF states that “decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport.

In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport).”

Paragraph 109 of the NPPF seeks to ensure that developments understand and address potential impacts on transport networks, identify and pursue opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use. Paragraph 115 requires development to prioritise sustainable transport modes, provide safe and suitable access for all, be designed to meet national guidance and standards, and mitigate any significant impacts on the transport network.

Paragraph 116 states 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, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios”

Access

There is no proposed change to the existing site vehicle and pedestrian access points off Station Road.

With regards to access to the proposed building itself, there is no requirement for access by fork-lift trucks either from internal spaces or externally. Finished goods would continue to be dispatched via existing loading docks located to the southwest of the proposed development area.

The proposed development would not hinder or affect areas used for goods vehicle parking or turning.

Trip Generation

On average approximately 290 pallets of bulk product are transported off-site to third party cold storage facilities each week which then need to be brought back to the site in order to be packed for final distribution to their customers. These proposals would overcome the need for the movement of pallets between sites.

The proposal would increase the on-site cold storage facilities so the full cold storage requirements could be achieved on site. As a result, Heavy Goods Vehicle movements would be reduced as there would be no requirement to transport products to and from the off-site third-party storage which are currently necessary to use due to the prevailing storage constraints. In providing the full amount of their cold storage requirement on site this would remove 8-weekly goods vehicle movements.

A total of 82 vehicles per week would still leave site with finished goods and this will remain unchanged as production levels would not increase.

Highways Officers have considered the proposals and state that the information provided within the Design and Access Statement does not adequately address concerns regarding potential intensification of use of the existing site given the proposed storage level and have provided a holding objection based on the existing southern access on Station Road visibility being restricted in both directions by third party boundary hedgerow. From the required 2.4 metre setback position visibility is restricted to 32 metres in the critical traffic direction (north-east) and 13 metres to the south.

Taking into consideration the officers concerns, there are no planning restrictions on the current production output levels of the site. The applicant has also stated that the factory lacks the capability to increase process run times across the week and is constrained by the requirements to both clean & maintain the factory, therefore the process lines would continue to operate at the current level (Sunday Night through to Friday Evening). Given there would be no increase in production, 82 vehicles per week would still leave the site with finished goods. The need to store off site would be removed, reducing 8 weekly vehicle movements for storage purposes. Officers therefore consider that the scheme proposes an overall betterment in existing highways movements.

Parking

There is no requirement to provide additional staff parking as there would be no increase in employee numbers.

Overall, notwithstanding the holding objection from NCC Highways, Officers consider that a refusal based on highway grounds or potential intensification of use could not be sustained. The proposal would broadly comply with Core Strategy Policies CT 5 and CT 6.

8. Sustainable construction and energy efficiency

Core Strategy Policy EN 6 states that all new development will be required to demonstrate how it minimises resource consumption, minimises energy consumption compared to the current minimum required under part L of the Building Regulations, and how it is located and designed to withstand the longer-term impacts of climate change. All developments are encouraged to incorporate on site renewable and / or decentralised renewable or low carbon energy sources, especially in those areas with substation capacity issues. The most appropriate technology for the site and the surrounding area should be used, and proposals should have regard to the North Norfolk Design Guide.

The existing cold store and plant is outdated and inefficient and currently runs at a constant 100% capacity in order to maintain the temperatures required to ensure safe storage of frozen food products. The upgrade would allow compressor efficiency to be improved by 20-30% through enhanced machinery tolerances and advances in speed control and technology. The electrical motors within the compressors, evaporators and condensers would be in accordance with latest European standards, offering a further 5-8% improvement in efficiency. Furthermore, the current freezer system uses water for cooling of the equipment, which is not required for the proposed new plant and machinery which would save approximately 2.8-million litres of water per annum. Additional surface water would be recycled and used within factory processing.

The proposed facility would be constructed using low conductivity insulation panels and incorporate highly energy efficient refrigeration equipment to minimize its power requirement

in providing a stable temperature of -20 degrees C. The 200mm thick cladding and roofing panels proposed would offer a reduction in heat gain of approximately 30% over traditional materials and thicknesses.

