

Batcheller Monkhouse



PLANNING STATEMENT

Planning application for the change of use of land to allow for the siting of 3no. holiday cabins, together with associated parking

Land East of Wakeley Farm
Cherry Green
Westmill
Buntingford

On Behalf Of
Unplugged

August 2023

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**Batcheller
Monkhouse**



Unplugged

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for the siting of 3 no. holiday cabins and the associated change of use of land and parking on land East of Wakeley Farm, Cherry Green, Westmill, Buntingford.
- 1.2 This Planning Statement sets out the relevant background to assist East Hertfordshire District Council in its determination of the planning application. The statement includes a description of the site and its surroundings, relevant planning history, details of the proposed development, a summary of the planning policy context, and an appraisal of the scheme against all relevant planning considerations.
- 1.3 The application is supported by the following documents and plans:
- Planning Application Form and Ownership Certificate;
 - Site Location Plan
 - Detailed Site Location Plan
 - Existing Site (Block) Plan
 - Proposed Site (Block) Plan
 - Proposed Floor Plan and Elevations
 - Preliminary Ecological Assessment – Green Shoots Ecology (July 2023)
 - Biodiversity Net Gain Calculation

2 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1 The application site forms three small areas of redundant agricultural land within the southern edge of Wakeley Farm.
- 2.2 Access to the site is off the northern end of Cherry Green Lane via a private road that is shared with Wakeley Farm.
- 2.3 The site is well positioned away from any residential properties however a public right of way runs down the centre of the private road and there are further public rights of way connections surrounding the site as shown in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1 - Site Aerial



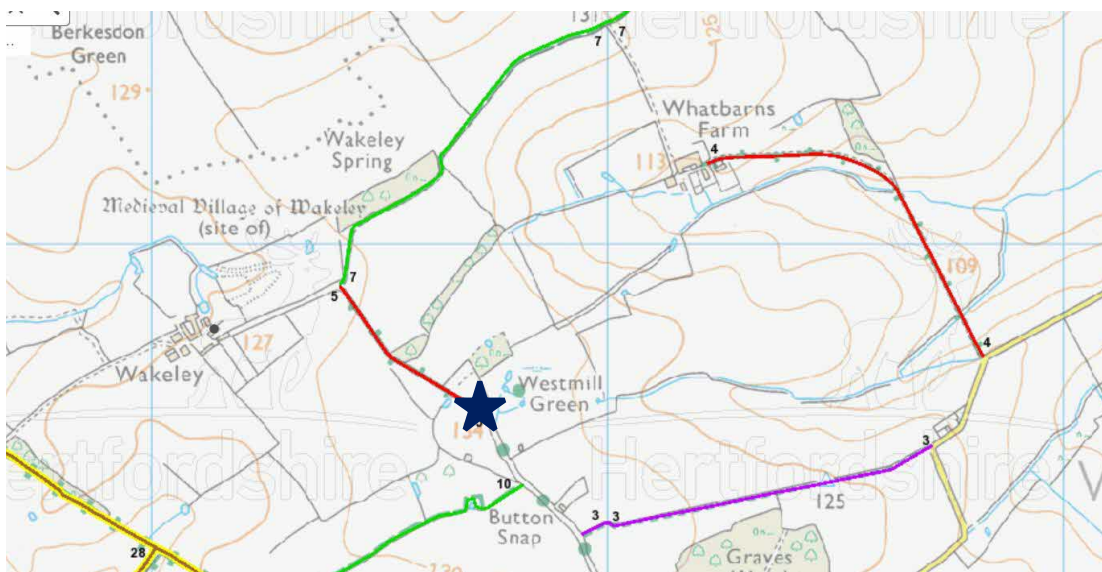
Site Context

- 2.4 The site forms part of Wakeley Farm which is made up of 624 hectares and has been in active agricultural use for over 100 years and farms a selection of arable crops. Over the years, Wakeley Farm has not diversified its income streams in any way and relies solely on farming income for the continued running of the farm. With the continued economic uncertainty, it is vital that the owners explore other avenues for income. This income will ensure the continued

running and upkeep of the farm.

