

MADDOX PLANNING

PLANNING

STATEMENT

LONDON & MANCHESTER

0845 121 1706

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**TOTTERIDGE CITY FARM
FEBRUARY 2021**

DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

Erection of a classroom structure, an agricultural barn, polytunnels, a greenhouse, associated structures and pathways.

TYPE OF APPLICATION

FULL PLANNING PERMISSION

APPLICANT

PROJECT GROW LIMITED

LIST OF SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

1. Arboriculture Assessment, prepared by Greengage;
 2. Architectural plans and drawings, prepared by Assemble;
 3. CIL form;
 4. Design and access statement, prepared by Assemble;
 5. Drainage report, prepared by KP Associates;
 6. Ecology appraisal, prepared by Greengage;
 7. Farm management plan, prepared by GROW;
 8. Transport report, prepared by Yes Engineering; and
 9. Visual Impact Assessment, prepared by Assemble.
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DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The adopted development plan comprises:

1. The London Plan, 2016;
2. Barnet's Development Management Policies Development Plan Documents (2012);
3. Barnet's Core Strategy (2012); and
4. Barnet's Proposals Map.

The emerging development plan comprises:

1. Publication London Plan version, December 2020; and
2. Draft Local Plan (Reg 18) Preferred Approach Consultation (January 2020)

POLICIES MAP

The following designations on the policies map are particularly relevant:

1. Green Belt; and
 2. Article 4 (6) land removing agricultural permitted development rights.
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PLANNING POLICIES

The following adopted and emerging planning policies are particularly relevant:

| Document | Policy number | Policy title |
|--|---------------|--|
| Barnet's Development Management Policies | DM01 | Protecting Barnet's character and amenity |
| | DM02 | Development standards |
| | DM03 | Accessibility and inclusive design |
| | DM04 | Environmental considerations for development |
| | DM13 | Community and education uses |
| | DM15 | Green Belt and open spaces |
| | DM16 | Biodiversity |
| Barnet's Core Strategy | DM17 | Travel impact and parking standards |
| | CS NPPF | National Planning Policy Framework – Presumption in favour of sustainable development |
| | CS1 | Barnet's place shaping strategy – protection, enhancement and consolidated growth – the Three Strands Approach |
| | CS5 | Protecting and enhancing Barnet's character to create high quality places |
| | CS7 | Enhancing and protecting Barnet's open spaces |
| | CS9 | Providing safe, effective and efficient travel |
| | CS10 | Enabling inclusive and integrated community facilities and uses |
| The London Plan 2016 | CS11 | Improving health and well being in Barnet |
| | CS13 | Ensuring the efficient use of natural resources |
| | 1.1 | Delivering the strategic vision and objectives for London |
| | 2.18 | Green infrastructure: the multi functional network of green and open spaces |
| | 3.1 | Ensuring equal life chances for all |
| | 3.18 | Education facilities |
| | 5.3 | Sustainable design and construction |
| | 5.11 | Green roofs and development site environs |
| | 7.4 | Local character |
| | 7.5 | Public realm |
| 7.6 | Architecture | |
| 7.16 | Green belt | |

| | | |
|-------------------------|------|------------------------------------|
| | 7.19 | Biodiversity and access to nature |
| | 7.21 | Trees and woodland |
| | 7.22 | Land for food |
| Publication London Plan | GG3 | Creating a healthy city |
| | D4 | Delivering good design |
| | S3 | Education and childcare facilities |
| | G2 | London's Green Belt |
| | G4 | Open space |
| | G5 | Urban greening |
| | G6 | Biodiversity and access to nature |
| | G7 | Trees and woodlands |
| | G8 | Food growing |

OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Other material considerations (such as national planning policy and supplementary planning documents, area action plans and design briefs) include:

1. National Planning Policy Framework, 2019;
2. National Planning Practice Guidance;
3. Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2016-2026;
4. Green Infrastructure - Supplementary Planning Document (October 2017); and
5. Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (October 2016).

RELEVANT ON-SITE PLANNING DECISIONS

| Reference/address | Description | Status/decision date |
|-------------------|--|--|
| B/04262/10 | Use of field to the north of the site (area 22723sqm) as school playing field involving levelling for sports use, new pedestrian and vehicular access and the erection of a new boundary fence. Use of existing school playing field (area 22775 sqm) as public open space. | Approved subject to conditions 19 January 2011 |
| 19/5037/FUL | Conversion of the existing outdoor sports facility into a MUGA (multi use games area) with new access ramps and steps to sports hall entrance. Replacement of existing fencing and installation of new pedestrian gates. Provision of cycle parking and floodlighting to MUGA. | Approved subject to conditions 16 December 2019 |
| 19/6686/FUL | Change of use of land to be used as a City Farm with educational farming. Erection of animal shelter, raised planters, chicken coops, beehives, introduction of | Approved subject to conditions 3 August 2020 |

| | | |
|-------------|---|---------|
| | new paths and pedestrian access and associated alterations to landscaping. | |
| 20/4676/CON | Submission of details of condition 3 (external materials), 9 (proposed lighting), 10 (hard and soft landscaping), 11 (temporary tree protection plan), 12 (landscape management plan and ecological management plan), 13 (site enclosure and proposed fencing), 14 (cycle parking spaces and cycle storage facilities), 15 (pedestrian footpath access), 17 (raised planters and internal fencing and gates), 21 (car parking management plan), 22 (refuse and recycling collection strategy) and 24 (storage of animal waste) pursuant to planning permission 19/6686/FUL dated 13/08/2020 | Pending |

