

TITLE: 25/00371/FUL

Committee: Planning Committee

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Author: Planning Officer

Report No: AA30

Contact Officer: Rachael Forbes, Planning Officer
rachael.forbes@eastcambs.gov.uk
01353 616300
Room No 011 The Grange Ely

Site Address: Land Off Water Lane Long Acre Kirtling Suffolk

Proposal: To build a purpose-built Wildlife Veterinary Hospital including residential facilities

Applicant: Sue Stubley

Parish: Kirtling

Ward: Woodditton

Ward Councillor/s: James Lay
Alan Sharp

Date Received: 23 April 2025

Expiry Date: 18 June 2025

1.0 RECOMMENDATION

1.1 Members are recommended to REFUSE the application for the following reasons:

1. Policy GROWTH 2 states that outside of the development envelopes, development will be strictly controlled, having regard to the need to protect the countryside and the setting of towns and villages. Development will be restricted to the main categories listed in the policy, and may be permitted as an exception, providing there is no significant adverse impact on the character of the countryside and that other Local Plan policies are satisfied. The proposal does not fall within any of the exception policies listed in GROWTH 2 and therefore would be unacceptable in principle. There is insufficient justification as to why the proposed development needs to be in this specific location or why someone needs to live on site. There is a lack of clarity around the proposals

and concerns about the suitability of the site. The proposal is therefore considered to be contrary to GROWTH 2 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 (as amended) and Chapter 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

2. Policy ENV 1 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 states that development proposals should ensure that they provide a complementary relationship with the existing development and conserve, preserve and where possible enhance the distinctive and traditional landscapes and key views in and out of settlements. Policy ENV 2 states that development proposals ensure that the location, layout, massing, materials and colour of buildings relate sympathetically to the surrounding area. The proposal would result in a large amount of development projecting into the countryside against the general pattern of development in the area. The storage containers and other buildings are unlikely to result in a high-quality design. The proposal includes four buildings, access and hardstanding and this would result in overdevelopment of the site. The proposal would result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the area by virtue of the scale, amount and design of the development proposed and is therefore contrary to Policies ENV 1 and ENV 2 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 (as amended) and Chapter 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024)
3. Policy ENV 2 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 states that new development will be expected to ensure that there is no significantly detrimental effect on the residential amenity of nearby occupiers and that occupiers and users of new buildings, especially dwellings, enjoy high standards of amenity. The proposal has the potential to result in noise and disturbance to the residential amenity of neighbouring dwellings, however, there is a lack of information submitted in respect of traffic movements and the operation of the site to allow a full assessment of the impact of the proposal to residential amenity. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy ENV 2 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 (as amended) and Chapter 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024)
4. Policy COM 7 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 states that development proposals shall provide a safe and convenient access to the highway network. Policy COM 8 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 states that development proposals should provide adequate levels of car and cycle parking in accordance with the Council's parking standards. The proposal is not supported by sufficient transport information to demonstrate that the proposed development would not be prejudicial to the satisfactory functioning of the highway or highway safety. In addition, due to the lack of information around the operation of the site, it cannot be assessed as to whether the proposal provides sufficient parking provision for the use. The proposal does not include

sufficient information to allow the LHA and LPA to be certain that there would be no significant impacts to the operation of the highway or highway safety nor to ascertain if any mitigation measures would be required. There is also insufficient information provided to ensure that the level of car and cycle parking proposed is suitable. The proposal is therefore considered contrary to Policies COM 7 and COM 8 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 (as amended) and Chapter 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

5. The proposed development would potentially result in harm to protected species, and the loss of habitats of importance by virtue of the partial removal of the protected road verge. There is concern regarding conflict between species and whether hedgehogs could be rewilded successfully. There is insufficient information submitted to address the objections and concerns. In addition, the protected road verge has not been factored into the Biodiversity Net Gain Metric, nor has suitable mitigation been included. The area for the biodiversity improvement is greater than the site area. These issues result in the baseline habitat being incorrect. There is insufficient information submitted for the LPA to be satisfied that the proposal would not result in harm to protected species and would protect, mitigate and enhance biodiversity. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies ENV 1, ENV 2 and ENV 7 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 (as amended), the Natural Environment SPD, Chapter 15 of the NPPF, as well as failing to meet the overarching objectives of the Environment Act 2021 in achieving net gains in biodiversity and protection of irreplaceable habitats

1.2 The application is being heard by committee because it was called in by Councillor Sharp for the following reasons:

1.3 Levels of public interest and in the interests of transparency

2.0 SUMMARY OF APPLICATION

2.1 The application seeks planning permission for a purpose-built wildlife hospital which includes residential facilities. The proposal includes the hospital itself, a multi-purpose agricultural barn, a prefab which is proposed to be used as a temporary hospital and educational classroom and a static caravan for temporary staff accommodation. The function of these buildings will be discussed within the report and the scale of the buildings will be set out in the visual amenity section. The hospital would provide 24/7 care for wildlife and proposes to provide training for veterinary nurses.

