

APPLICATION REPORT – 23/00557/FULMAJ

Validation Date: 14 July 2023

Ward: Croston, Mawdesley And Euxton South

Type of Application: Major Full Planning

Proposal: Erection of Blending Building following demolition of existing building to accommodate 'Freshtusion' pet food production process, extension of Engineers Stores building, erection of 'Swash' building to accommodate washing and recycling of containers, erection of covering to route used for the internal transfer of materials and finished products incorporating overhead conveyor for containers, erection of timber screen fences within the site and along the western boundary

Location: Golden Acres Ltd Plocks Farm Liverpool Road Bretherton Leyland PR26 9AX

Case Officer: Mr Iain Crossland

Applicant: Mr Roger Bracewell

Agent: Mr Tom Hollick

Consultation expiry: 9 August 2023

Decision due by: 13 October 2023

RECOMMENDATION

1. It is recommended that Members be minded to approve full planning permission following referral to the Secretary of State under the provisions of the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2021.

SITE DESCRIPTION

2. The application site is a major industrial site that is located in the Green Belt to the western extremity of the Borough. The site was originally an arable farm, but first diversified into the manufacture and distribution of dry extruded animal foods in 1992 using the farm's crop production as its basis. Following on from this diversification, several planning applications were approved as the business grew. There are now a number of large industrial buildings across the site of utilitarian design. There are also large plant structures, and areas of hardstanding. The character of the surrounding area is largely open agricultural land with a distinctly flat topography, although the village of Tarleton is located to the west on the opposite side of the River Douglas. The application site comprises a clearly defined area of major development bound by the River Douglas to the west and A59 to the east.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3. This application seeks planning permission for the erection of a Blending Building following demolition of an existing building to accommodate the 'Freshtusion' pet food production process, an extension to the Engineers Stores building, erection of a 'Swash' building to accommodate washing and recycling of containers, erection of a covering to the route used for the internal transfer of materials and finished produ incorporating an overhead conveyor

for containers, and the erection of timber screen fences within the site and along the western boundary extending from the existing pipe bridge.

4. The proposed Blending Building is a replacement of the existing blending building in the south east part of Plocks Farm to accommodate plant and equipment to enable the electrification of existing driers, and the replacement of the current Extrusion Lines 'A' and 'B' by two updated lines, to be known as Extrusion Lines 'E' and 'F'. The footprint would be same as the existing building. There would be a shallow dual pitched roof with a maximum height of approximately 25m over an area measuring approximately 47m by 32m, whilst a lower 'pack building' section would have a maximum height of approximately 14m over an area measuring approximately 44m by 36m. For the most part the building would be faced in profile sheet cladding in 'Olive Green' over a lower band of precast concrete block.
5. The proposed extension to the Engineering Stores would measure approximately 60m by 22m with a height of approximately 14m to provide the space required for the racking system. This development would be located in a cluster to the southeast corner of the Plocks Farm buildings. The extension would be faced in profile sheet cladding in 'Olive Green' over a lower band of precast concrete block.
6. The 'Swash' Building would be located on the lower level of Plocks Farm, in a triangular area of land adjacent to the biobeds on the west and the air corridor to the south. It would provide facilities for the automated sanitizing (washing and drying) of the variously sized vessels used to transport dry powers, meats and fats, and finished dry kibbles around the site. The building would measure approximately 48m by 59m and would have a maximum height of approximately 25m.
7. The proposed Transfer Routes are located in the core of Plocks Farm. The proposed canopy structure would cover the transfer routes and would provide a two-storey transport system, as the existing AGVs (both Mules and Camels) would operate at ground level, whilst the lighter and smaller containers would be moved on an automated circular track (the 'conveyor') at the upper level.
8. The Canopy is detailed to have a level profile when viewed in elevation. The conveyor level would have a height of approximately 9m, allowing for adequate clearance for vehicles operating at ground level, and the width would be 10m, allowing for the two-way road to pass under, with pedestrian routes on either side.
9. The Screen Fence to the Recycling Yard would comprise a 4.3m high close boarded fence attached to the proposed parapet wall around the south and west side of the yard, which serves the Engineering Store Extension. It would achieve a barrier height of 5.8m from yard level and has been conceived with the intention of screening Plocks Farm activity from views along the Leeds-Liverpool Canal Corridor, and from the expanding residential development on the east side of Tarleton.
10. The screen fence extending from the existing pipe bridge would continue the close boarded timber fence, supported on galvanised steelwork, to a height of 6m to match the existing screen fence forming part of the pipe bridge.

APPLICANTS CASE

11. Plocks Farm was originally an arable farm, and in 1992 it diversified into the manufacture and distribution of dry extruded animal foods using crop production from the farmland as the basis. The business has been a tremendous success and now employs (as staff, agency workers and contractors) some 850 people having a turnover in excess of £144m, of which 44% is exported to 37 different countries including Russia and Japan.
12. This development has been formalised by over thirty separate Planning Applications to Chorley Council as local planning authority. Since 2003 GA has worked to a 'Masterplan' strategy, which relates to a ten-year period and shows all the envisaged requirements for

that period. This ensures a comprehensive approach where clarity is provided for the Council about the whole site, as far into the future as is possible.