2.5 The wider area is characterised by rural land with a cluster of farm buildings to the west of the application site. The village of Westmill lies approximately 1.8km to the east and Cherry Green approximately 0.5km to the south, which is accessible via quiet country lanes in the local area. There is also a network of public rights of way in the vicinity which provide access throughout the local countryside on foot and by bicycle. Notably there are a number of footpaths in close proximity to the site which include Westmill 003, Westmill 005 and Westmill 007. These are shown in figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 – Extract of the Hertfordshire Rights of Way



2.6 The site is also well located in proximity to local visitor attractions and facilities including:

PLACE OF INTEREST	TYPE	DISTANCE
The Fox Pub, Aspenden	Food and Drink	3 miles
St Mary's Church, Aspenden	Historic	3.6 miles
Pearce's Farm Shop and Gardens, Buntingford	Food and Drink	4 miles

PLACE OF INTEREST	TYPE	DISTANCE
The Golden Fleece, Braughing	Food and Drink	4.9 miles
Milling Barn Wedding Venue	Venue	6.2 miles
Cromer Windmill, Cromer	Historic	8 miles
Fairlands Valley Park	Natural Attraction	12 miles

Site Photographs

2.7 Figure 2.3 below shows an example of a cabin location within the edge of field (i), an example of a grass track that would lead to a cabin on the site (ii), and a section of concrete road within the redline application boundary (iii).

Fig 2.3 (i) Edge of field



(ii) Grass Track



(iii) Concrete road

Environmental Designations

- 2.8 The site is located within Flood Zone 1 and therefore has a low risk of flooding in accordance with the Environment Agency's flood maps for planning.
- 2.9 The application site is located within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt, however there are no further designations to note.
- 2.10 There are no heritage assets in the vicinity. The nearest listed building is Button Snap which is Grade II listed and located 285 meters from the nearest cabin which is located to the southwest.

Planning History

- 2.11 The site has been subject to a recent application under reference 3/22/0971/FUL for the change of use of land for the siting of 3 glamping cabins and hard surfacing for parking areas. The application was refused on 16th February 2023 by East Herts Council¹ for the following reasons:
- 1) The proposed cabins would present a stark and incongruous appearance due to their height, positioning and appearance, to the detriment of the character and appearance of the rural area beyond the Green Belt. This falls contrary to policies GBR2 and DES4 of the East Herts District Plan (2018) and the aims and objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework.
 - 2) Insufficient information has been submitted with the application to demonstrate that the proposal would result in a net gain in biodiversity and would not harm the local ecology, contrary to policies NE2 and NE3 of the East Herts District Plan (2018).

¹ [3/22/0971/FUL | Change of use of the land for the siting of 3 glamping cabins. Hard surfacing for parking areas \(retrospective\). | Land East of Wakeley Farm Cherry Green Westmill Buntingford Hertfordshire SG9 9NH \(eastherts.gov.uk\)](#)

3. PROPOSAL

3.1 This application seeks Planning Permission for the change of use of land to allow for the siting of 3 no. holiday cabins, together with associated parking, on land at the Wakeley Farm, Cherry Green, Westmill, Buntingford. As the cabins have been partially completed, the application is for retrospective planning permission. The difference between this application and the application refused under 3/22/0971/FUL is identified below.

3.1.1 Further evidence is submitted showing the location of the proposed cabins would have no harmful impact on the character of the rural area beyond the Green Belt to demonstrate compliance with Policies GBR2 and DES4 of the East Herts District Plan (2018)

3.1.2 Submission of an ecology appraisal and biodiversity net gain calculation to demonstrate compliance with Policies NE2 and NE3 of the East Herts District Plan (2018)

3.2 Under the refused application the applicant described the cabins as glamping caravans. However, it is acknowledged that the cabins do not meet the criteria as identified by the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 and cannot be considered as caravans due to the height of the proposed cabins. They are therefore assessed as new buildings.

Context

3.3 The cabins are owned and managed by Unplugged, who lease the land from Wakeley Farm. Unplugged have a number of cabins in the countryside around London and seek to provide their guests with a digital detox experience requiring guests to relinquish their mobile phones upon arrival for the duration of their stay. Guests are provided with everything they need including eco-friendly toiletries, cooking essentials and a basic Nokia mobile phone for use in emergencies and for making reservations at the local pub. The experience has attracted a huge amount of interest from those looking for a closer-to-nature experience as a break from everyday life.