2.2 The full planning application, plans and documents submitted by the Applicant can be viewed online via East Cambridgeshire District Council's Public Access online service, via the following link [Simple Search](#).

3.0 PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 There is no planning history at this site.

4.0 THE SITE AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

The proposed wildlife hospital would be situated on a parcel of land along Water Lane and would occupy approximately 0.48ha (1.18 hectares) of the wider site. The site is outside of the development envelope of Kirtling and is therefore considered to be in the countryside. The site is accessed by a single-track road. There is a row of trees to the north of the site which provides some screening on approach. The wider site is surrounded by hedgerows; these are beyond the red line boundary of the site. To the east of the wider site is a Public Right of Way (Footpath 141/20). To the southwest of the site is a County Wildlife Site (CWS) and the verge along Water Lane is a protected road verge. The site currently contains storage containers, a static caravan and other paraphernalia such as hutches, which have been placed on the land without the benefit of planning permission. There have also been trees planted, and bee hives placed on the land, although all of this is outside of the red line boundary.

5.0 RESPONSES FROM CONSULTEES

5.1 Responses were received from the following consultees and these are summarised below. The full responses are available on the Council's web site.

Parish - 13 May 2025

- Although the council is not against the idea of a hedgehog hospital, it does have serious concerns about the scale of what is planned for the land off Water Lane and the nature of the hospital buildings. Kirtling and Upend Parish Council, therefore, feels that this application should be refused for the following reasons
- The planned development is very close to the village envelope and residences in Woodditton Road and The Green. The use of the hospital for 24-hour care as well as a training and education resource would increase the number of vehicles visiting the site.
- The proposed development is oversized for its location and the number and nature of the buildings is inappropriate and not in keeping with the other dwellings nearby and throughout the village. There are concerns about the number of containers and what they will look like in what is currently a very picturesque setting
- The proportion of the land to be used for buildings is excessive for the site and will be visible from the road and local footpaths where residents walk. It is felt that the planned development with the number of buildings is too large to suitably blend into its surroundings and not negatively impact on the area.
- We are not confident that this development has been fully thought through. Old portacabins, containers and a mobile home have been sited on the land for some time prior to the planning application being validated. There does not appear to have been a sustainable business/funding plan for this development so far so there is concern that it may have to be abandoned and

become an eyesore. Alternatively, should the hospital not be financially viable, a dwelling with residential use could remain on the site which would not have been granted permission without its use as part of the wildlife hospital.

- Three local residents have already attended Parish Council Meetings to express concerns about the containers and buildings already sited here and the scale and impact of the planned development.

Environmental Health (Scientific Officer) - 6 May 2025

Although no contamination information has been supplied with the application this appears to be a greenfield site. I recommend that a condition requiring investigation for contamination is not required. I recommend that standard contaminated land condition 4 (unexpected contamination) is attached to any grant of permission.

Environmental Health - 25 April 2025

- Recommends a condition to control construction hours
- Recommends a condition to submit a method statement should ground piling be required
- No issues to raise with the proposed lighting but recommends a condition to prevent any additional external lighting
- Has no immediate concerns to raise in respect of noise, however would recommend a condition that the noise emitted from the site shall not exceed the background noise level.

East Cambs Ecologist – 20 June 2025

- Objection 1 – harm to protected species
- Objection 2 – protected road verge removal
- Several queries raised regarding the size of the plot, the inclusion of a koi pond, the use of the classroom and why the bird room is not adjacent to an aviary
- Objects in respect of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) as an inaccurate baseline habitat has been used.

Local Highways Authority - 13 May 2025

- Object because the application is not supported by sufficient transport information to demonstrate that the proposed development would not be prejudicial to the satisfactory functioning of the highway or highway safety.

ECDC Trees Team - 30 May 2025

- The proposal does not appear to impact any existing trees on or adjacent the site. The soft landscaping information lacks detail so there will need to be a condition to provide a detailed soft landscaping scheme by condition should the proposal be approved.