Blending Building (17)

13. GA has a number of business needs. In terms of emissions it currently emits 23% of all Chorley Borough industrial and commercial greenhouse gases, and as a consequence GA have pledged to reduce carbon emissions by 50% in each decade to reach Net Zero by 2050. To achieve this, gas is to be removed from all its processes (primarily gas-powered driers and steam boiler) and replaced by electricity sources, allowing the potential for use of green energy. In addition, the current extrusion lines 'A' and 'B' are now around 30 years old. The functionality and sanitization requirements have changed, and the plant needs to be modernised to meet the required need.
14. GA has pioneered a production process, covered by a registered trade mark known as 'Freshtursion'. The process concentrates on the collection of fresh meat from source and its transportation to Plocks Farm in refrigerated vehicles, followed by cooking on-site at a low temperature (82oC). Fats which are extracted via a centrifuge are removed and re-used later in the process. The water is evaporated in a vacuum at 60oC to produce a thick gravy with a dry water content of 60%, this product is stable and is available as and when required for the extrusion process as the single source of meat protein for the production of the dry kibble. This process is currently taking place in building 17, and will in future be undertaken in the new Meat Kitchen (46), part of the 2015 Masterplan consent.
15. The new process requires the replacement of the existing Lines 'A' and 'B' with the upgraded Lines 'E' and 'F'. This will allow the production capacity to increase from the current level of 90,000 metric tonnes per annum to 120,000 tonnes, part of the business plan which generated the overall 2015 Masterplan, however, the need has been advanced as a priority to respond to the climate change agenda and replace gas with electricity as the heat source in the drying process. This is not only beneficial to the environment, but it is claimed to be significantly more economical as it dries at a lower temperature, makes greater use of controlling the relative humidity of the drying air, by condensing moisture from the humid air within the dryer, and then reusing the warm air so as not to waste the heat.
16. The improvement provided by the new Lines 'E' and 'F' also allows for tighter containment of salmonella risks within the production process, something that is currently not possible with the current plant. The new facility would also be fed directly by ground and blended dry raw materials from the recently completed Ingredients Kitchen (45), part of the 2015 Masterplan strategy and constructed to realise the target of 120,000 tonnes produce per annum.
17. Overall, these improvements of the production infrastructure will allow GA to maintain its position at the forefront of advanced pet food manufacturing.

Extension to Engineering Stores (26)

18. Currently stocks of spare parts are held in separate places, including former shipping containers, and there is a need to provide a single / centralised location in the interests of efficiency. The increasing complexity of the production processes now involves a greater range of maintenance tasks and equipment, and needs a wider range of spare parts, to allow an immediate response to any plant failures and mitigate or avoid disruption of production. The proposed expansion increases the storage capacity within the core maintenance area, and will also provide space for a dedicated team to develop maintenance and management regimes for both the present operations as well as the expansion and rationalisation of the systems required over the next 15 years, to keep in step with planned improvement projects.
19. The building will also provide an office for the administrative team (Store Keepers and Parts Procurement) and welfare facilities (canteen, toilets). These are to be accommodated over two floors in the south/west corner. The main part of the Extension will be occupied by a racking system for the spare parts and materials and will provide secure storage for, and

ready access to the many larger more awkwardly shaped components of the production process.

'Swash' Building (40)

20. The 'Swash' Building will provide a covered building to house automated washing facilities to clean, dry, and store all the containers used at Plocks Farm. The name is an amalgamation of 'storage' and 'washing'. This is currently done 24/7 in the open air, on the location scheduled for the construction of the Engineering Store Extension (26, as 4.4 above). In terms of the sequence of work, it is thus essential that the Swash facility is completed and operational as the first step, releasing the area currently used for the Store Extension project.
21. The Swash Building provides facilities for the automated sanitizing (washing and drying) of the variously sized vessels used to transport dry powders, meats and fats, and finished dry kibbles around the site. The scale of the building is largely dictated by the dehumidification plant, and the need to store containers for a long period to complete the process - thorough drying is essential and the facility needs to provide sufficient capacity to accommodate the stock of containers, which need to be heated for up to 48 hours to remove the final elements of moisture.
22. These containers are transported automatically on the raised covered roadway (known as "Central Avenue") and transferred into the Building to arrive at one of the five separate washing machines. The containers are sorted according to their size. The washing machines are located on both the first and second floors. They automatically clean the containers, which are then transferred to fixed racks in a 'Drying Room' using automated cranes. The Drying Room is heated and dehumidified to remove the moisture from the washed containers. Once dried they are immediately available for re-use within the production process, being re-loaded either onto Central Avenue or onto the trailers and taken to other parts of the site where required.
23. The elevated part of the building comprises an automated store, fully racked, with the containers moved by cranes and then placed in the store to dry. This part of the building rises to 30.47m AOD, the floor height (5.76m) is required to accommodate the number of containers for the drying process for the 48-hour period prior to their return to support the manufacturing process.
24. The remainder of the Swash Building is at a lower level of 28.87m. AOD. This area covers the physical washing of the containers, which is performed over the ground, first and second floors. The automated washing process is accommodated on the first and second floors, leaving the ground floor available for manual cleaning or for any specialist cleaning required. The ground floor also provides vehicular access via roller shutter doors in the north elevation, allowing HGV trailers to be unloaded and reloaded from the adjacent external yard, also shared with the Meat Kitchen (46).
25. The containment of the washing process within the building ensures that the noise, and any potential odours, are all contained within the building, being an improvement on the current process, which is all undertaken externally in an open yard.

Coverings to Transfer Routes - Central Avenue (75) and Regent Street (76)

26. The pet food production process necessitates the transfer of materials between the various processing centres within Plocks Farm. This is done using auto-guided electric vehicles (AGV's) running on the internal (concrete) road system. The AGV's are segregated into 'Camels' (transporting the larger containers of raw materials, known as Batch Containers (BC), and 'Mules' (transporting the smaller containers of finished pet food kibbles): the vehicles in Figs 7 – 8 above are Camels.
27. At present, the AGVs operate in the open air, with the attendant risk of damage to the materials, as well as a reduction in the efficiency of the vehicles when the weather is wet or

windy. The project creates a covered route, providing shelter for the produce and maintaining a dry track to improve the efficiency of the AGVs, especially in inclement weather.