RELEVANT OFF-SITE PLANNING DECISIONS

| Reference/address | Description | Status/decision date |
|---|--|--|
| Sweet Tree Fields Marsh Lane London NW7 4EY 19/0581/RCU | Use of agricultural land for care farming with retention of ancillary buildings, structures, pathways and access road (retrospective application) | Approved subject to conditions 19 December 2019 |
| Farmland, Forty Hall Farm, Forty Hill, Enfield, EN2 9HA TP/10/1151 | Erection of replacement barn for storage of hay. | 4 November 2010 |
| Farmland, Forty Hall Farm, Forty Hill, Enfield, EN2 9HA LBE/11/0027 | Change of use from storage/agricultural to D1 community use as an activity space supporting learning, training and volunteering for Forty Hall, involving works of repair and reinstatement, together with replacement glazing throughout. | 30 July 2012 |
| Forty Hall Farm, Forty Hill, Enfield, EN2 9HA P12-03088PLA | Re-build of two derelict agricultural buildings (building 13 and 17) with the addition of 3 rooflights to building 17. | 20 May 2013 |
| Forty Hall Farm Forty Hill Enfield EN2 9HA 20/00846/FUL | Installation of portacabin for use as toilet block. | 5 May 2020 |
| Sutton Community Farm 40A Telegraph Track Little Woodcote Estate Carshalton SM6 OSH DM2019/00376 | Erection of a single-storey barn for use as storage and for the packing of vegetables with the extension of the gravel track on the site. | 16 April 2019 |
| Sutton Community Farm 40A Telegraph Track Little Woodcote Estate Carshalton SM6 OSH | Erection of a single-storey barn for use as storage and for the packing of vegetables with the extension of the gravel track on the site. | 15 April 2020 |

URBAN GREENING FACTOR

Urban greening factor: 0.6

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APPENDICES

1. Letters of support

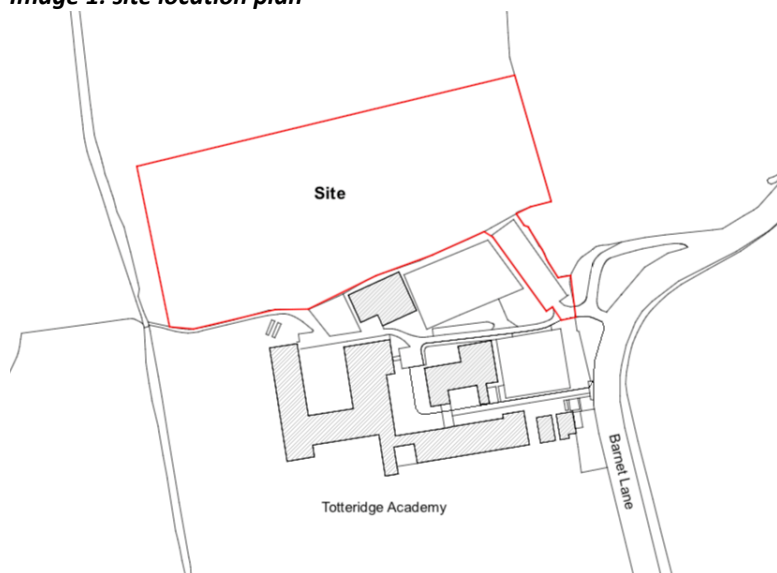
1.0 INTRODUCTION TO GROW AND PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 This application is submitted on behalf of GROW. GROW is a charity that was set up in May 2019 that aims to transform young people's relationship with food, the land and each other. GROW runs a community farm on land adjacent to The Totteridge Academy ('TTA') and also teaches a life-skills educational programme to students at TTA. The GROW curriculum aims to engage students with nature and teach them about nutrition, health and wellbeing. The aims of GROW are to build confidence and nurture wellbeing; to cultivate new relationships with nature and the outdoors; and to give everyone the tools to shape their own future and make positive changes in the world.
- 1.2 GROW's farm is located adjacent to TTA and provides a sustainable source of food for the school canteen and sells produce to the local community. Since its launch, GROW has been teaching its curriculum to 296 students every week. Headteacher Chris Fairbairn credits GROW with helping to transform the school's culture "...by encouraging our pupils to ask bigger questions and understand their place in the world."
- 1.3 GROW's farm is envisaged to be the first of many such farms that will be established across the UK. GROW is launching its second site in Spring 2021 and aims to deliver its curriculum to every secondary school in the UK by 2030.
- 1.4 Since March 2020, GROW has sold over £10,000 worth of organic, affordable produce to local people and businesses and has provided over 300 hours of volunteering opportunities for local people. GROW has also delivered training through its traineeship programme to four women, three of whom now work in the sustainable food sector.
- 1.5 GROW has been operating its farm on land adjacent to TTA for the past six months and has integrated itself into the life of the school. Through an educational programme focused on food and farming, mental and physical well-being and philosophical thinking, GROW aims to provide students with the skills, knowledge and tools to reach their full potential.
- 1.6 At TTA, GROW teaches 296 students per week. In order for students of TTA to be able to access the site throughout the school year, and for the GROW farm to be able to operate as a place of food production, it is essential that an insulated classroom space is provided, as well as an agricultural storage barn, greenhouse and set of screw-anchor polytunnels.
- 1.7 As the GROW farm is already up and running and the land available is adjacent to a school, it is difficult to see how these conditions could be easily replicated on another site. The Headmaster of TTA and the school's administration have given their support for this project to go ahead to be able to fulfil its purpose. Crucially the site is adjacent to, but not part of, the school, allowing it to operate independently as a public farm and have its own facilities, providing benefits to, and able to be accessed by students, as well as members of the public. The GROW team have already raised the necessary capital budget to fund the construction of the classroom, barn, greenhouse and polytunnels and there is widespread support for the project, meaning it is fully deliverable on the site.