Waste Strategy (ECDC) - 28 May 2025

- Have provided general advice on waste disposal which could be included as an informative on the decision notice if approved.

The Ely Group Of Internal Drainage Board - No Comments Received

Enforcement Section - No Comments Received

Ward Councillors - No Comments Received

Cambs Wildlife Trust - No Comments Received

- 5.2 A site notice was displayed near the site on 28 April 2025, and a press advert was published in the Cambridge Evening News on 8 May 2025.
- 5.3 Neighbours – 28 neighbouring properties were notified and the responses received are summarised below. A full copy of the responses are available on the Council's website.

Five comments were received from those who were directly notified by letter. The majority of these were objections for the following summarised reasons:

Arable land being lost, approval of residential accommodation sets dangerous precedent, out of keeping with the countryside, if charity vacates it would be primed for residential use, noise and disturbance, significant increase in traffic, visual impact, there is already a wildlife hospital in Shepreth, badgers are a risk to the hedgehogs, access is poor and would need making up to highway standard, exposed rural location, badgers are a material planning consideration, the village survey does not include residents close to the site, does not comply with policy, proposal lacks basic infrastructure and no access to mains electricity or sewage.

Those supporting did so for the following summarised reasons:

Sympathetic to rural location, the site would be a gain for biodiversity, valuable and sustainable enterprise

Eight comments were received from residents of Kirtling but who were not directly notified by letter. Those objecting did so for the following summarised reasons:

Number of policies against approval of planning permission, issues around inadequate parking, roads and increase in traffic, significant impact to landscape, storage containers are already on site, loss of arable land, this scenic spot has been blighted by storage containers, delivery of containers will disrupt road traffic, provision of lighting will cause issues, noise and disturbance, height and scale, environmental impact (biodiversity), inappropriate land use, light pollution, pressure on local infrastructure.

Those supporting did so for the following summarised reasons:

Valuable way to support wildlife, location is remote, would help biodiversity, hedgehogs are on the red list, it will enable the younger generation to learn about wildlife, tremendous boost for the village, the proposal has been given thought and consideration.

Twenty-two comments were received by residents of East Cambs located outside Kirtling. These comments were all in support for the following summarised reasons:

ECDC supports hedgehogs, current facility is full and expansion is required

Ninety-three comments have been received from outside of the district. These comments were all in support for the following summarised reasons:

Would provide 24hr wildlife service, wild animals being turned away from vets, essential service for wildlife, the applicant has thought about the site and respecting the area, consideration should be given to the 'greater good' being achieved, rejection risks the charity ceasing to exist, hedgehogs are at risk, ECDC committed to help recover the hedgehog population with the Hedgehog SPD, general support for the applicant and the good work of the charity, this facility is urgently needed, people have used the applicant's current facility, current hospital has outgrown its site, site would be an improvement to biodiversity, nowhere on this side of Cambridgeshire that provides these facilities, the site is ideal on a quiet rural lane, there are no planning policies preventing this and does not result in harm, nine rescue centre recently closed across Cambridgeshire, reasonable distance from neighbouring properties, buildings are single storey and planting is planned, will be of a scale with the connections to train a new generation of veterinary nurses, only covers a small proportion of the site, noise and disturbance will not be an issue, if not agricultural there will be no spraying of chemicals which would be a benefit.

6.0 THE PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

6.1 East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023)

GROWTH 2	Locational strategy
GROWTH 5	Presumption in favour of sustainable development
ENV 1	Landscape and settlement character
ENV 2	Design
ENV 4	Energy and water efficiency and renewable energy in construction
ENV 7	Biodiversity and geology
ENV 8	Flood risk
ENV 9	Pollution
COM 7	Transport impact
COM 8	Parking provision

6.2 Supplementary Planning Documents

Design Guide
Country Wildlife Sites
Natural Environment SPD
Climate Change SPD
Flood and Water

6.3 National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)

- 2 Achieving sustainable development
- 4 Decision-making
- 9 Promoting sustainable transport
- 12 Achieving well-designed places
- 14 Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

6.4 Planning Practice Guidance

7.0 **PLANNING MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS AND COMMENTS**