Design and Layout

3.4 The cabins each will be 2.84m in depth, 6.6m in width and 2.84m in height and would extend to 18.74sqm. In terms of materials, the cabins will be clad in western red cedar treated with

natural grey OSMO oil. Each cabin contains a king bed, kitchenette and shower room (including a Scandi compost toilet) suitable for up to 2 people. Access is taken via a single door on the side of the cabin and inside there are two smaller windows and one larger window facing south-west, providing views of the open farmland. All windows are fitted with blackout blinds.

3.5 The three cabins will be positioned on the southern edge of the farm located to the north of the access track.

3.6 The positioning of each cabin has been well considered to ensure they blend into their natural surroundings and are nestled on the edge of an existing woodland copse which helps to screen them from any long-distance views due to the backdrop of the trees and use of low key colours and materials. The cabins are run off-grid using free standing solar panels.

3.7 The cabins are secured to the ground using ground screws.

3.8 The cabins will be available to visitors on a year-round basis but would not be available to any one person for more than 28 consecutive days. This can be secured by condition.

Figure 3.1 – Photographs of the Cabin



Access and Parking

3.9 Access into the site is taken via an existing access with parking located on an area of existing hardstanding located off the main access road.

3.10 Within the parking area is a small temporary storage box which contains a trolley to allow guests to pull their personal belongings to their booked cabin using the existing paths to each site. No cars will be parked outside of the dedicated parking area.

Waste and Drainage

- 3.11 Waste and recycle bins are stored within the cabin and are collected by the applicant following guest departure.
- 3.12 Grey water from sinks, toilet and shower will be discharged into the ground via a soakaway. All toiletries such as shower gels, shampoos and soaps are provided by Unplugged and are free from any sulphates, parabens or petrochemicals. The toilet will be self-composting where the aerobic decomposition and evaporate function reduces human waste to a hygienically safe material that can be recycled back to nature without polluting the environment. The waste is collected and taken off site.

Lighting

- 3.13 Each cabin has one external small ground level light located on the western corner of the cabin. All other lights are internal. Black out blinds are provided to prevent glow during night-time hours.

4. PLANNING POLICY

- 4.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the provisions of the statutory Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.2 Currently the Development Plan for the site comprises the East Herts District Plan 2018 which sets out the planning framework for the District for the period of 2011-2033 and will deliver sustainable development.
- 4.3 The key material consideration for the determination of planning applications is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which was first published in 2012 and most recently updated in 2021.
- 4.4 There is no made Neighbourhood Plan for the area.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 4.5 The NPPF (2021) sets out the three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental within Paragraph 8. These dimensions give rise to the need for the planning system to perform a number of roles, namely:

an economic role – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity.

a social role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being;

an environmental role – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment, including make effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

- 4.6 At the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 11c confirms that for decision taking this means approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay. Or, where the policies of which are most important to determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless the application of policies in the NPPF that protect areas or assets of particular importance (e.g., National Parks, AONBs, irreplaceable habitats or designated heritage assets) provides a clear reason for refusing the development; or any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.
- 4.7 Chapter 6 (building a strong, competitive economy) states that planning policies and 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, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.
- 4.8 More specifically, paragraph 83 relates to the rural economy and states that planning policies and decisions should enable:
- a) The sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;
 - b) The development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;
 - c) Sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside.

East Herts District Plan 2018

- 4.9 The East Herts District Plan was adopted in 2018 and sets out the long-term special vision for the district. The site is located within an area outside of any built-up area boundary and will therefore be subject to countryside policies. The relevant policies from the East Herts Local Plan (2018) are as follows:

POLICY	SUMMARY
ED2 – Rural Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. In order to support sustainable economic growth in rural areas and to prevent the loss of vital sources of rural employment, proposals to create new employment generating uses or support the sustainable growth and expansion of existing businesses in the rural area will be supported in principle where they are appropriately and sustainably located and do not conflict with other policies within this Plan. ii. Proposals that consist of a change of use of agricultural or employment generating use in the rural area to other employment generating uses will be supported in principle subject to other policies within this Plan. iii. Where the proposal results in the loss of an agricultural or employment use in a rural area or a change of use to a non-employment generating use, evidence will be required to demonstrate that: (a) the current agricultural or employment use is no longer needed or viable; (b) that improvements to the site/premises would not make alternative employment generating uses viable; (c) the retention of the employment generating use is unable to be facilitated by the partial conversion to a non-employment generating use; (d) the building is of permanent and substantial construction. iv. Proposals for the diversification of farms will be supported in principle where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) they secure the viability of the agricultural practice of the farm; (b) they contribute to the maintenance of biodiversity or landscape interests; (c) they support the engagement of communities with land management, food production and rural crafts and the development of local produce markets; (d) the diversification remains a subsidiary of the overall agricultural activity of the holding; (e) any resultant retail or commercial use does not have an adverse impact on the viability of existing nearby rural or village shops or community facilities.
ED5 - Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. New tourism enterprises and extensions to existing tourism enterprises will be supported in principle where the facility meets identified need which are not met by existing facilities, are appropriately located and do not conflict with other policies within this Plan.
GBR2 - Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt	<p>In order to maintain the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt as a valuable countryside resource, certain types of development will be permitted, provided that they are compatible with the character and appearance of the rural area</p>

POLICY	SUMMARY
<p>DES4 - Design of Development</p>	<p>i) development proposals, must be of a high standard of design and layout to reflect and promote local distinctiveness. Proposals will be expected to;</p> <p>a) Make the best possible use of the available land by respecting and improving upon the character of the site and the surrounding area, in terms of its scale, height, massing (volume, shape), orientation, siting, layout, density, building materials (colour, texture), landscaping, environmental assets, and design features, having due regard to the design opportunities and constraints of a site;</p> <p>d) Incorporate high quality innovative design, new technologies and construction techniques, including zero or low carbon energy and water efficient, design and sustainable construction methods;</p> <p>ii) Proposals must not prejudice the development opportunities of surrounding sites.</p> <p>iii) Development proposals which create new or have a significant impact on the public realm should:</p> <p>(a) Maximise legibility and accessibility of the public realm through the layout of buildings, landmarks, use of colour, landscaping, paving, high quality public art, street furniture and infrastructure including clear and legible signposting, rest places and public toilets, in a way that maintains uncluttered spaces and enables easy navigation and movement through the space;</p> <p>(b) Maximise opportunities for urban greening, for example through planting of trees and other soft landscaping wherever possible;</p> <p>(c) Avoid creating 'left-over' spaces with no clear purpose or function;</p> <p>(d) Ensure that long-term maintenance and management arrangements are in place for the public realm as appropriate.</p>
<p>CFL R3 - Public Rights of Way</p>	<p>Proposals for development must not adversely affect any Public Right of Way and, where possible, should incorporate measures to maintain and enhance the Rights of Way network.</p>
<p>TRA1 - Sustainable Transport</p>	<p>Development proposals should aim to achieve accessibility improvements and promotion of sustainable transport in the district</p>

POLICY	SUMMARY
TRA2 - Safe and Suitable Highway Access Arrangements and Mitigation	<p>Development proposals should ensure that safe and suitable access can be achieved for all users. Site layouts, access proposals and any measures designed to mitigate trip generation produced by the development should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Be acceptable in highway safety terms; (b) Not result in any severe residual cumulative impact; and (c) Not have a significant detrimental effect on the character of the local environment.
TRA3 - Vehicle Parking Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Vehicle parking provision associated with development proposals will be assessed on a site-specific basis and should take into account the provisions of the District Council's SPD II. Provision of sufficient secure, covered and waterproof cycle and, where appropriate, powered two-wheeler storage facilities should be made for users of developments for new residential, educational, health, leisure retail, employment and business purposes (to be determined on a site-specific basis). III. Car parking should be integrated as a key element of design development layouts to ensure good quality, safe, secure and attractive environments. IV. Where a private car park for non-domestic use is proposed, the Council will assess whether it should also be available for shared public use having particular regard to the needs of the primary user
CC1 - Climate Change Adaptation	<p>All new development should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Demonstrate how the design, materials, construction and operation of the development would minimise overheating in summer and reduce the need for heating in winter; and b. Integrate green infrastructure from the beginning of the design process to contribute to urban greening, including the public realm. Elements that can contribute to this include appropriate tree planting, green roofs and walls, and soft landscaping.
CC2 - Climate Change Mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. All new developments should demonstrate how carbon dioxide emissions will be minimised across the development site, taking account of all levels of the energy hierarchy. Achieving standards above and beyond requirements of Building Regulations is encouraged.