The new cold store would require only a minimal level of lighting as staff do not need to enter it on a day-to-day basis, due to the fully automated storage equipment system. Photovoltaic solar panels would be installed on the roof to provide a renewable energy source.

The above factors contribute towards the applicant's aim of a 42% reduction in operational carbon emissions by 2030 and becoming net-zero by 2040.

Goods vehicle movements would also be reduced by 8 weekly journeys due to not having to transport products to and from off-site storage facilities.

The proposed development would ensure the applicant's long-term viability at this site, enabling it to continue to use locally grown potatoes and thereby reducing food miles. Reducing capacity or indeed loss of the factory would increase longer distance vehicle journeys to deliver the grown products to other facilities around the country.

Officers consider that the proposal would accord with relevant Development Plan Policies.

9. Flooding and drainage

Policy EN 10 of the Core Strategy states that the sequential test will be applied rigorously across North Norfolk and most new development should be located in Flood Risk Zone 1. The policy also states that appropriate surface water drainage arrangements for dealing with surface water runoff from new development will be required. The use of Sustainable Drainage Systems will be the preference unless, following an adequate assessment, soil conditions and / or engineering feasibility dictate otherwise.

The site is located within Flood Zone 1. Much of the site is hard surfaced with concrete slab. The proposed development is located within an area of the site with existing concrete paving plus the area of existing building to be demolished. The surface water from these areas drains into the factories existing rainwater harvesting and treatment system. It is proposed that the new roof areas would continue to discharge to this system and be recycled for use during the processing stage. It is considered that there would be no significant increase in surface water discharge as result of the development in accordance with Policy EN 10.

Planning Balance/ Conclusion

The proposal seeks to construct a new cold store and plant at the Albert Bartlett site on Station Road, outside the village of Worstead. Under Policy SS 2 in Countryside locations extensions to rural businesses are supported in principle.

With regards to residential amenity there would be some improvement to existing noise levels from the factory as the new cold store would be able to run more efficiently than the existing store. However, the height and scale of the new store would create some overshadowing of nearby properties on Station Road, at worst this would be limited to less than 3 hours of a morning. The impact of this is considered to comply with the BRE British Standards of rights to light and would be acceptable under Policy EN 4. Whilst detrimental impacts would arise, Officers consider that these adverse impacts do not amount to significantly detrimental impacts on residential amenity.

Less than substantial heritage harm has been identified to heritage assets. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. In the case of less than substantial harm, this should be weighed against any public benefits generated by the development.

There would be a significant Landscape impact, which is most adverse in close proximity to the site but would be mitigated by distance away from the site. Given the large scale of the proposed building, the effects would be experienced from numerous locations over a considerable distance from the site (up to 5km). Although those impacts would be moderated to an extent by topography and intervening vegetation, the adverse landscape and visual effects will be permanently experienced. This landscape and visual impact would be contrary to the aims of Core Strategy Policies EC 3 and EN 2.

In terms of the benefits of the scheme, the proposed cold store would provide efficiencies, improving the on-site storage capacity and utilising more energy efficient equipment. The new equipment would run more efficiently and at a reduced noise level when compared to existing plant on site. The volume of HGV movements would also be reduced by 8 per week as the need to transport products for storage off site would be removed.

The site is an important source of employment in North Norfolk employing people to work within the site but is also supplied by a number of local farmers, hauliers and contractors. If the site were no longer economically viable then Albert Bartlett have indicated that they would relocate the site most likely to Europe and this would have a significantly detrimental local economic impact not only for people directly employed but for suppliers including the farming industry.

On balance, it is considered that the wider public benefits including economic and sustainability benefits would outweigh the identified amenity, landscape and heritage harms. This positive balance and appropriate mitigation enable a departure from Development Plan policies EC 3 and EN 2.

RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVAL subject to conditions relating to the following matters:

- Time limit
- Development in accordance with approved plans
- Materials
- External Colour
- Details of Machinery / Plant

Final wording of conditions and any others considered necessary to be delegated to the Assistant Director – Planning