7.1 Principle of Development

- 7.1.1 Policy GROWTH 2 states that outside of the development envelopes, development will be strictly controlled, having regard to the need to protect the countryside and the setting of towns and villages. Development will be restricted to the main categories listed in the policy, and may be permitted as an exception, providing there is no significant adverse impact on the character of the countryside and that other Local Plan policies are satisfied.
- 7.1.2 The proposal does not fall within any of the exception policies listed in GROWTH 2 and therefore would be unacceptable in principle. Therefore, to depart from policy, there would need to be sufficient justification as to why the hospital needs to be sited in this specific location.
- 7.1.3 The planning statement sets out that the use proposed is *‘unique in that it includes small scale employment development, health, welfare and medical to wildlife so requires to be in a rural or semi-rural location’* but does not actually set out the details as to why this is required. The applicants statement sets out that *‘relocation to the new hospital would enable the work to continue in a more sustainable environment, meeting the Five Welfare needs described in the Animal Welfare Act 2007, particularly, to be housed with, or apart from other animals and the ability to express normal behaviour’* and that there will be separate areas for separate species, mimicking their natural habitats to reduce stress during their stay. The applicant has also provided a document setting out which alternative sites were considered and have concluded that the location of this land is the only viable location. The statement sets out that the site is accessible enough to bring in casualties, whilst still being quiet and away from busy roads, housing and power lines, allowing wildlife the best chance of recovery and at the same time the existing volunteer team would be able to continue. In addition, the applicants statement sets out that most vet surgeries are unable to take in wildlife and that in the Cambridgeshire area, many have closed due to stress or lack of funds.
- 7.1.4 However, no real justification has been provided as to specifically why this location would be required or is the most viable. In respect of the alternative sites assessment, it is noted that largely that the land became unavailable (sold to someone else, higher offer made by someone else) or that it was too far for volunteers rather than being unsuitable for the animals. It is also noted that in respect of Nowton Cricket Ground

that the alternative site assessment states that 10.5 acres is 'small but adequate' and at a site in Ousden that part of the reason the land was not pursued was because the land available was not sufficient and then lists the size as 2.5 acres. The land within the red line of this application equates to approximately 1.21 acres and therefore is smaller than both of the above. This suggests that the scale of the site at Kirtling may be insufficient and that further land may be required (which is another concern the Council's ecologist has raised).

- 7.1.5 There is no specific, detailed information as to why this location is essential/suitable for the care and rewilding of animals. One of the Council's concerns regarding the location is that there is a badger sett in close proximity and therefore it would be difficult to rewild hedgehogs as they would likely be preyed upon by badgers. This will be discussed further in the ecology section of this report. It has not been explained why an animal could not be transported from a site to an appropriate location for rewilding.
- 7.1.6 In addition to this, the hospital includes residential accommodation. While it is noted that there are many statements made by professionals that someone needs to be on site 24/7, there is no substantive information as to why (for example, the specific needs of different animals). However, if it was accepted that a 24/7 presence was required, the information submitted states that there would be 3 full time nurses employed for round the clock care. Therefore, if there are staff employed at the site 24/7, it is considered that this would not require someone to live on site and residential accommodation would not be required. There has been no information submitted as to how shift patterns would work or how many people would be on site at any one time. In addition, there is a static caravan shown on the plan that is noted as temporary staff accommodation but there is no real explanation as to what this means. It is unclear whether this is temporary accommodation while the hospital is being built or for staff to sleep in on a temporary basis.
- 7.1.7 There also appears to be a mix of uses on site with the presence of the agricultural barn. Apart from potentially housing large animals (which the Council's Ecologist has raised concerns with and will be discussed in full in the relevant section of this report), it is not clear how or whether this is an ancillary use to the hospital. It is set out that this barn will have a number of functions (space for large animals, agricultural storage, space for community engagement). Insufficient information has been provided as to how this use supports the function of the site as a wildlife hospital. If the wider area is to be farmed, it may be more appropriate for the barn to be sited outside of the red line.
- 7.1.8 A letter has been submitted with the application from Professor Dick White, which states that it is essential that each UK regional area (25-mile radius) is able to access one centre that can provide care for abandoned juvenile hedgehogs and states that the proposed location is 40 to 50 miles distant from other such facilities in Norfolk/Buckinghamshire. It is unclear where the nearest wildlife hospitals are, for example, one letter states that PACT in Norfolk is the closest, others say Shepreth. This is an important detail if the location of the hospital is to be justified on the basis that each regional area is able to access one centre.
- 7.1.9 The proposal does not fall within an exception to GROWTH 2 and is therefore unacceptable in principle. There is insufficient justification as to why the hospital needs

to be in this specific location or why there is a need for someone to live on site. It is also unclear as to whether there is another centre within a 25-mile radius. In addition, larger sites have been discounted for being too small and there are other concerns around the suitability of the site, such as the presence of badgers. The proposal is therefore considered to be contrary to GROWTH 2 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 (as amended).