1.0 SITE AND AREA DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 The site address is Land North of The Totteridge Academy, Barnet Lane, London N20 8AZ. The site area is 22,723sqm. The site is located to the west of Barnet Lane, to the south of High Barnet and north of Totteridge.

Image 1: site location plan



- 1.2 Following approval of planning permission in August 2020 (ref. 19/6686/FUL) the site is in use as a City Farm with educational farming (Sui Generis). The site comprises an area of open grassland located to the north of The Totteridge Academy (TTA), Barnet Lane. The permission for educational use with animal shelter, raised planters, chicken coops, beehives and pedestrian path access routes from TTA has since been implemented. The site has no current public access. The applicant, through the GROW educational programme works in conjunction with TTA to engage young people with nature, through teaching the values of nutrition and well-being in an immersive agricultural setting.
- 1.3 Hedgerow and a palisade fence run along the perimeter, substantial hedgerow containing a number of mature trees is found on the southern boundary, partially screening the sports hall and music classroom that are located close to the southern site boundary. The site slopes slightly down to the north and west. The site is accessed through the school car park, which is secured by a metal gate located in the south eastern corner of the site. Two cycle stands are located near the entrance on the south east corner.
- 1.4 The site is located within designated Green Belt land and within Article 4 (6) land that removes permitted rights for agricultural uses on the land. A Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), the London Loop footpath and the Dollis Valley Green Walk are located to the north of the site. The site is situated within a Flood Zone 1, meaning that it has a low probability of flooding.
- 1.5 The boundary of the Totteridge Conservation Area lies beyond the south boundary of TTA but the site itself is not in the setting of the conservation area.
- 1.6 As noted, to the south the site adjoins TTA which comprised a number of buildings ranging from one to three storeys. Closest to the boundary of the site is the sports hall, one of the tallest buildings on the adjoining site.

2.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

2.1 The proposed description of development is:

“Erection of a classroom structure, an agricultural barn, polytunnels, a greenhouse, associated structures and pathways”

2.2 The proposed development comprises the construction of a classroom, barn, greenhouse and three polytunnels for use in conjunction with the farm. The classroom building is comprised of a single 105sqm classroom and two 4sqm accessible composting WCs. The barn is proposed to be uninsulated and comprises a 145sqm packing, preparation and storage space, and two secure 11sqm storage spaces for tools and food. Polytunnels are scaled to their proposed use, incorporating 45sqm of space per polytunnel. In addition, the timber frame Dutch greenhouse provides 50sqm of space.

LAYOUT

2.3 The Dutch greenhouse is situated to the north of the yard and Barn. Raised beds are also located in a cluster enclosed by a low rise brick wall, for the purpose of growing soft fruits. Three polytunnels are proposed to be located in the southeast corner of the site where two of them can receive full sun throughout the day. The third is situated in a shaded spot adjacent to the hedge on the southern boundary in order for it to be used to grow shade-needing mushrooms.

SCALE AND MASSING

2.4 The barn and classroom are both a single storey. The classroom has a ridge height of 4.5m and the barn 4.6m. This scale is similar or smaller to standard single-storey agricultural buildings. The polytunnels and greenhouse are standardised and entirely typical with the agricultural character, the greenhouse comprises a ridge height of 3m whilst the polytunnels have a ridge height of 3.5m.

EXTERNAL APPEARANCE

2.5 The barn and classroom are proposed to be clad in a dark stained overlapping timber boards with both roofs clad in red Onduline panels, corrugated bitumen sheets typical of local agricultural buildings. The classroom structure is proposed to be timber frame well insulated building whilst the barn will be uninsulated. The greenhouse is proposed to be a timber frame Dutch greenhouse with a clear varnish finish and the polytunnels are standardised screw anchor polytunnels made with steel tube hoop structures and polythene cladding.