POLICY	SUMMARY
	<p>II. Carbon reduction should be met on-site unless it can be demonstrated that this is not feasible or viable. In such cases effective off-site measures to reduce on-site carbon emissions will be accepted allowable solutions</p> <p>III. The energy embodied in construction materials should be reduced through re-use and recycling, where possible, of existing materials and the use of sustainable materials and local sourcing.</p>
<p>NE2 - Sites or Features of Nature Conservation Interest (Non-Designated)</p>	<p>I. All proposals should achieve a net gain in biodiversity where it is feasible and proportionate to do so, as measured by using and taking into account a locally approved Biodiversity Metric, and avoid harm to, or the loss of features that contribute to the local and wider ecological network.</p> <p>II. Proposals will be expected to apply the mitigation hierarchy of avoidance, mitigation and compensation, as set out in the NPPF, and integrate ecologically beneficial planting and landscaping into the overall design.</p>
<p>NE 3 - Species and Habitats</p>	<p>i. Development should always seek to enhance biodiversity and to create opportunities for wildlife. Proposals must demonstrate how the development improves the biodiversity value of the site and surrounding environment. Evidence will be required in the form of up-to-date ecological surveys undertaken by a competent ecologist prior to the submission of an application. The Biodiversity value of a site pre and post development will be determined by applying a locally approved Biodiversity Metric where appropriate. Submitted information must be consistent with BS 42020 2013.</p> <p>ii. Proposals should detail how physical features will be maintained in the long term.</p> <p>iii. Development which would result in the loss or significant damage to trees, hedgerows or ancient woodland sites will not be permitted.</p> <p>iv. Proposals will be expected to protect and enhance locally important biodiversity sites and other notable ecological features of conservation value</p> <p>v. Proposals should avoid impacting on Species and Habitats of Principle Importance as published under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (or as subsequently amended).</p>

POLICY	SUMMARY
	<p>vi. Where adverse impacts are unavoidable, appropriate mitigation and compensation measures must be employed</p> <p>vii. Development adjoining rivers or streams will be required to preserve or enhance the water environment in accordance with Policy WAT3</p> <p>viii. Integrated bird and bat boxes will be expected in all development bordering public green space and beneficial habitat.</p>
<p>WAT4 - Efficient Use of Water Resources</p>	<p>Development must minimise the use of mains water by:</p> <p>(a) Incorporating water saving measures and equipment; (b) Incorporating the recycling of grey water and utilising natural filtration measures where possible</p>
<p>HA3 - Archaeology</p>	<p>I. Where a site has the potential to include heritage assets with archaeological interest (whether scheduled or unscheduled), applicants should consult with the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Unit to submit an appropriate desk based assessment</p> <p>II. Where development is permitted on sites containing archaeological remains, planning permission will be subject to conditions and/or formal agreements requiring appropriate excavation and recording in advance of development</p>

Parking Standards SPD (2018)

4.10 This document sets out the parking standards for each development type. New residential development requires 1 parking space for a 1-bedroom unit.

5. PLANNING APPRAISAL

5.1 The issues of relevance in the determination of the application are considered to be as follows:

Principle of the proposal

Design and landscape

Amenity

Access and parking

Drainage

Biodiversity

Climate change and sustainability

5.2 It is noted that the reasons for refusal outlined within 3/22/0971/FUL concern the impact on the character and appearance of the rural area beyond the Green Belt, and insufficient information being provided to demonstrate that the proposal would result in a net gain in biodiversity and would not harm the local ecology. The following section will demonstrate how the proposal has addressed these concerns, in addition to all relevant material considerations. These matters are considered in detail below.

Principle of the proposed use

5.3 The application seeks retrospective planning permission for the change of use of land and the siting of 3 holiday cabins, which will be offered to guests as a form of farm diversification in line with Policy ED5 and Strategic Objective 5 of the East Herts District Plan 2018 and the provisions of the NPPF 2021.