7.2 Visual Amenity

- 7.2.1 Policy ENV 1 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 states that development proposals should ensure that they provide a complementary relationship with the existing development and conserve, preserve and where possible enhance the distinctive and traditional landscapes and key views in and out of settlements. Policy ENV 2 states that development proposals ensure that the location, layout, massing, materials and colour of buildings relate sympathetically to the surrounding area.
- 7.2.2 The proposed wildlife hospital would be situated on a parcel of land along Water Lane and would occupy approximately 0.48ha (1.18 hectares) of the wider site. The site is visible from a number of vantage points; from Water Lane, from the Public Right of Way which runs to the east of the site and from Woodditton Road.
- 7.2.3 The development proposed consists of the hospital building which would be a series of storage containers linked together and clad. This building would be approximately 39 metres (127ft) at its widest point, 19 metres (62ft) deep at its deepest point and 3 metres (9.8ft) in height, excluding the solar panels. There is also an agricultural barn proposed, which from the 3D visuals plan would be timber clad with a clear roof. This building would be approximately 15 metres (49ft) deep and wide and 3.7 metres (12ft) in height. In addition to this would be a prefab building (approximately 12.5 metres (41ft) in width, 4 metres (13ft) in depth and 2.7 metres (8.8ft) in height) and a static caravan which is approximately 13.6 metres (44ft) in width, 4.4 metres (14.4ft) deep and 3.6 metres (11.8ft) in height.
- 7.2.4 The submitted plans show that there is planting proposed around the access and along the northern boundary of the site. There is also a tree belt along the northern boundary of the wider site and hedgerows around the wider site. The tree belt along the northern boundary of the site does screen the site from view on approach from Water Lane from the north and the tree planting and cladding proposed may go some way to aid in assimilating the development into the surroundings, landscaping cannot be relied upon in perpetuity.
- 7.2.5 It is considered that the proposed development would change the character and appearance of the area and would project a large amount of development into the countryside. The use of storage containers and prefab buildings have a high potential to result in a poor-quality design, particularly when considering the items that are already stored at the site. There is also a lack of consistent design rationale across the whole site which makes the site appear disjointed and lack cohesion.
- 7.2.6 In addition, the application site contains a lot of development with the site appearing very full; the proposal includes four buildings as set out above but there is also hardstanding for access and car parking. It is considered that the quantum of development proposed would result in an overdevelopment of the site.

- 7.2.7 It is considered that the proposal would result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the area due to the scale, amount and design of the development proposed and is therefore contrary to Policies ENV 1 and ENV 2 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 (as amended).

7.3 Residential Amenity

- 7.3.1 Policy ENV 2 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 states that new development will be expected to ensure that there is no significantly detrimental effect on the residential amenity of nearby occupiers and that occupiers and users of new buildings, especially dwellings, enjoy high standards of amenity.
- 7.3.2 The closest dwellings to the site are situated to the north of the site on Woodditton Road and The Green. The main issues raised by neighbours in respect of residential amenity are increased traffic and noise and disturbance.
- 7.3.3 It is considered that the physical development would not result in harm to the amenity of neighbouring dwellings, in respect of overshadowing, overbearing or overlooking as there is sufficient distance between the site and the neighbouring properties to avoid these impacts.
- 7.3.4 The Council's Environmental Health Officer (EHO) has raised no concerns in respect of the proposal and has recommended conditions to control construction hours, and a method statement should ground piling be required. He has raised no issues in respect of the lighting proposed but has recommended a condition that to prevent additional external lighting without the express permission of the Local Planning Authority (LPA).
- 7.3.5 The Council's EHO has also commented that he has no immediate concerns to raise in respect of noise but has recommended a condition that noise emitted from the site shall not exceed background level. However, officers consider that this condition would not be reasonable to impose as it is unknown whether it could be complied with.
- 7.3.6 There is concern that there would be the potential for noise and disturbance, particularly from vehicle movements but there is little information provided with the application as to how the site would operate. For example, in respect of traffic movements, the submitted information states there would be 10-15 vehicle movements a day including staff and volunteers dropping off injured animals and deliveries. However, in the applicants statement it says that there would be 3 full time vet nurses providing round the clock care, 3 part time assistants, 1 part time admin assistant and a Hospital Manager. The statement also sets out that there are 20 volunteers but only four people per day can currently be used at the existing site due to lack of space. The information submitted gives the impression that existing volunteers do not live locally so would need to drive as public transport is limited. There is no information as to how many staff and volunteers would be on site at any one time or regarding shift patterns and when people would be moving to and from the site.
- 7.3.7 The submitted information states that the living room of the residence will be used for conference facilities, that there is an educational classroom, that the multipurpose

barn would provide a space for community engagement and that local groups want to help with the project such as Brownies/Guides but there is no indication as to the scope or frequency of these uses, all of which have the potential to create traffic movements and noise and disturbance.