LANDSCAPING

2.6 A significant proportion of the land will be maintained as open grassland. Along the western and northern perimeters of the site is a hedge, to the east and south will remain the existing trees and hedgerow. An aggregate pathway runs from the new site entrance and also through the centre of the site linking the site entrance to the proposed agricultural buildings and structures. The proposed material provides an essential level for transporting materials and produce whilst also creating a weatherproof surface to allow for wheelchair accessibility to the classroom, barn, yard, raised beds, chicken coops, animal shelter and polytunnels.

ACCESS AND PARKING

2.7 There are two pedestrian entrances to the site, through the existing vehicular entrance from the car park at the south east corner alongside an additional proposed pedestrian entrance on the southern perimeter located west of the existing sports hall. The vehicular entrance will remain in the south east corner. The TTA's existing 44 car parking spaces that are located just south of the proposed site will be used to facilitate any visitors to the farm.

3.0 CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material consideration indicates otherwise. This section therefore assesses the proposal against the development plan policies outlined above and examines relevant material considerations where appropriate. The assessment draws upon the suite of application documents listed at Section 1 of this statement. The main planning considerations are considered to be:

- Principle of the proposed development;
- Impact on the character of the area;
- Residential amenity;
- Ecology;
- Impacts to trees; and
- Highways.

PRINCIPLE OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.2 Planning permission reference: 19/6686/FUL was granted in August 2020 for the change of use of land for use as a City Farm with educational farming; erection of animal shelter, raised planters, chicken coops, beehives, introduction of new paths and pedestrian access; and associated alterations to landscaping. This permission has since been implemented, meaning the site is now in mixed agricultural/educational use. This application is for the construction of a classroom, barn, greenhouse and three polytunnels for use in conjunction with the farm. These buildings and structures are required in order for the farm to successfully operate from the site.

3.3 As discussed, the site is located within the Green Belt. As such, impacts to the Green Belt are considered in detail below.

Impacts to openness

3.4 As set out in the Framework, the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

3.5 Therefore, in developing the proposals for the site, impacts to openness have been considered. The submitted design and access statement includes a section that considers the impacts of the proposal on public views of the site. There are very few public views available of the site. However, the design and access statement includes views of the site from the London Loop footpath that is located to the north of the site. The site is well-screened from the London Loop by mature vegetation and trees, meaning there are limited public views of the site available. The document demonstrates that even where there are gaps in the vegetation, the proposed barn and classroom would have very limited visibility. Whilst it is acknowledged that the buildings are being constructed on an open field, there will be very limited opportunities available for members of the public to be able to see the buildings. Furthermore, the proposed buildings are limited in scale, as they are low-level and single storey in height. They are also agricultural in style meaning they will integrate into the backdrop of the farm and will not be visually intrusive.

3.6 It is therefore considered that the visual impacts of the proposed development will be limited due to the low-level nature of the buildings proposed, and the limited availability of public views of them. Whilst it is acknowledged that the proposals will have minimal impacts on the openness of the Green Belt as the site currently comprises of undeveloped land, it is not considered that the proposals will result in any visual harm to the Green Belt.

Impacts to five purposes of Green Belt

3.7 As set out in the Framework, the five purposes of the Green Belt are:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

3.8 The impacts of the proposal on each of these purposes is considered below.

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

3.9 The site is located within the Green Belt located between the built up areas of High Barnet to the north and Totteridge to the south. The site comprises of a field located adjacent to the school that owns it. The proposal is for a classroom and barn that will be utilised by the GROW farm that is located on the site. The wider site is already built up, as it includes the school buildings. Providing two additional buildings (one in educational use and one in agricultural use) is not going to result in 'unrestricted sprawl' to a large built up area as the site does not adjoin a large built up area. It is well separated from the built up areas located to the north and south of it, and as such, will not result in urban sprawl.

To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

3.10 As noted, the site is located between the built up areas of High Barnet to the north, and Totteridge to the south. Constructing two agricultural/educational buildings on the site will not result in the convergence of these two built up areas. With the buildings in place, Totteridge and High Barnet will still be well-separated by open fields, and will not merge into one another.

To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

3.11 The proposed development is located on a field located adjacent to the school that owns it, and the buildings are proposed to be utilised by the GROW farm for educational and agricultural purposes. As such, whilst it is acknowledged that the development is proposed on a greenfield site, it is required to be in this location as the buildings are proposed to be utilised by the farm. As discussed above, the buildings are agricultural in style and are considered to result in minimal harm to the openness of the Green Belt. It is therefore considered that due to the agricultural nature of the buildings proposed, they are appropriate for their setting. Although they are proposed on an open field, they cannot be accommodated anywhere else due to their intended use.

To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

3.12 The site itself is not located within the setting of a historic town. Whilst there is a conservation area located to the south of the site, the site is not located within the setting of it. As such, the proposal would not impact on the setting or special character of any historic towns.

To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

3.13 The proposal is for the construction of a classroom and a barn for use in conjunction with the farm that is already operational on the site. The buildings are required to be located on the farm itself to enable it to successfully operate from the site. It would not be possible to locate the buildings on previously developed land in a different location, as the buildings are required to be located on the farm itself. Therefore, whilst it is acknowledged that the proposal would not assist with urban regeneration, this is not possible in this instance due to the agricultural nature of the proposed buildings and their requirement to be located on a greenfield site (the farm).