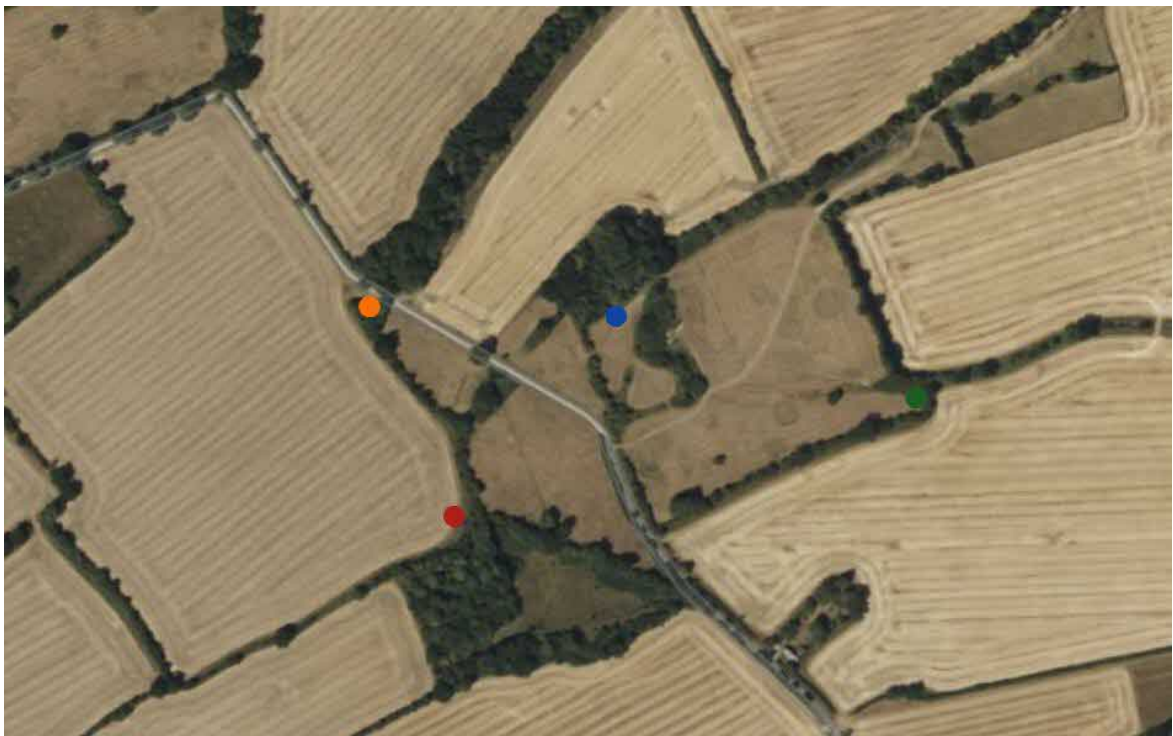
5.4 The East Herts Local Plan Policy ED5 relates to tourism and outlines that new tourism enterprises will be supported in principle where the facility meets identified needs which are not met by existing facilities and are appropriately located. Strategic objective 5 outlines that to foster entrepreneurial endeavour through educational attainment and encourage small and medium enterprises through maximising existing employment opportunities and clusters and supporting rural diversification.

- 5.5 It is noted that no details were provided with the application of the refused 3/22/0971/FUL to demonstrate a need in this location. The Case Officer Hannah Weston concluded in the Officer Report however that the proposal is a small-scale glamping development accessible by the public highway network and therefore compliant with policy ED5. As such we consider that the policy is compliant with ED5
- 5.6 Paragraph 84 of the NPPF 2021 seeks to promote applications that support the rural economy, including but not limited to sustainable rural tourism which respects the character of the country.
- 5.7 The proposal will not affect any protected areas or assets of particular importance, other than the countryside listed above, and there are no adverse impacts that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of adding to the supply of small-scale tourist accommodation options in the district.
- 5.8 The proposed cabins are modest in scale and would allow up to two people to stay in each cabin on the site without affecting the tranquility of the area, being away from the open farmland and in a location with limited to no public views.
- 5.9 Due to the type of accommodation proposed, it would not be possible for the cabins to be contained within an existing building on the farm, although the structure would be temporary in nature and could be removed from the site should the use cease in the future.
- 5.10 The cabins will be positioned on the edge of field boundaries, within a private location which is not used as part of the farming business. It will not affect the farmland and general operation of the farming business in any way.
- 5.11 Overall, the application represents rural diversification and rural tourism and will contribute to the local economy by increasing visitor spending at local businesses and services, including pubs, shops and attractions. This will be a quiet and low-key use which will help to promote the enjoyment of the countryside.
- 5.12 The cabins are specifically designed for short stay accommodation and would not be suitable for long term use. The applicant expects a suitably worded planning condition restricting use to short term holidays.