- 7.3.8 It is considered that the proposal lacks sufficient information to fully assess the potential impacts to the residential amenity of neighbouring dwellings. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy ENV 2 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 (as amended).

7.4 Highways

- 7.4.1 Policy COM 7 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 states that development proposals shall provide a safe and convenient access to the highway network.
- 7.4.2 Policy COM 7 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 states that development proposals shall provide a safe and convenient access to the highway network.
- 7.4.3 The site would be accessed from Water Lane. From the plans submitted, the access would be upgraded with hardstanding as it is currently an informal field access.
- 7.4.4 The Local Highway Authority (LHA) have objected to the proposal as it is not supported by sufficient transport information to demonstrate that the proposed development would not be prejudicial to the satisfactory functioning of the highway or highway safety. This additional information would be required to enable the Local Highway Authority to establish whether the proposal is considered acceptable, and what conditions, may be required to mitigate the impact of the development on the public highway, if necessary. The LHA have also noted that the proposals include an educational classroom, and specific detail would be required regarding the expected trip generation in relation to this. While they haven't specifically mentioned the other uses such as conference facilities, this would also need to be addressed.
- 7.4.5 The LHA have also commented that the visibility splay diagram provided does not conform with requirements set out under the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges for adequate inter-vehicle visibility on a derestricted road. However, they have concluded that it is apparent that adequate visibility is available along Water Lane.
- 7.4.6 Policy COM 8 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 states that development proposals should provide adequate levels of car and cycle parking in accordance with the Council's parking standards
- 7.4.7 While there are no parking standards in the Local Plan for this type of development, there are 11 spaces proposed which, given different uses mentioned within the submission (educational classroom, accommodation on site, conference facilities, community engagement, staff, volunteers and agricultural use) officers are not convinced 11 spaces would be sufficient, particularly as there are limited public transport options. However, without sufficient information as to the operation of the site in respect of the scale of some of the uses proposed and the shift patterns expected for staff/volunteers this is very difficult to assess.

- 7.4.8 In addition, the application form states that there are 10 cycle spaces, but these do not appear to be specified on the submitted drawings. The provision of cycle parking could be conditioned, however, given the uncertainty around the uses on the site means that the LPA cannot ascertain the level of cycle parking required.
- 7.4.9 The proposal does not include sufficient information to allow the LHA and LPA to be certain that there would be no significant impacts to the operation of the highway or highway safety nor to ascertain if any mitigation measures would be required. There is also insufficient information provided to ensure that the level of parking proposed is suitable. The proposal is therefore considered contrary to Policies COM 7 and COM 8 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 (as amended).

7.5 Ecology

- 7.5.1 Policy ENV 7 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 states that all applications for development that may affect biodiversity and geology interests must be accompanied by sufficient information to be determined by the Local Planning Authority, including an ecological report, to allow potential impacts and possible mitigation measures to be assessed fully. It also states that all development will be required to protect the biodiversity and geological value of land and buildings and minimise harm to or loss of environmental features, such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, wetland and ponds. Policy ENV 1 states that development proposals should protect, conserve and where possible enhance the pattern of distinctive historic and traditional landscape features such as watercourses, characteristic vegetation, individual and woodland trees, field patterns, hedgerows and walls and their function as ecological corridors for wildlife dispersal. Policy ENV 2 states that all development proposals will be expected to make efficient use of land while respecting the density, urban and village character, public spaces, landscape and biodiversity of the surrounding area.
- 7.5.2 The Council has adopted the Natural Environment SPD which states that all developments must result in biodiversity net gain.
- 7.5.3 Since April 2024, it has been mandatory to provide 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) unless exempt.
- 7.5.4 The Council's Senior Ecologist has raised two objections to the proposal. The first is harm to protected species. The existing storage at the site (which would be relocated onto the application site if approved) has been placed within 30m of an active badger sett and will require a licence for disturbance would be required to remove the structures and no structure should have been placed on the land without a licence which is a concern as the proposal is for a wildlife hospital.
- 7.5.5 In addition to this, the presence of badgers in close proximity to the site, infection control measures would need to be put in place to protect animals from infection but also to prevent sick animals infecting the native population. There is also concern that hedgehogs could not be released here as they would be eaten by the badgers.
- 7.5.6 The Senior Ecologist has also raised concern that there is a large animal room in the hospital but nowhere for them to recover and the agricultural shed would not be appropriate due to the specific requirements of large animals and that outdoor pens

would be expected for acclimating animals for release. She has raised concern that the redline boundary of the site may be inappropriate (too small) as it is not accommodating the basic needs of sick animals.