28. There are three basic movements –
- a) The transfer of the raw ingredients in BC's from the Ingredients Kitchen (45) (where they are mixed to customers' requirements in batches) to the Blending Building (17 remodelled as per 4.3 above) where they are processed into the kibbles.
 - b) The return journey for the AGVs to deliver the kibble products back to the Ingredients Kitchen for interim storage, and then to collect more raw ingredients to continue the cycle.
 - c) The movement of the individual containers which, once emptied in the Blending Building (17), need to be transported to the Swash Building (40) for sanitising and preparation for return to the Ingredients Kitchen for refilling and allowing the sequence to restart.
29. All these movements of containers ((both empty and full, used and sanitised) are currently done at ground level using the same roadways, causing congestion: segregation of the movements will remove this problem thereby improving production efficiency.

Boundary Screening

30. A previous appraisal of the current setting of Plocks Farm within its landscape context, carried out a review of the measures taken to establish screening provided by a woodland setting following the approval of the initial Masterplan in 2003. The proposed screening responds to this as the assessment identified three additional locations where fencing could be of benefit to screen the Plocks Farm activity in views for the Leeds-Liverpool Canal Corridor, and from the expanding residential development on the east side of Tarleton.
31. To address the visual impact of Plocks Farm in views from Tarleton it is proposed to add a timber screen along the top of the block retaining wall separating the HGV parking area (8) from the lower level of the yard area in front of the Laundry/Workshop (19) and Recycling Buildings (20).
32. The panorama (Fig 10) shows the current effect. The woodland planting structure of Plocks Farm is developing to absorb the buildings into the landscape context, however, the yard on the north side is open to views, particularly from the angle of Tarleton Lock, and is approximately 2m higher than the land on which the perimeter woodland (W15) is planted. The white 'blocks' (refrigerated road-going trailers) contrast with the dark green of the woodland background and are clearly visible in the view.
33. The area between the retaining wall between the two levels and the flood bank is scheduled for development with the Laundry Building (19). This is to have dark green cladding and will provide screening, however, the construction of the 5m high close-boarded timber fence will safeguard this view, particularly in the short term.

REPRESENTATIONS

34. No comments have been received.

CONSULTATIONS

35. Bretherton Parish Council: No comments have been received.
36. United Utilities: No objection subject to a condition requiring accordance with the drainage masterplan phasing assessment.
37. Regulatory Services - Environmental Health: No comments received.
38. Environment Agency: No objection.

39. Lead Local Flood Authority: No objection.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Principle of development in the Green Belt

40. The application site is located in the Green Belt at Bretherton close to the western boundary of the Borough and is a major previously developed site, although it is not specifically identified as such in the Chorley Local Plan 2012 - 2026.

41. National guidance on Green Belt is contained in Chapter 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) which states:

137. 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.

138. Green Belt serves five purposes:

- 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.*

147. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

148. 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, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

149. A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

- a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;*
- b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;*
- c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;*
- d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;*
- e) limited infilling in villages;*
- f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and*
- g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:
 - not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or*
 - not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.**

42. Bretherton is not specified as an area for growth within Core Strategy Policy 1 and falls to be considered as an 'other place'. Criterion (f) of Core Strategy Policy 1 reads as follows:

43. "In other places – smaller villages, substantially built up frontages and Major Developed Sites – development will typically be small scale and limited to appropriate infilling, conversion of buildings and proposals to meet local need, unless there are exceptional reasons for larger scale redevelopment schemes."
44. Policy BNE5 of Chorley Local Plan 2012 – 2016 relates to previously developed land within the Green Belt and reflects guidance contained within the Framework as follows:
The reuse, infilling or redevelopment of previously developed sites in the Green Belt, will be permitted providing the following criteria are met:
In the case of re-use
- a) *The proposal does not have a materially greater impact than the existing use on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land in it;*
 - b) *The development respects the character of the landscape and has regard to the need to integrate the development with its surroundings, and will not be of significant detriment to features of historical or ecological importance.*
- In the case of infill:*
- c) *The proposal does not lead to a major increase in the developed portion of the site, resulting in a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.*
- In the case of redevelopment:*
- d) *The appearance of the site as a whole is maintained or enhanced and that all proposals, including those for partial redevelopment, are put forward in the context of a comprehensive plan for the site as a whole.*
45. Whilst the test for sites such as this relates to the impact on openness it is important to note that the Framework contains no specific definition of 'openness'. It is acknowledged that the site is a major developed site and as such comprises a significant amount of built form already. The proposed development would be viewed in the context of the existing buildings on the site and positioned within the developed area of the site.
46. The site is well contained and has been strategically landscaped over time in order to create a dense woodland buffer to the periphery, which contains the development and largely conceals built form from views of the site. It is also noted that planning permission for a pipe bridge was approved (18/00279/FUL), which has been implemented and effectively screens the site from the west. It is, however, noted that where the pipe bridge terminates there are more open views of the buildings at the site. The development would not increase the developed part of the site. In addition to this, views of the application site are limited by landscaping and other structures.
47. The proposed blending building would replace an existing building in the same use at the centre of the site. It would cover the same footprint but would be a significantly taller structure and of greater volume. It would be similar in height to the existing ingredients kitchen to the north but would be positioned to the south of the site, and not in the immediate context of this building. As a result it would clearly increase the visual presence of built form through the additional height of development on this part of the site. This would have a visual impact on openness that would be clear from public vantage points to the west in particular. There would also be a spatial impact on openness through the increased volume of development. It is therefore considered that the proposed blending building would have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development.
48. The proposed extension to the engineering stores building would fill the space occupied by the service yard located in a cluster to the southeast corner of the Plocks Farm buildings. Paragraph 149 of the Framework sets out that one exception to inappropriate development is the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.

