Introduction

Vanguard Business Park (formerly Sedul Bahr) is an established business park which is comprised of predominantly industrial and storage uses. The area of land the subject of this application which was formerly known as The Piggeries lies in the countryside, as does the wider business park, and abuts the southern boundary of the business park boundary.

Vanguard Business Park is not allocated as an employment site within the Local Plan however historically it has been recognised as an employment site by the Council and provides a range of B8 and B2 uses which Local Plan policy DM15 seeks to safeguard. Access to the business park is via Alington Lane and the development the subject of this application does not alter this. The site is also not within a flood zone.

This application seeks retrospective consent for the engineering operation comprising the laying of a hardstanding, creation of a bund and the change of use of land which is accessed from and adjoins the existing business park.

For background information, the area the subject of the application has been used informally as part of the commercial activity relating to some of the units at the site for many years. This resulted in an untidy appearance and the deterioration of the grass to mud. The applicant laid the area of hardstanding in order to improve and tidy-up the overall appearance of this piece of land so that it could be used for purposes incidental to the functioning of the business park.



Existing gates from Vanguard Business Park leading to area formed



Aerial image from google earth showing hardstanding since Jan 2026

Principle of development

The site is located within the countryside and also within a settlement gap in policy terms, therefore strategic policies S4, S5 and S6 of the Local Plan are applicable. Local Plan policy S4 supports the sustainable growth for employment provision and seeks to retain existing employment sites. Local Plan policy S5 also supports in principle new development in the countryside provided that it is related to the extension / replacement of existing employment uses. There is also support from Local Plan policy S6 which permits development within a settlement gap providing that it would not undermine the physical extent / visual separation of settlements and would not result in an urbanising effect detrimental to the character of the countryside. Local Plan polices DM15, DM18 and DM19 further expand upon the strategic policies identified. Policy DM15 seeks to safeguard existing employment sites to retain a diverse choice of employment opportunities and the enable industries already established on these sites to grow. Policy DM18 supports the extension of non-residential buildings in the countryside and DM19 sets out the acceptable criteria for changes of use of buildings in the countryside. Although the proposal involves a change of use land to form an extension to the existing industrial site, rather than a building, the principles of these policies are still considered to be applicable.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) also forms a material consideration in the decision-making process. As the site is located outside a settlement NDMP S5 is applicable

which identifies certain forms of development that should be approved in these locations. The development for rural businesses and services where a location outside settlements is shown to be necessary is included within the list of acceptable development. The policy further states that these developments should be approved, unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by any adverse effects, when assessed against the national decision-making policies in this Framework. Paragraph 2 of policy S5 further confirms that when applying this policy, the circumstances in which the benefits of approving development proposals are likely to be substantially outweighed by adverse effects include, but are not restricted to, situations where the development proposal would fail to comply with one of the NDMPs which state that development proposals should be refused in specific circumstances.

NDMP E2 also supports business growth and requires substantial weight to be given to the economic benefits of proposals for commercial development which allow businesses to invest, expand and/or adapt. NDMP E4 clarifies that through the application of NDMP E2 the sustainable growth of businesses in rural areas should be supported and that development may need to be located outside settlements. In these circumstances development proposals should make use of sites that are physically well-related to existing development and previously developed land where possible. The siting and design of development should be appropriate having regard to the character of its surroundings as well.

There is not therefore an in principle policy objection to the extension of the industrial estate in the form of an area of hardstanding to serve the long-established commercial activity at the site.

Landscape / visual impacts

The application site forms a small area of land which abuts the existing well-established business park being physically well-related to existing development. Prior to the construction of the hardstanding this area had been used informally as part of the commercial activity for many years and was starting to have a very untidy appearance.

The site is not located within a protected landscape but does fall within land designated as countryside. The surrounding landscape is characterised by a mixture of commercial premises similar in character to Vanguard Business Park, with open fields around the fringes. The location of the area of hardstanding being physically attached to the wider site is such that it blends into the surrounding landscape and does not appear intrusive or incongruous in its setting. For these reasons the development is not considered to alter the overall character and has minimal visual and landscape impact being viewed in the context of the wider commercial development. The bunds which contain the area of hardstanding also act as a physical barrier protecting the adjacent landscape. The hardstanding is also set back from Allington Lane ensuring that public views are limited and it does not encroach beyond the rear of the site into the open fields either. There are also no PROWs which would have prominent views. For these reasons it is not considered the development has an urbanising impact and it would respect the character of the countryside whilst supporting the established employment site and allowing it to adapt. Furthermore, the development does not adversely affect the settlement gap the site sits within

having no impact on the visual / physical extent of separation. The development is therefore considered to be in accordance with Local Plan policies S5, S6, DM15 and principles of DM18 and DM19, plus NDMPs DP3, E2 and E4.

The applicant also has no objections to planting additional landscaping on the bunds formed to further soften the impact of the area of hardstanding and this can be secured by a landscaping condition.

Impact on Trees

The larger site is bound by some mature trees and contains areas of overgown shrub which screen it well from the surrounding area and contribute to the character of the site and the wider area. Given the extent of works carried out, the previous condition of the land and existing use of the Business Park, no substantial impact on trees or habitats has occurred as a result of additional hardstanding. Whilst changes have occurred within the site, the applicant's position is that these do not result in an unacceptable effect upon retained trees, and that, where necessary, appropriate mitigation and replacement planting can be secured.

Ecology

As the application is a retrospective under section 73A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 the requirement to achieve at least a 10% biodiversity net gain under the Environment Act 2021 does not apply. The additional planting to the bunds would however provide an enhancement and this can be secured by condition.

Given the extent of works carried out and the existing use of the of the adjoining site no substantial impact on trees or habitats has occurred as a result of the development. Whilst changes have occurred within the site, the applicant's position is that these do not result in an unacceptable effect upon biodiversity or retained vegetation, and that, where necessary, appropriate mitigation and replacement planting can be secured by condition.

Highways and Access

The proposed development would utilise the existing vehicular access via the business park and Allington Lane and no changes are proposed to this. The development would also not increase traffic movements at the site as it does not provide additional commercial floorspace, but rather an expansion of the site to allow better flow of traffic through the business park.

Flooding and Surface Water Drainage

The development area is not within a flood zone as identified by the Environment Agency flood risk information for planning. The hard surfacing is also made up of permeable material.

The development in question does not involve the construction of soakaways. Rather, surface water drainage utilises the existing properties of rainfall infiltration through the moderate permeability ground. The development does not involve the construction of an impermeable concrete or asphalt surface. The hardstanding comprises an unsealed granular material through which a degree of infiltration can occur. Given the retrospective nature of the development, regard can also be had to its actual drainage performance. There is no evidence before the applicant that the hardstanding has resulted in unacceptable surface-water runoff or increased flood risk to surrounding land.

Other matters

In accordance with the requirements of NDMP S5, the decision-maker needs to determine whether there are any other adverse impacts that would substantially outweigh the benefits of approving the development. The above paragraphs demonstrate how the proposal would not conflict with NDMPs DP3, TR6, F6, F7 and N2. The site is also not within a protected landscape or a conservation area and does not impact a designated heritage asset. The proposal does not therefore conflict with any decision-making policies that indicate planning permission should be refused.

Summary

To summarise, the principle of development to support an existing commercial site and rural business is supported by both local and national planning policy. The hardstanding serves a clear functional purpose in connection with the existing business park allowing improved accessibility. The impact upon the landscape character is deemed to be negligible given the existing adjoining uses on site and the scale of development. The development does not adversely impact upon the settlement gap nor the character of the countryside being viewed in context with the industrial estate it serves being physically well related and does not introduce new built form.