- 7.5.7 The second objection is that the protected road verge which runs along Water Lane is proposed to be fragmented and partially removed. The road verge adjoins a County Wildlife Site (CWS) and therefore the proposal is currently contrary to Policy ENV 7 as it does not protect the biodiversity and geological value of the land nor minimise harm to or loss of environmental features.
- 7.5.8 In respect of BNG, the Senior Ecologist has objected on the basis that baseline habitat is incorrect and the road verge, which is a protected road verge for its flora diversity, needs to be factored into the habitats and accounted for within the metric with suitable mitigation included. The area for the biodiversity improvements is shown as 0.58ha (1.4 acres) which is greater than the site size which means that a revision of onsite habitats would need to occur.
- 7.5.9 The Senior Ecologist has also queried the size of the plot in relation to the field use and has commented that other parts are already in use and not determined in the application and if the wider site is to be grazed, where are the facilities for livestock. She has also queried why there is a Koi pond shown on the plans and why this is required as these are not a native species and if it is for native fish rescue then the pond shown would be too small. In addition, she has commented the classroom is concerning as it is not clear whether this is for professional education or schools and if the intention is for schools, then the site is too small and lacks appropriate visitor facilities. Finally, she has queried why the bird room shown on the plans which is not near an aviary as the stress on native birds not being outside would likely kill them.
- 7.5.10 The Trees Officer has commented that the proposal does not appear to impact any existing trees on or adjacent the site but the soft landscaping information lacks detail. However, a detailed soft landscaping scheme could be secured by condition if the application was to be approved.
- 7.5.11 The proposal has the potential to result in harm to protected species and there are serious concerns regarding the potential rewilding of hedgehogs in close proximity to a badger sett and if rewilding has to occur off site, then this suggests that the location is not appropriate and adds to the conclusion that there is insufficient justification for the proposed hospital to be sited here. In addition, the proposal would result in partial removal of a protected road verge which has not been mitigated against. There are also a number of queries raised as set out above. The proposal also does not comply with the legal requirement to provide 10% BNG as the baseline habitat is incorrect.
- 7.5.12 There is insufficient information submitted for the LPA to be satisfied that the proposal would not result in harm to protected species and would protect, mitigate and enhance biodiversity. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies ENV 1, ENV 2 and ENV 7 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 (as amended), the Natural Environment SPD, Chapter 15 of the NPPF, as well as failing to meet the overarching objectives of the Environment Act 2021 in achieving net gains in biodiversity and protection of irreplaceable habitats.

7.6 Flood Risk and Drainage

- 7.6.1 Policy ENV 8 states that all developments and re-developments should contribute to an overall flood risk reduction. The sequential and exception test will be strictly applied across the district and new development should normally be located in flood zone 1; the application site is situated in flood zone 1 and therefore is considered to be acceptable.
- 7.6.2 There has been concern raised that the site lacks basic infrastructure. The application form states that surface water would be disposed of via soakaway and foul water disposed of via a septic tank. No details of the soakaways have been shown on the submitted drawings and only basic details of the septic tank have been included.
- 7.6.3 The septic tank would require Building Regulations approval and at this stage a percolation test and design of the drainage field would be required. This type of development must have building regulations approval and may require a permit from the Environment Agency, both of which are legislation separate to planning. The applicant would need to apply separately for these consents, and any grant of planning permission does not negate the need to comply with other relevant legislation.
- 7.6.4 In addition, soakaways would also require Building Regulations approval, and it is considered that the site would likely be large enough to accommodate soakaways.
- 7.6.5 There are no obvious concerns or objections to these methods of water disposal and therefore the proposal is considered to comply with Policy ENV 8 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 (as amended).