3.14 It can therefore be concluded that the proposal will not result in harm to any of the five purposes of the Green Belt that are set out above. Although the buildings will be constructed on an open field, they are required to be due to their intended use, and it would not be possible for them to be accommodated elsewhere.

Very Special Circumstances

- 3.15 As discussed, the site is located within the Green Belt. Paragraph 143 of the Framework states: *Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.* Paragraph 144 states: *When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.*
- 3.16 As set out above, it is not considered that the proposal will result in any harm to the openness of the Green Belt due to the limited scale of the development proposed; the agricultural style and appearance of the proposed buildings; and the limited availability of public views in which the development will be visible in. In addition, the impacts of the development on the five purposes of the Green Belt have been considered above, and it is concluded that the proposal will not result in harm to any of these purposes.
- 3.17 It remains the applicant's view that the use that is operational on the site is predominantly an agricultural use, meaning the proposal for structures and buildings associated with the agricultural use (such as the barn, polytunnels and greenhouse) is not considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. However, as the Council has asserted that it considers the use to be a mixed educational and agricultural use (Sui Generis), in accordance with paragraphs 143 and 144 of the Framework, the 'very special circumstances' associated with the proposed development are set out in detail below.

Requirement for shelter to enable GROW to continue to operate during periods of bad weather

- 3.18 The planning permission referred to above has been implemented and is operational on the site. As such, the site is currently being used for educational farming, with pupils at the Totteridge Academy participating in lessons on farming and associated activities covered by the GROW curriculum out on the field. At present, a temporary solution is in place that seeks to provide some shelter on the field during periods of bad weather, including wind, rain, snow, hail and sleet. Such poor weather is common in the UK, particularly over the autumn, winter and spring months, but can occur year-round. The temporary solution is shown in the image below and is formed by a parachute attached to a pole. This solution is wholly inadequate as the shelter is provided by a parachute that is open sided, moves in the wind and does not provide any warmth or shelter from wind and rain.

Image 2: Temporary shelter provided by parachute



- 3.19 The educational farming use is now operational on site. However, when bad weather occurs during a teaching session outside on the farm, GROW is often required to abandon the lesson completely and take pupils back inside within the main school. This arrangement is disruptive for pupils and impedes GROW's ability to successfully deliver its curriculum. The classroom is necessary to provide quick and easy access to shelter if bad weather unexpectedly arrives. As such weather often only lasts for a brief period, the classroom would provide essential shelter for brief periods without causing the significant disruption to lessons that results from transporting a class of pupils back to the main school building.
- 3.20 In addition, the educational farming site is also used by community volunteers and young people from external educational settings. The planning permission also allows six Corporate Volunteer Days annually whereby a maximum of 35 volunteers are permitted on site and four Fun Days annually allowing the site to open at the weekend with up to 70 members of the general public. On occasions such as the Volunteer Days and Fun Days and also when people from external educational settings visit the farm, it is not possible to use the school for shelter due to safeguarding procedures. In cases of poor weather, volunteers and students either get wet and cold or they have to leave the site completely. This hinders GROW's ability to successfully operate from the site, particularly on the Volunteer and Fun Days which are limited in numbers and occur infrequently. Further to this, with no shelter on site it prevents GROW from working with disabled and higher need participants, as shelter is essential for such participants.

Requirement for classroom to be provided out on the field to immerse pupils in the farm environment and deliver the unique educational opportunity provided by GROW

- 3.21 The classroom is required to be provided on the farm not only to provide shelter during bad weather, but in order to provide a teaching environment that is immersed in the farm and separate and distinct from the main school building.
- 3.22 GROW's curriculum covers the following modules:
- GROUND: this module introduces pupils to the principles of horticulture, farming and environmental issues. Activities include growing and harvesting fruit and vegetables and looking after farm animals and bees. These lessons are delivered out on the farm (as much as possible).
 - THINK: this module is focused on nurturing independent thinking and developing critical thinking skills. Activities include structured group discussions that are facilitated to explore big ideas and questions.
 - FLOW: this module combines yoga, mindfulness and breath-work and aims to improve overall mental and physical well-being and manage any stress and anxiety students may experience.
- 3.23 The GROW curriculum is intended to be delivered in the setting of the farm rather than a standard classroom as GROW lessons are intended to break up students' everyday routine through providing a different style of teaching and learning. GROW's curriculum is intended to provide not only different subject matter to the traditional educational curriculum but is intended to be delivered in an outdoor setting that is immersed in nature. It is therefore essential that the classroom is constructed on the farm as it will enable GROW to successfully delivery its curriculum in a unique setting that is distinct from the everyday classrooms located within the school.
- 3.24 A number of letters of support have been submitted with this application from parents, the headteacher of the Totteridge Academy and the Greater London Authority that are appended to this document at Appendix A. Of particular relevance, the letters received from parents and TTA's headteacher outline the positive impacts GROW has had. A letter received by Anne Slane highlights the benefits of GROW and notes: *'our daughter, who is now in Year 8 at The Totteridge Academy, has been lucky enough to benefit from Forest School through the Grow project and has overcome a fear of dirt and OCD tendencies as a result. Learning mindfulness has been extremely beneficial to her and she is enjoying growing as a hobby.'*

- 3.25 A letter received from another parent, John Jenkins, notes:

'Grow promotes some of the most important aspects in all our lives, especially in current times - health, wellbeing, fitness, mindfulness, connection to each other and the natural world. We believe these aspects serve to enhance academic learning on many levels and Grow has provided an inspiring new dimension to our Son's learning...'