Design and landscape

- 5.13 The NPPF acknowledges a need for new buildings in the countryside associated with sustainable rural development and visitor accommodation. The proposed holiday cabins, due to their ability to be moved, are not considered as a building in planning terms but it has nevertheless been sensitively designed to fit comfortably within the setting using a natural, low key material palette.
- 5.14 The proposed cabins are typical in size and appearance of a holiday let. Each cabin has been designed to sit within the discrete rural location to limit views of the structure from any public viewpoint. Ground screws have been used which are suitable for use within the vicinity of trees and can be easily removed in the future if required.
- 5.15 Photographs of the site from the surrounding area have been taken to show how the site sits in the local landscape, as identified in **Figure 5.1** below.

Figure 5.1 – Aerial showing location of photographs

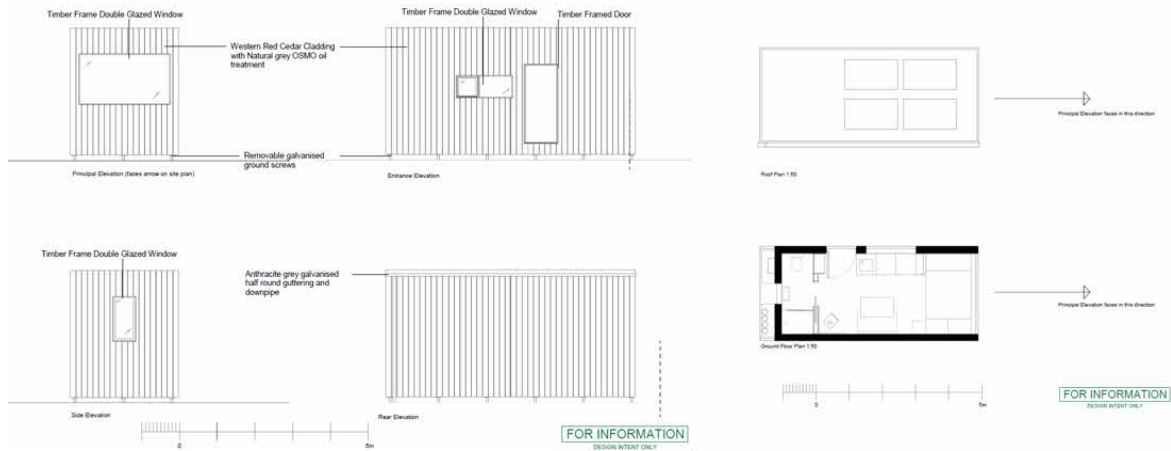


- Cabin 1
- Cabin 2
- Cabin 3
- Existing parking



5.16 The cabins are designed and sited in a location which meets the needs of the type of retreat offered by Unplugged. Each cabin is served by a set of solar panels which generate energy from a renewable source. Water consumption is minimal and limited to a shower, toilet and two sinks. It is likely that guests would use less water than they would in their permanent place of residence due to the scale and nature of the cabin. Plans of the cabins are shown below in figure 5.2.

Fig 5.2– Elevations and floor plans of the cabins



- 5.17 Waste and recycling bins are provided within the cabin. Waste is checked after guests check out to ensure that waste is separated and disposed of correctly. There are no neighbouring properties that would be impacted by the proposal.
- 5.18 The site is well screened with mature hedging and trees to its borders. The photographs above show the cabins in situ located close to the site boundaries, and the view of the site from the public right of way that passes along the main road.
- 5.19 The use of the fields for three cabins represents a low density and small-scale form of off grid tourist accommodation. The cabins have been designed and situated so they are naturally screened within the landscape. The cabins cannot be readily seen from neighbouring public footpaths or nearby residential properties. Outside of the holiday season when trees are less well-leaved the site will largely revert to being a grassy field albeit with the cabins remaining in place. During the holiday season the site is very well screened and is not likely to be visible from outside the farm. The proposal is considered to have little impact on the countryside landscape.
- 5.20 It is considered that the proposal would not result in harm to the landscape character or the area generally. As such it complies with East Herts District Plan Policies GBR2 and DES4 of the East Herts District Plan (2018) and the aims and objectives of the NPPF (2021)