49. Whether the proposed extension would result in a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building is a subjective judgment. Objective criteria could include the volume of the existing buildings although it is important to note that the Framework does not include such an allowance or capacity test. The proposed extension would be of a lesser volume by comparison to the building to which it would be attached and would be set within the context of a larger development of buildings and thereby indistinguishable. As such the extension is not considered to be disproportionate and would not, therefore, represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
50. The proposed swash building would be positioned within a triangular area of land adjacent to the biobeds to the west and the air corridor to the south. The positioning is such that it would be entirely contained by surrounding development within the site. The proposed building would be similar in height to the existing ingredients kitchen to the north but would be positioned to the south of the site, and not in the immediate context of this building. It would become one of the tallest structures on the site and would clearly increase the visual presence of built form through its physical presence within the site. This would have a visual impact on openness that would be clear from public vantage points to the west in particular. There would also be a spatial impact on openness through the increased volume of development. It is therefore considered that the proposed swash building would have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development.
51. The coverings to the transfer routes would be located centrally within the site and would be contained by existing development. The structure would be comparable in height with the surrounding buildings and would be viewed within the context of the existing structures at the site. In addition to this the proposed building would not be visually dominant from public view points due to its position within the centre of the site, peripheral landscaping and surrounding buildings and structures of scale. This element of the development would be consistent with the infilling of a previously developed site in line with paragraph 149.g) of the Framework.
52. The proposed screening would extend the current screen provided by the pipe bridge to the north of this structure, would screen the recycling area to the north east and the workshop to the south. These elements are proposed in response to visual impacts that already occur through the outdoor storage uses and the presence of existing structures and plant. They are intended to ameliorate these existing visual impacts and would help to fill gaps in the screening that is currently provided at the site. The screen fencing would be visible from outside the site to the west, however, they would be viewed in the context of the existing buildings and would not impact on the openness of the site any greater than the existing development, which is significant. It is the case that the fencing would be visible, however this would be instead of the structures and buildings, but would provide an improved appearance of these parts of the site when viewed externally. As such they would not impact on openness in this context.
53. There is a strong landscape buffer and fencing to the east of the site bound by the A59, such that views into the site are fleeting from the site entrance area only. To the west of the site from the canal towpath there is an embankment and landscape buffer that filter views effectively, whilst the proposed buildings would be set far enough into the site such that their prominence would be reduced. In addition to this the proposed development would be viewed at distance within the context of the existing large buildings. Nonetheless the blending building and swash building would be tall structures visible at distance from outside the site, and would increase the overall scale of development.
54. When pulling these points together in considering the impact of the development as a whole, the Framework and Local Plan policy requires the decision maker to consider and make an assessment of whether the openness of the Green Belt is impacted or harmed by the proposals to a greater extent than openness has already been impacted as set out in policy BNE5 c) of the Chorley Local Plan. This is an open-textured assessment and there is no check list to be gone through but, where openness of the Green Belt is in issue, visual impact, as well as spatial impact, requires consideration, subject to a margin of appreciation.

55. The proposed development is contained within an already well developed site and would not result in any encroachment, or sprawl and would not lead to the merging of built up areas. As such there would be no harm to any of the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. There would be an impact on openness due to the height and scale of the proposed blending building and swash building, which would be a clear break from the existing built form and prevailing building heights across the site, although it is acknowledged that there are structures of similar height elsewhere at the site. Given the overall impact the development as a whole would fail to meet with any of the exceptions to inappropriate development set out at paragraphs 149 and 150 of the Framework.
56. As such the tests of paragraph 148 of the Framework are engaged. This sets out that very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. The proposal must be considered in its entirety in order to properly consider the harm, benefits and other considerations in the Green Belt balance. These considerations are brought together in concluding the assessment of the proposal.
57. In relation to the scale of development in an 'other area' as identified by policy 1(f) of the Central Lancashire Core Strategy the circumstances of the business on the site and its existing scale are such that any improvements to business processes or productivity can only be carried out at the existing site, which is an exceptional circumstance for major development on this specific site, which is already a major developed site. As such it is considered that the proposed development is compliant with policy 1(f) of the Central Lancashire Core Strategy.
58. In relation to policy EP3 of the Chorley Local Plan 2012 – 2026, which seeks to ensure appropriate standards of business development, the proposed development would be located within the centre of an existing large scale industrial site. The blending building would replace an existing building resulting in a reorganisation of the existing functions already carried out at the site. The engineering store, swash building and coverings to the transport routes would support existing operations and enable efficiencies to be achieved, whilst the screen fences are a practical response to the current visual impacts of the site. The structures would be functional in nature, though they would match the finish and form of existing buildings at the site, contributing to the same operations, whilst a strategic landscaping plan has been set out, and has been largely implemented and being managed. As such the development would be in general compliance with policy EP3. Matters of character and the impact on amenity are considered below.

Impact on the character of the area

59. The proposed development would be well contained within the existing industrial site, which is well established. The proposed blending building would replace an existing structure, though it would be significantly higher at approximately 25m in height. This would be amongst the tallest buildings on the site and as such would be visible from public views beyond the site. The additional height is required to accommodate the new Freshtrusion plant, which is the rationale behind the development and would improve the efficiency and environmental impact of the business. The building would be faced in materials to match the existing buildings at the site, which are faced in green cladding. This would help the development to blend in with those existing buildings around it and would be in keeping with the industrial appearance and character of the site. Although the building would be visible at distance its presence would not be unexpected in the context of what is a major developed industrial site and would not harm the character of the area over and above the existing impacts presented by the site and consented schemes.
60. The extension to the engineering stores would extend the existing building to which it would be connected and would be of the same scale and form. It would also use matching materials and be located within a part of the site that is largely screened at present by existing buildings or boundary landscaping. The extension would be viewed in the context of existing buildings of similar design and would reflect existing development.