'The new multi-purpose building and barn would enhance Grows ability to bring more fresh grown produce to the school canteen and local businesses. It would create a purpose built space for practical activities, classes and workshops with the children, further strengthening Grows positive impact on our Children and the local community.'

- 3.26 The letter from the headteacher of GROW (Chris Fairbairn) states that through the GROW curriculum, *'students have learned valuable new skills and spent more time outside, all of which has complemented and enhanced both their learning and wellbeing.'* The letter also states *'we fully support GROW's latest planning application for the classroom and associated buildings and we urge you to consider the wider positive impact of the project: on the landscape, for educational purposes; to further develop young people's health and well-being, and for the local community. We have huge local support for this project and are keen to develop it further with the help of the classroom and buildings for in-school and outreach work.'*

- 3.27 Another letter from parent Marta Gutowska notes:

'My son is in Year 9 at the Totteridge Academy and he absolutely loves all Grow lessons. He enjoyed all the learning with the farm module being the most exciting and educational part for him. It is a shame that the previous planning application has been refused and children cannot benefit fully from all the exciting plans Grow has for the children not only in Totteridge Academy but also for other schools in the area...

'The farm is not as accessible to children as it could be as it is lacking a pathway, you need wellingtons to access it during wet season, also having outdoor classroom would benefit enormously teaching and enable after school clubs, workshop and other activities to be run on site. Children and local residents could spend more time on farm...

'Postponing planning applications to much needed investment on the farm is robbing our children valuable experience and is just not fair that some generations just would not have a chance to experience nature lessons.'

- 3.28 These letters highlight the unique educational opportunity that GROW provides for students and volunteers at the Totteridge Academy, and demonstrate the range of benefits that students are gaining as a result of GROW's curriculum. The proposed classroom is required in order to ensure that GROW can continue to operate from the farm and broaden the range of classes and activities that the farm delivers.

Lack of alternative sites

- 3.29 The proposed classroom is required in order to ensure GROW can successfully deliver its curriculum. It is required to be provided in this location as there are no other alternative sites in the area where the facility can be accommodated. The site is unique as it comprises a farm located adjacent to a school. There are no other established farms in the locality located adjacent to schools where GROW could operate from instead. The site provides a unique opportunity whereby the farm can be utilised to deliver lessons for pupils without there being a requirement to travel a significant distance from the school, it is just a short walk away from the main school building. As such, the development cannot be provided elsewhere on a site that is not within the Green Belt, as there are no other farms available that are located adjacent to schools.

Community need

- 3.30 The proposed classroom is required as it will enable further volunteering activities to take place during the school holidays and weekends. Whilst volunteering currently takes place on the farm, it is limited during periods of bad weather. Providing a classroom on the farm will enable volunteers to take shelter during spells of bad weather, rather than abandoning volunteering sessions completely due to the current lack of shelter on the farm.
- 3.31 Volunteering on the farm is beneficial to the local community. The benefits provided by volunteering opportunities on the farm have been particularly evident over the last year when restrictions and social distancing measures that are in place due to COVID have limited the opportunity to socialise with others and carry out recreational and leisure activities that are usually possible, such as going to a gym class or the

cinema. The farm provides an essential outdoor space for volunteers to utilise, which is particularly key at the moment as a number of people do not benefit from having private gardens or balconies. The farm therefore offers a place where volunteers can safely meet others outdoors (when permitted) and undertake practical activities such as growing and harvesting food. These activities are beneficial for well-being and mental health, and also provide a local source of organic food and employment opportunities. Providing the classroom on site will enable volunteering sessions to continue on site during poor weather and will widen the range of activities that are on offer to volunteers.

3.32 Several letters of support have been received for the application that highlight the benefits of the farm for volunteers. The letter of support received from Marta Gutowska states: *'During the lockdown I have been volunteering at the Grow farm which was a life enhancing experience for me.'*

3.33 The supportive letter received from Anne Slane notes:

'The Grow project has been a real asset to the local community to date. The project provides excellent opportunities for all ages to get involved in working together towards something positive.'

'The opportunities we have experienced are unique and so important to families and individuals providing a new positive added dimension to Barnet.'

'For those who don't have gardens or would like to know more about growing it is a fantastic opportunity to learn, socialise and experience the benefits of nature. We have found that this is something that is not easily accessible elsewhere in the Barnet area.'

3.34 These letters demonstrate the value of GROW within the local community and the benefits it provides through its volunteering opportunities, which are not available elsewhere in the locality of the site. The delivery of the proposed classroom would broaden and further the volunteering opportunities the farm offers.