Amenity

- 5.21 The proposed cabins are located just under 500m south-east from the nearest dwellings and given the nature of the proposal it is highly unlikely that any noise disturbance will occur. The purpose of the Unplugged offering is to provide an off-grid, quiet retreat for those looking to escape their fast-paced day to day life therefore heightened levels of noise and music is not tolerated.

Access and parking

- 5.22 The site benefits from an existing access and an unused area of ground which will be used for car parking, as shown on the submitted site plan. There is no formal parking standard for holiday lets within the Parking Standards SPD, with the closest type of development being a residential dwelling for which there is a need for one space for a one-bedroom home. One parking space is therefore provided. This is sufficient for the size of the cabin which is suitable for one to two people only.
- 5.23 Due to the scale of the proposal, there will be no tangible difference to the number of vehicles accessing the site. It is likely that any guests looking to visit the area and local attractions would already be on the local road network.
- 5.24 Visitors will be encouraged to use the public right of way network wherever possible through the provision of local PROW maps to reduce vehicle trips to and from the site.

Drainage

- 5.25 The cabin is stocked with shampoos, shower gels and hand washes which are environmentally friendly and free from any sulphates, parabens or petrochemicals. A Scandi toilet is a self-composting toilet where the aerobic decomposition and evaporate function reduces human waste to a hygienically safe material that can be recycled back to nature without polluting the environment.

Climate change and sustainability

- 5.26 The cabin is served by solar panels which face southwards over the adjacent field.

Ecology

- 5.27 The second reason that application 3/22/0971/FUL was refused was owing to the lack of information submitted to demonstrate that the proposal would result in a net gain in biodiversity and would not harm the local ecology, contrary to policies NE2 and NE3 of the East Herts District Plan (2018). The following section demonstrates how this has been addressed.
- 5.28 A Preliminary Ecology Assessment has been submitted in support of this application (prepared by Green Shoots Ecology, July 2023). The protected species assessed comprise of [REDACTED], nesting birds, dormice, great crested newts, reptiles, water voles, otters and other protected species not mentioned above. Further, the site was assessed for species of principal importance under NERC Section 41 and invasive species.
- 5.29 A separate Biodiversity Net Gain report has been produced for this development and attached separately.
- 5.30 The report concludes that the proposal does not impact any important habitats, as such no mitigation is required. Of the above protected species noted, the survey found a very low probability of great crested newts being present. Mitigation is advised in the executive summary (chapter 1). This could be controlled by a suitably worded condition. As such, the proposal would have no harmful impact on ecology and would comply with Policies NE2 and NE3 of the East Herts District Plan (2018).

6. SUMMARY

- 6.1 This planning application seeks retrospective planning permission for the change of use of land to allow for the siting of three holiday cabins set within Wakely Farm, Cherry Green, Westmill, Hertfordshire. The three cabins will be available for quiet, short-term holiday lets operated by Unplugged.
- 6.2 The proposal represents a form of farm diversification which will support a long-running farming business that has been operating in the local area for many years. The proposal will provide a small but important uplift in the farm's revenue as well as increased visitor spending at local shops, pubs and venues in the surrounding area.
- 6.3 The cabins will be located within a private, secluded location which will help to screen the structures from distant views, using appropriate ground fixtures.
- 6.4 The site is set close to a network of public rights of way which will encourage exploration of the area and use of local facilities.
- 6.5 There are no nearby residential properties who would be affected by the proposal and therefore local amenities will be protected.
- 6.6 The application would have no harmful impact on the ecology of the area.
- 6.7 The application is in line with national and local planning policies which encourage farm diversification; proposals that support the tourism industry; and those which encourage the use and enjoyment of the local countryside.
- 6.8 It is therefore hoped that East Herts District Council will support the application.