61. The proposed Swash building would be a new structure on an existing yard area, and would also be amongst the tallest buildings on the site at approximately 25m in height. As such the upper portion of the building would be visible from public views beyond the site. The additional height is required to accommodate the dehumidification plant, and the need to store containers for a long period to complete the process. The containers would be transported to one of five separate washing machines within the building and sorted according to their size. The washing machines would be located on both the first and second floors. These would automatically clean the containers, which are then transferred to fixed racks in a 'Drying Room' using automated cranes. The Drying Room is heated and dehumidified to remove the moisture from the washed containers. Once dried they are immediately available for re-use within the production process, being re-loaded either onto Central Avenue or onto the trailers and taken to other parts of the site where required.
62. The building would be faced in materials to match the existing buildings at the site, which are faced in green cladding. This would help the development to blend in with those existing buildings around it and would be in keeping with the industrial appearance and character of the site. Although the building would be visible at distance it's presence would not be unexpected in the context of what is a major developed industrial site and would not harm the character of the area over and above the existing impacts presented by the site and consented schemes.
63. The coverings to the transfer routes would be of a functional appearance and would span the main circulation routes between the ingredients kitchen and extrusion lines. Given the central position within the site this would not be visible from public views and would be commensurate in the context of existing structures and the scale of the site, being of a similar height to the current structures. The appearance of the proposed coverings would be appropriate for an industrial scale development of this nature and would not impact on the character of the area.
64. Comprehensive planting works to provide a woodland structure for the site have been carried out generally in advance of the various phases of development that have already occurred, with the first areas being established in 2004-05 using mass planting of whips and transplants. The subsequent management has been guided by an Ecological Management Plan, prepared by Pennine Ecological and BCA Landscape and reviewed every two years. The planting has matured over the past 18 years to form continuous woodland belts and copses around the periphery of the site. However, it has been identified that there are gaps in the landscape buffer. A recent appraisal of the current setting of Plocks Farm within its landscape context was carried out, which identified three additional locations where fencing could be of benefit to screen the Plocks Farm activity in views for the Leeds-Liverpool Canal Corridor, and from the expanding residential development on the east side of Tarleton. Two of these locations are addressed through this application.
65. The 4m high close boarded fence would be attached to the proposed parapet wall around the south and west side of the yard, which serves the Engineering Store Extension, and would achieve a barrier height of approximately 5.8m from yard level. This would be effective in screening of the yard activity in views from Bank Bridge.
66. It is proposed to add a timber screen along the top of the block retaining wall separating the HGV parking area from the lower level of the yard area in front of the Laundry/Workshop and Recycling Buildings. The woodland planting structure of Plocks Farm is developing to absorb the buildings into the landscape context, however, the yard on the north side is open to views, particularly from the angle of Tarleton Lock, and is approximately 2m higher than the land on which the perimeter woodland is planted. The trailers parked in this area contrast with the dark green of the woodland background and are clearly visible in the view. The construction of the 5m high close-boarded timber fence would screen this unsightly element of the site and would safeguard this view, particularly in the short term.
67. The proposed screening would provide an improvement in the visual impact of the site when viewed from Tarleton Lock and Bank Bridge filling current gaps and resulting in a more consistent and less visually obtrusive exterior.

68. Overall the proposed development would reflect the industrial nature of the site. Two elements of the proposal would be readily visible by virtue of their height, but would be reflective of the other buildings and the context of the site. The proposed screen fencing would improve the visual appearance of the site by filling gaps in the current landscaping and screening. On the basis of the above it is considered that the proposed development would be comply with policies BNE1 and EP3 of the Chorley Local Plan 2015 – 2026 in respect of the visual impact and local character.

Impact on neighbour amenity

69. The application site is located some distance from residential dwellings (at least 200m), such that there would be no impact from the physical presence of the proposed buildings despite the scale and mass of the blending building and swash building. Operational noise and odours would not be impacted upon as a result of the proposed development, as the proposed development would support the existing operations that already occur on the site. It is likely that there will be some improvements to noise and odour emissions as the washing of vessels for the transportation of product would take place internally, whereas this is currently an external process. In addition the screen fencing that is proposed has some acoustic properties, which will help to contain some elements of noise within the site, where there are currently gaps.

Flood risk

70. Part of the application site is located within Flood Zones 2 and 3. In this instance the proposed development would not extend the developed part of the site and would replace an existing building with a new building on the same footprint in the case of the blending building, whilst the proposed engineering store extension and swash building would be built over the existing hard surfacing and the transfer route coverings would provide cover over an existing concrete track. The development would have the same level of flood resilience as the current development on the site, whilst the level of flood risk would not be increased by the development, given that it would not increase the area of hard surfacing. The proposed buildings would also be developed to improved building regulations in comparison with the existing buildings with regard to providing safe access and escape routes. There is no sequentially preferable site given that the development is specific to the current business located on an already major developed site and is effectively an upgrade and extension of an existing facility.

71. Foul and surface water drainage within Plocks Farm is treated in separate systems, as per Condition 24 of the 2015 Masterplan consent (15/00888/FULMAJ). The 2015 Masterplan Consent included Conditions for surface water management (Conditions 12 and 13) and surface water management (Condition 15) on the Site. These have been discharged by the submission of a site-wide drainage strategy prepared for GA by Tetra Tech (TT), set out in the reports approved as part of the application 22/00019/DIS 24th November 2022.

72. It is noted that the Environmental Statement submitted with the 2015 Masterplan consent included Chapter 12, which set out parameters for the management of flood risk and defining the requirements for the raising of the flood bank along the River Douglas. The further detail, including the detailed design of the flood bank improvement, was submitted and approved in 2016 (Ref. 16/00159/DIS 09 May 2016).

73. Subsequently, there were several flooding incidents in West Lancashire, which prompted a review of the criteria and the application of a new Condition (20) within the consent for the new Packing Hall, Bldg 6, (Application Ref 20/00449/FULMAJ). The Tetra Tech Report "Review of Flood Risk Assessment 784-B031923" (16th September 2021) was submitted as part of the Application Ref 22/00019/DIS, noting that all buildings, which have people habitually present should have a threshold level of 6.15m AOD. The proposed buildings all have a threshold level exceeding 6.15m AOD and therefore comply with arrangements set out in the Review of Flood Risk Assessment.