Barn, polytunnels and greenhouse

3.35 The proposed barn, polytunnels and greenhouse are agricultural structures that are typically located on farms. These buildings and structures are agricultural in design and would blend into the existing agricultural landscape. As these structures will have an agricultural use, they are not considered to constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt. They are required in order for the farm to successfully operate from the site and are considered to be appropriate as they will be used for agricultural purposes. It is therefore considered that 'very special circumstances' exist and the development should therefore be considered to be appropriate.

Summary of VSC

3.36 As set out above, paragraph 144 of the Framework states: *When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.*

3.37 Overall, the benefits the proposal delivers are considered to be substantial and significantly outweigh the limited harm the proposal causes to the Green Belt. In summary, the benefits include the following:

- Provision of a classroom and barn on the farm itself which will enable GROW to effectively operate on the site throughout the year, in all weathers. This is considered to be a significant benefit to TTA pupils and the wider community, whose participation in farming activities are currently limited due to the lack of adequate shelter on the site.
- Provision of the classroom and barn on the site will enable GROW to deliver its curriculum to pupils on the farm itself, outside of the classroom setting. This is considered to be a unique offer and therefore a significant benefit of the development.
- An additional benefit of the proposal is that there is a lack of alternative sites where the development could be accommodated. The classroom and barn are required to be delivered on

the farm itself, as it is located adjacent to TTA. There are unlikely to be any other schools that are located adjacent to fields that could be utilised as a farm. The fact that the TTA is supportive of the use of the field as a farm is a substantial benefit, as there are unlikely to be other opportunities for similar developments to be delivered adjacent to schools.

- Finally, providing the classroom and barn on the site will enable further volunteering activities to take place on the site during the school holidays and weekends. This is considered to be a substantial benefit of the proposal due to the positive impacts volunteering activities have on mental health and well-being. Furthermore, there are limited opportunities in the local area for volunteering, particularly on a farm. As such, the farm offers a unique opportunity for volunteering in the local area, which will be enhanced through the provision of a barn and classroom on the site.

- 3.38 Overall, it is considered that the substantial benefits the proposal delivers outweigh the limited harm the buildings cause to the openness of the Green Belt. 'Very Special Circumstances' are therefore considered to exist, meaning the development is considered to be acceptable in principle, in accordance with paragraph 144 of the Framework.

IMPACT ON THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA

- 3.39 The proposed development will introduce new buildings associated with the existing educational farming use. Policy CS5 of the Core Strategy states that the Council 'will ensure that development in Barnet respects local context and distinctive local character creating places and buildings of high quality design'. Policy DM1 of the Development Management Policies states, that 'development proposals should be based on an understanding of local characteristics. Proposals should preserve or enhance local character and respect the appearance, scale, mass, height and pattern of surrounding buildings, spaces and streets.
- 3.40 The proposed new buildings include a classroom, a barn building, three polytunnels and a Dutch greenhouse. The buildings are proposed to be a single storey, timber frame buildings similar to typical agricultural barn buildings found in Hertfordshire. The classroom and barn are proposed to be clad in dark stained overlapping timber boards with both roofs clad in red Onduline panels, corrugated bitumen sheets. Further details of the proposed design of buildings are included in the submitted design and access statement.
- 3.41 The buildings are to be of an appropriate scale and sited close to the existing tree lined boundary to limit the visual impact. Due to the boundary treatments, which provide a high degree of screening of the site from the public highways, the character of the area is largely preserved. Whilst it is acknowledged that there will be views of the proposed buildings and activity from public vantage points to the north, the appropriate scale and materials selection are considered to limit the impact on the character of the area sufficiently.
- 3.42 In light of the above, it is considered that the proposed development complies with policies CS5 and DM1 and will not have an adverse impact on the character of the area being of an appropriate, sensitive design that reflects the functional agricultural use of the buildings.

RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

- 3.43 The south boundary of the site lies around 240m to the closest residential properties along Barnet Lane and Oaklands Road to the south. Given this significant distance, it is considered that the proposal would not harm the residential amenity of the closest neighbouring residents as a result of adverse noise or odour impacts as the change of use of land for use as a City Farm with educational farming; erection of animal shelter, raised planters, chicken coops, beehives, introduction of new paths and pedestrian access; and associated alterations to landscaping has been implemented.
- 3.44 The significant distance from the closest neighbouring residents means that the proposal for the construction of a classroom, barn, greenhouse and three polytunnels would not adversely impact their visual amenity. Also, considering the nature of the surrounding area, the site is screened by dense shrubs, trees and hedges further lessening the visual impact of the proposal. Further to this, the proposed barn and classroom have been located to the southern boundary so as to ensure they are viewed with the existing

school sports hall in the background. The submitted Visual Impact Assessment by Assemble details where the proposals could be visible from beyond the site boundary.

- 3.45 The proximity to the school is not considered to be an issue as any noise coming from the farm is highly likely to be significantly less than the noise levels that arise throughout the day from the school. In addition, the GROW curriculum is now functional with the TTA as such the students use the existing farm throughout the week, weather conditions permitting for educational use.
- 3.46 Accompanying the application is a farm management plan. This sets out the existing hours of use of the farm, how deliveries will take place and the maximum number of animals on the farm. The proposal for a classroom and a barn would not impact on the existing function of the farm with regards to hours of use, deliveries and number of animals.

