

This statement has been prepared by Andrew Martin – Planning on behalf of the Applicant, R A Brice & Partners, in relation to Parkgate Farm, in Rivenhall.

The Application Site is currently occupied by a number of vacant farm buildings which are ageing and have a negative impact on the character and appearance of the countryside. The Proposed Development involves: the demolition of five of these buildings and two silos; the erection of five replacement office units; and, the conversion of two existing buildings to create two further office units. These proposals result in a circa 25% reduction in total floorspace, built footprint and average ridge height on-site, and will have a lesser impact on their surroundings than the existing site.

Although located in the ‘countryside’ in planning policy terms, the Application Site includes a considerable amount of built form and part of it already benefits from a Permitted Development prior approval for conversion to office use. Furthermore, the current proposals provide an opportunity to re-plan the site comprehensively and achieve a better-quality development that improves the character and appearance of the area, than would otherwise be the case by implementing the Permitted Development scheme.

The design of the new buildings reflects the traditional rural Essex vernacular of dark weatherboarded barns, with gable-ends, tile or slate roofs and tall door openings. The design has been subject to pre-application discussions and amendments have been made to the scheme since the application was submitted, to take on board officer’s comments.

The proposals will result in the permanent closure of the site’s western-most access, at the junction of Park Road and Parkgate Road, which should improve highway safety.

Extensive new covered cycle parking is to be provided to encourage sustainable forms of transport and the site is within cycling distance of the settlements of Silver End, Rivenhall and Witham. There is also scope to promote car sharing (via a workplace Travel Plan) to help minimise the number of single occupancy trips to the site by private car.

While Covid-19 has caused a temporary reduction in the demand for office space, the UK’s successful vaccination programme is allowing life to return to normal and many businesses are now reopening their offices or planning to do so this year. The District has also experienced significant new housing growth in recent years, including 700 metres to the west at the Redrow site on Western Road, Silver End, and it is important that the delivery of employment floorspace keeps pace with this to ensure that there are local employment opportunities available to residents and to avoid excessive commuting out of the District in the future.

Finally, the Council’s planning and urban design officers have seen fit to recommend the scheme for approval. With that in mind, Andrew Martin – Planning respectfully requests that members follow this advice and grant consent.