Highway safety

74. The site has an established access and egress system with HGVs and visitors entering using the easterly access to the site. It is not proposed that this arrangement would be altered. The replacement of blending building and erection of the swash building and engineering store extension on the are unlikely to alter the operations of the business to such an extent that there would be any material impact on highway capacity over and above the existing situation. The coverings over the already existing transfer routes would not increase capacity, but is designed to improve existing operations. It is, therefore, considered that the proposed development would not have a significant impact on highway safety, capacity or amenity in the immediate vicinity of the site over and above the existing situation.

The case for Very Special Circumstances

75. The benefits and need for the development presented by the applicant are based on the continued development of the business at the site as envisaged by the 2015 masterplan and the economic and social benefits that were identified at the time. The 2015 Masterplan approved the phased construction of development over a period of 10 years. This situation prevails, but with the changing pace of the business, its regulation, and market competition the operations of the business and it's future direction necessitate flexibility and adjustments to suit commercial development. Part of the strategy of the business is that it consistently seeks to embrace innovation and accommodate new processes and efficiencies. The proposed reconstruction of the main Blending Building (17) to allow the installation of the pioneer 'Freshtrusion' process is an example of this, and would be the first of it's type.

76. The business currently emits 23% of all Chorley Borough industrial and commercial greenhouse gases, and as a consequence GA have pledged to reduce carbon emissions by 50% in each decade to reach Net Zero by 2050. To achieve this, gas is to be removed from all its processes (primarily gas-powered driers and steam boiler) and replaced by electricity sources, allowing the potential for use of green energy. The Freshtrusion process requires the replacement of the existing Lines 'A' and 'B' with the upgraded Lines 'E' and 'F'. This would allow the production capacity to increase from the current level of 90,000 metric tonnes per annum to 120,000 tonnes, part of the business plan which generated the overall 2015 Masterplan. However, the need has been advanced as a priority to respond to the climate change agenda and replace gas with electricity as the heat source in the drying process. This is not only beneficial to the environment, but it is claimed to be significantly more economical. It dries at a lower temperature, makes greater use of controlling the relative humidity of the drying air, by condensing moisture from the humid air within the dryer, and then reusing the warm air so as not to waste the heat. The environmental benefits of this element of the scheme are considered to carry significant weight, whilst the efficiencies that would be achieved would help to secure the continued success of the business and protect jobs, which is also considered to carry significant weight.

77. The improvement provided by the new Lines 'E' and 'F' also allows for tighter containment of salmonella risks within the production process, something that is currently not possible with the current plant. This is a benefit that carries great weight.

78. The extension to the engineering stores would not in itself be inappropriate development. This element of the proposal would support the business, however, through improved efficiencies and through creating greater capacity, which would support the continued success and growth of the business, which is afforded great weight.

79. The swash building would provide a covered building to house automated washing facilities to clean, dry, and store all the containers used at Plocks Farm. This is currently carried out externally, however the proposed building would enable the containment of the washing process within the building to ensure that the noise, and any potential odours, are all contained within the building and would enable more effective and sanitised cleaning. This is an improvement on the current process, which is all undertaken externally in an open yard, the benefits of which are afforded great weight. The scale of the building is largely dictated by the dehumidification plant, and the need to store containers for a long period to complete the process, as thorough drying is essential and the facility needs to provide sufficient

capacity to accommodate the stock of containers, which need to be heated for up to 48 hours to remove the final elements of moisture.

80. The coverings to the transfer route relates to the transfer of materials between the various processing centres within Plocks Farm. This is carried out using auto-guided electric vehicles (AGV's) running on the internal (concrete) road system. The covering of the route would reduce the risk of damage to materials and improve the efficiency of vehicles using the route.
81. Improvements to the efficiency of the operations at the site relate back to the importance of the business as a major employer as set out above and supports the continued success and growth of the business, which helps to secure and create jobs. The benefits associated with these aspects of the development in relation to the engineering stores, swash building and covered transfer route are considered to carry great weight in this context.
82. The development of the screen fencing would have a positive effect in relation to the visual impact of the site when viewed externally and would also provide some acoustic benefits, which are of great weight in the planning balance.
83. Although not quantified the proposed development would support construction jobs in the short to medium term which is considered to carry moderate weight.

Green Belt balancing exercise

84. It has been established that there is definitional harm to the Green Belt as the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt due to the impact on the openness of the Green Belt over and above the existing development. No other harm has been identified.
85. In terms of the benefits, these are detailed above and cover a range of social, economic and environment benefits to which a variety of different weights have been attributed.
86. When assessing if there are very special circumstances a number of factors, while ordinary in themselves, can combine to create something very special. These benefits have to be considered and an assessment made as to whether these clearly outweigh the harm so as to amount to very special circumstances.
87. The need for the development in this specific location in combination with the benefits of the development, when taken together are considered to provide very special circumstances that, on balance, outweigh the substantial harm to the Green Belt. The very special circumstances also demonstrate exceptional reasons to support such a large scale development scheme in an 'other place' as defined by policy 1 of the Core Strategy. The proposal therefore complies with paragraphs 147 and 148 of the Framework and policy 1 of the Central Lancashire Core Strategy.

CONCLUSION

88. For the reasons set out above it is considered that very special circumstances have been demonstrated which outweigh the harm the proposals will have on the Green Belt. All of the other impacts can be addressed by condition.
89. If Members are minded to approve the application please note it is not open to Members to determine the application as it will have to be referred to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2021 as the proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt incorporating the provision of a building where the floor space to be created is 1,000 square metres or more. The Secretary of State will then determine whether the application should be called for determination or whether this can be determined at the local level.