7.7 Climate Change

- 7.7.1 Local Plan Policy ENV4 states: 'All proposals for new development should aim for reduced or zero carbon development in accordance with the zero carbon hierarchy: first maximising energy efficiency and then incorporating renewable or low carbon energy sources on-site as far as practicable' and 'Applicants will be required to demonstrate how they have considered maximising all aspects of sustainable design and construction.' The adopted Climate Change SPD encourages all development to include sustainability measures within their proposal.
- 7.7.2 The proposal has some sustainability benefits in that the proposed development would re-use existing storage containers, a prefab and a static caravan. It also incorporates solar panels. There are also mentions of other elements that could be considered a sustainability benefit, for example, wind power but this is only mentioned in one document and no details have been submitted.
- 7.7.3 However, it is considered that there would be sufficient scope to incorporate a number of sustainability benefits and if approved a detailed sustainability statement could be conditioned. However, certain sustainability benefits such as wind power (turbine) may require planning permission in their own right so would need to be applied for separately.
- 7.7.4 With the imposition of a condition for the submission of a sustainability statement, it is considered that the proposal would comply with Policy ENV 4 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2015 (as amended) and the Climate Change SPD.

7.8 Other Material Matters

- 7.8.1 The Parish Council have commented that there does not appear to have been a sustainable business/funding plan so there is concern that it may have to be abandoned and become an eyesore. The LPA would not routinely seek a funding plan in relation to an application unless clearly relevant (such as the stipulation in HOU5 that applications for rural workers dwellings must demonstrate that the enterprise must be and remain financially viable), however, it is noted that in the Ecological Impact Assessment that the timings for development are unknown but it is likely to be in phases as funding becomes available. If the application were being approved, a condition would be imposed for a phasing plan to set out the intended stages of delivery at the site.
- 7.8.2 There have been comments made that the site lacks basic infrastructure. There has been very limited information submitted in relation to this. Where this has been mentioned, it is inconsistent. For example, one document mentions wind power, but this has not been mentioned anywhere else. While this information could potentially be secured by condition, this is another area where there is a lack of detail as to the operation of the site which does not assist officers in assessing the proposal.
- 7.8.3 There has been reference made throughout the application and the comments received as to ECDC supporting hedgehogs through the adoption of the Hedgehog SPD. However, the SPD is to inform the reader what the average developer should do, such as create hedgehog highways as part of their development, rather than express any type of support for development of this nature.

7.9 Human Rights Act

- 7.9.1 The development has been assessed against the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998, and in particular Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) and Article 1 of the First Protocol (protection of property). Under the Act, it is unlawful for a public authority, such as East Cambridgeshire District Council, to act in a manner that is incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. In arriving at this recommendation, due regard has been given to the applicant's reasonable development rights and expectations which have been balanced and weighed against the wider community interests, as expressed through third party interests / the Development Plan and Central Government Guidance. The Council is also permitted to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest and the recommendation set out below is considered to be a proportionate response to the submitted application based on the considerations set out in this report.

7.10 Equalities and Diversities

- 7.10.1 In considering this planning application due regard has been had to the public sector equality duty (PSED) under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, which means that the Council must have due regard to the need (in discharging its functions) to put an end to unlawful behaviour that is banned by the Equality Act, including discrimination, harassment and victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who have a protected characteristic and those who do not. Account has been taken of the PSED and it is considered that the recommendation set out below would not undermine the objectives of the duty.

7.11 Planning Balance

- 7.11.1 There is undoubtedly a lot of support for the application as evidenced by the number of positive comments received. There are also a number of positive elements to the application such as supporting wildlife and the positive benefits that the proposal brings to those who volunteer at the current establishment. In addition, the hospital would provide training opportunities for veterinary nurses. Letters of support have also been submitted from vets, other wildlife hospitals and charities including the British Hedgehog Preservation Society.
- 7.11.2 However, when considering the material planning considerations, the proposal is unacceptable in principle, results in harm to the character and appearance of the area and lacks sufficient information to assess the impacts of the proposal to residential amenity, highway safety, parking and biodiversity. In addition, the proposal is not complying with the legal requirement to provide 10% Biodiversity Net Gain due to an incorrect baseline habitat.
- 7.11.3 It is considered that while there is a lot of support for the proposal, there have been objections received from residents who live close to the site and from the Parish Council. Weight has been given to the letters of support from vets and other wildlife professionals, however, there are no material planning considerations that outweigh the significant conflicts with policies outlined in this report and the resulting five reasons for refusal.

8.0 APPENDICES

8.1 None

PLANS

The following plans are a selection of those submitted as part of the application and are provided to illustrate the proposed development. They may not be to scale. The full suite of plans can be found on the Council's website.

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