ECOLOGY

- 3.47 Policy DM16 of the Development Management Plan notes that the Council will seek the retention and enhancement, or the creation of biodiversity. Where development will affect a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (of relevance due to the proximity of such a designation to the north of the site) and/or species of importance, the Council will expect the proposal to meet the requirements of London Plan policy 7.19E. Policy 7.19E seeks to avoid adverse impact to the biodiversity interest and minimise impact and seek mitigation.
- 3.48 The application is accompanied by a preliminary ecological appraisal prepared by Greengage. The findings of the ecology surveys concluded that there is high value habitat for nesting birds associated with the hedgerow and trees. The appraisal concludes that as this habitat will be retained, no further surveys were required. The appraisal also notes that there is low value habitat for reptiles, therefore recommending no further surveys. The appraisal then notes that the site is located within a dark landscape so provides value to commuting bats. The proposal does not incorporate lighting the field during the hours of darkness therefore it is considered that the proposal would not negatively impact on any commuting bat activity across the site. The site contains small areas of habitat of potential value for hedgehogs. Suitable ground floor landscaping is recommended by Greengage, such as the provision of gaps in fencing throughout the site.
- 3.49 The application seeks to retain and enhance the existing habitats whilst creating a more diverse habitat for native species on site through the introduction of a wildflower meadow, log piles, beehives, bird and bat boxes and bug hotels in line with recommendations from the ecological appraisal. The proposal is therefore compliant with policies 7.19E of the London Plan and DM16 of the Development Management Plan.

IMPACTS TO TREES

- 3.50 Policy DM01 of the Development Management Plan supports the provision of new habitat including tree planting whilst also seeking to adequately protect existing trees and their root systems.
- 3.51 The application is accompanied by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment also carried out by Greengage. The crowns and stems were inspected from the ground using the 'Visual Tree Assessment' (VTA) method. All trees under assessment have been considered with a total of 14 trees and 2 tree groups identified within or adjacent to the proposed development area.
- 3.52 The tree survey notes that the quality of the surveyed trees varies significantly, with a mix of Category A through to Category U trees. The submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment prepared by Greengage confirms that the proposed site layout, ensures all on site plantings and constructions are located outside the Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of retained trees. As such special construction techniques are therefore not required.
- 3.53 If the recommendations in this report are adhered to (namely the installation of suitable tree protection fencing), all retained trees should be suitably protected throughout the development.

- 3.54 A tree planting campaign has recently been undertaken at the site which will more than adequately mitigate for the loss of a small section of G1 which is considered to be of a low category species. Accordingly, the proposal is in general accordance with policy DM1 of the Development Management Plan.

HIGHWAYS

- 3.55 The application is accompanied by a brief transport statement prepared by Yes Engineering. The statement was prepared based on the area of the site, approximately 6 acres and considers the impact on transport demand in the local area. The statement takes into consideration the operational farm and any potential impact from volunteer or fun days. Overall, it concludes that the facility will have a minimal impact on transport demand and as such it will not have an adverse impact on the highway network in the vicinity.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 This planning statement supports a full planning application for planning permission for the application is for the construction of a classroom, barn, greenhouse and three polytunnels for use in conjunction with the farm.
- 4.2 The proposal has been assessed against all of the relevant adopted and emerging planning policies and guidance. The assessment of the proposal demonstrates that the proposed structures are in accordance with the material policies and guidance.

BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSAL

- 4.3 The key benefits of the proposed development are as follows:
- The key benefit the proposal provides is that is necessary to ensure a hugely important and unique educational scheme can continue to effectively operate from the site, which will change the lives of children and the local community and will set a national example of what is possible in this field of education.
 - The delivery of a barn, polytunnels and Dutch greenhouse will support the exiting function of the farm;
 - Increased crop production and yield through the support of a Dutch greenhouse and polytunnels for seedlings grown on site;
 - Increased crop sale through provision of adequate storage and packing areas in the barn;
 - Effective and engaging GROW lessons on site with students from the TTA and the wider Barnet community through the provision of on site classroom; and
 - On site facilities will increase the accessibility of the facility to disabled persons; visitors from external educational settings and allow for year round availability of corporate volunteer and fun days.
- 4.4 The proposal complies with Section 38(6) of the Planning Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 which states the determination must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Planning Statement has demonstrated that the proposal is in accordance with the development plan. In accordance with paragraph 144 of the Framework, the benefits the proposal delivers have been weighed against the limited harm the proposal causes to the openness of the Green Belt. It is considered that the benefits the proposal delivers significantly outweigh the limited harm the proposal causes to the Green Belt. 'Very Special Circumstances' are therefore considered to exist that justify the proposed development. The proposal is therefore in accordance with the Framework and policy DM15 of the Local Plan, as the Local Plan also requires 'Very Special Circumstances' to be demonstrated to justify development in the Green Belt. Therefore, both the Framework and Local Plan indicate that planning permission should be granted.