RELEVANT HISTORY OF THE SITE

- Ref:** 94/00968/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 15 March 1995
Description: Erection of General Purpose Agricultural Building,
- Ref:** 94/00969/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 15 March 1995
Description: Extension to existing building housing Extrusion Plant to accommodate Bio Filter Plant,
- Ref:** 95/00279/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 6 June 1995
Description: Alteration of existing roofline to accommodate mixing bin,
- Ref:** 96/00044/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 1 May 1996
Description: Widening of the existing driveway and improvements to the access,
- Ref:** 96/00320/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 28 August 1996
Description: Extension of existing mill building over existing yard area incorporating raising of roof height,
- Ref:** 99/00132/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 7 July 1999
Description: Demolition of outbuildings, construction of bin storage building together with canteen shower block, garage, stables and stores,
- Ref:** 03/00528/FULMAJ **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 26 September 2003
Description: Extension to buildings to form produce store, tractor store, administrative and staff accommodation, raw materials store, new entrance control, landscaping and waste water treatment area,
- Ref:** 07/00843/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 5 October 2007
Description: Proposed installation of a sprinkler tank and associated pump house
- Ref:** 08/00364/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 15 August 2008
Description: Installation of fan house, three activated carbon filters and flue to control odour emissions at Plocks Farm
- Ref:** 09/00078/SCE **Decision:** RESCEZ **Decision Date:** 23 February 2009
Description: EIA Screening Opinion for Plocks Farm, Liverpool Road, Bretherton
- Ref:** 09/00236/SCOPE **Decision:** PESCOZ **Decision Date:** 23 April 2009
Description: Scoping Opinion for the Environmental Impact Assessment at Plock farm, Liverpool Road, Bretherton.
- Ref:** 09/00738/FULMAJ **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 25 March 2010
Description: Extensions and alterations to pet food manufacturing facility including an automated finished product store (AFPS); upgraded and new extrusion process lines including a sunken mill; raw material storage; odour abatement (a roofed pine bark based biological filter system including venting chimneys, one 30 metres high); waste water treatment; additional capacity of waste recovery and recycling facilities; landscaping including earth excavation and mounding; related infrastructure.
- Ref:** 10/00647/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 13 October 2010
Description: Relocation of plant to treat waste water from dry pet food production process
- Ref:** 10/01054/DIS **Decision:** PEDISZ **Decision Date:** 12 January 2011
Description: Application to discharge conditions no. 5 and 6 of planning permission 10/00647/FUL
- Ref:** 10/01080/MNMA **Decision:** PEMMAZ **Decision Date:** 6 January 2011

Description: Application for minor Non Amendment to planning application 10/00647/FUL for the relocation of plant to treat waste water (Effluent Treatment Plant)

Ref: 12/00032/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 12 March 2012
Description: Change of use from residential (C3) use to mixed residential (C3) use and office (B1) use

Ref: 12/00450/DIS **Decision:** PEDISZ **Decision Date:** 21 June 2012
Description: Application to discharge condition 14 of planning approval 09/00738/FULMAJ (odour assessment)

Ref: 12/00644/FUL **Decision:** WDN **Decision Date:** 20 November 2012
Description: Substitute revised drawings for those noted as 'Approved Plans', to reflect changes made to the buildings to address operational requirements. For summary details please refer also to Supporting Statement (dated 22 June 2012) attached. - N/a

Ref: 12/01118/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 16 January 2013
Description: Construction of a new Energy Centre and Fan House, part retrospective application for amendment to previously approved plans (under permission ref: 09/00738/FULMAJ), to allow the building to be higher than the detail approved by the Masterplan to allow the filter bags (which remove airborne dust) to be removed from within the building, and to accommodate acoustic protection. The Fan House part of the building was required to comply with condition 14 of the 2009 permission.

Ref: 13/00472/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 2 August 2013
Description: Construction of service yard - in situ concrete surfacing to existing stone area, plus structures to allow unloading and cleaning of silos which deliver raw materials to Plocks Farm

Ref: 14/00049/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 30 April 2014
Description: Construction of an acoustic enclosure building over an air extraction system

Ref: 14/00581/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 30 July 2014
Description: Construction of building for use as engineering workshop and formation of concrete hardstanding

Ref: 5/5/09592 **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 1 May 1973
Description: Stock Yard

Ref: 15/00416/SCOPE **Decision:** PESCOZ **Decision Date:** 27 May 2015
Description: Scoping Opinion for the Environmental Statement, pursuant to Regulation 13 of the Town And Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2015), associated with the production complex at Plocks Farm, Bretherton.

Ref: 15/00888/FULMAJ **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 4 January 2016
Description: Erection of buildings, engineering operations and related development, all within the curtilage of the existing Class B2 production complex, to create: larder (finished product), ingredients kitchen, meat kitchen, fridge, combined heat and power plant (CHP), water storage tanks, odour abatement plant comprising wet scrubber and bio bed anaerobic digestion plant, offices and car park, River Douglas embankment repairs and 5m high acoustic fencing within the complex

Ref: 15/01190/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 1 February 2016
Description: Formation of earth mounding to facilitate additional planting.

Ref: 16/00159/DIS **Decision:** PEDISZ **Decision Date:** 9 May 2016
Description: Application to discharge conditions 4 (phasing), 5 (external facing materials), 6 (levels), 7 (landscaping), 8 (Habitat Creation and Management Plan), 10 (Construction Method

Statement), 11 (archaeological investigation), 12 (lighting), 13 (surface water drainage), 14 (sustainable drainage), 16 (surface water), 17 (attenuation tanks), 18 (travel plan), 20 (noise monitoring), 28 (flood defence works), 29 (bat roosts) and 32 (odour control) attached to planning approval 15/00888/FULMAJ

Ref: 16/00723/MNMA **Decision:** PEMNMZ **Decision Date:** 16 September 2016

Description: Minor non-material amendment to planning approval 15/00888/FULMAJ to extend the loading bay area and canopy, erect fire escape shaft, addition of water harvesting tank, alterations to wet scrubber room layout and amendments to ingredients kitchen roof

Ref: 17/00829/FULMAJ **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 20 November 2017

Description: Section 73 application to vary conditions 3 (approved plans), 4 (phasing plan) and 7 (landscaping works) attached to planning approval 15/00888/FULMAJ to alter the position and form of the previously approved recycling building, pallet store, biobed and scrubber building and pre-extrusion building.

Ref: 18/00162/FULMAJ **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 25 May 2018

Description: Section 73 application to vary condition 2 (approved plans) attached to planning approval 17/00829/FULMAJ to alter the details and siting of the recycling building.

Ref: 18/00279/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 17 May 2018

Description: Erection of structure to carry service infrastructure and pipe work

Ref: 18/00922/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 3 December 2018

Description: Construction of 'penthouse' features to provide weatherproof cover to plant and equipment at three individual locations at roof level

Ref: 20/00295/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 9 June 2020

Description: Extension of water treatment works comprising an effluent treatment plant extension, installation of new water storage tanks and erection of associated buildings: erection of screw press building: and erection of new workshop building and extension to existing workshop building

Ref: 20/00449/FULMAJ **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 14 August 2020

Description: Demolition of existing building and erection of new packing hall (with administration facilities) and new canopy over service yard

Ref: 20/00500/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 24 July 2020

Description: Erection of 4m high acoustic fence and construction of storage yard, containing temporary fridge trailers for storage of meat product (retrospective)

Ref: 20/00858/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 6 October 2020

Description: Section 73 application to vary condition 4 (approved plans) attached to planning permission 18/00279/FUL (erection of structure to carry service infrastructure and pipe work) to increase the height and width of the previously approved pipe bridge in addition to amendments to the layout and roof design

Ref: 21/00141/DIS **Decision:** PEDISZ **Decision Date:** 10 May 2021

Description: Application to discharge condition nos. 5 (remediation strategy), 6 (employment & skills plan) and 7 (surface water drainage scheme) of planning permission 20/00449/FULMAJ (Demolition of existing building and erection of new packing hall (with administration facilities) and new canopy over service yard)

Ref: 21/00317/FULMAJ **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 11 June 2021

Description: Section 73 application to vary conditions nos. 3 (approved plans), 4 (phasing), 5 (cladding materials), 6 (ground levels) and 30 (cold store plant and noise attenuation) attached to planning permission 15/00888/FULMAJ (Erection of buildings, engineering operations and

related development, all within the curtilage of the existing Class B2 production complex, to create: larder (finished product), ingredients kitchen, meat kitchen, fridge, combined heat and power plant (CHP), water storage tanks, odour abatement plant comprising wet scrubber and bio bed anaerobic digestion plant, offices and car park, River Douglas embankment repairs and 5m high acoustic fencing within the complex) to alter the design and phasing of the cold store and supply details of facing materials, levels and noise attenuation.

Ref: 22/00019/DIS **Decision:** PEDISZ **Decision Date:** 24 November 2022

Description: Application to discharge condition nos. 5 (levels), 7 (habitat management), 11 (lighting), 12 (surface water drainage scheme), 13 (surface water drainage scheme), 15 (surface water management and pollution prevention), 17 (travel plan), 19 (noise monitoring), 22 (flood evacuation plan) and 31 (odour control) attached to planning permission 21/00317/FULMAJ (Section 73 application to vary conditions nos. 3 (approved plans), 4 (phasing), 5 (cladding materials), 6 (ground levels) and 30 (cold store plant and noise attenuation) attached to planning permission 15/00888/FULMAJ (Erection of buildings, engineering operations and related development, all within the curtilage of the existing Class B2 production complex, to create: larder (finished product), ingredients kitchen, meat kitchen, fridge, combined heat and power plant (CHP), water storage tanks, odour abatement plant comprising wet scrubber and bio bed anaerobic digestion plant, offices and car park, River Douglas embankment repairs and 5m high acoustic fencing within the complex) to alter the design and phasing of the cold store and supply details of facing materials, levels and noise attenuation.)

Ref: 22/00821/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 4 November 2022

Description: Erection of maintenance building for the servicing and repair of Automatic Guided Vehicles (AGV) and a building to house plant and equipment for water treatment and storage

Ref: 22/01282/FUL **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 26 April 2023

Description: Section 73 application to vary condition no.4 (approved plans) attached to planning permission ref:20/00295/FUL to increase the length of the engineering workshop building

Ref: 23/00678/FULMAJ **Decision:** PCO **Decision Date:**

Description: Section 73 application to vary conditions 2 (approved plans) and 3 (phasing) attached to planning permission 21/00317/FULMAJ (Section 73 application to vary conditions nos. 3 (approved plans), 4 (phasing), 5 (cladding materials), 6 (ground levels) and 30 (cold store plant and noise attenuation) attached to planning permission 15/00888/FULMAJ (Erection of buildings, engineering operations and related development, all within the curtilage of the existing Class B2 production complex, to create: larder (finished product), ingredients kitchen, meat kitchen, fridge, combined heat and power plant (CHP), water storage tanks, odour abatement plant comprising wet scrubber and bio bed anaerobic digestion plant, offices and car park, River Douglas embankment repairs and 5m high acoustic fencing within the complex) to alter the design and phasing of the cold store and supply details of facing materials, levels and noise attenuation) to alter the design of the Meat Kitchen, design and positioning of the Laundry Building and the phasing of these elements.

RELEVANT POLICIES: In accordance with s.38 (6) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004), the application is to be determined in accordance with the development plan (the Central Lancashire Core Strategy, the Adopted Chorley Local Plan 2012-2026 and adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance), unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Consideration of the proposal has had regard to guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and the development plan. The specific policies/guidance considerations are contained within the body of the report.

Suggested Conditions

To follow.