



RCC TOWN PLANNING CONSULTANCY



Site: Hillview Farm, Sells Green, Seend, Wiltshire, SN12 6RS

Proposal: Retrospective change of use to a mixed-use site comprising agriculture and B8 storage (including open storage)

On behalf of: Coppard Plant Hire

Date of Issue: March 2026



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PLANNING STATEMENT

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared on behalf of Coppard Plant Hire Ltd to support a retrospective planning application for the change of use of land at Hillview Farm, Sells Green, to a mixed use comprising agriculture and B8 storage (including open storage). The statement assesses the proposal having regard to the site and its surroundings and explains how the development accords with relevant national and local planning policy.



2.0 BACKGROUND AND PLANNING HISTORY

- 2.1 Coppard Plant Hire Ltd is a long-established and family-owned business. It operates across the South of England providing a wide range of plant and construction related equipment for hire. This ranges from excavators, tracked dumpers, concrete mixers, handheld equipment and welfare cabins for on-site staff. They are organised across 5 sites in the south of England (Sells Green, Reading, Brighton, Godstone and Crowborough) and provide equipment to a wide range of sectors including:
- Construction Sector;
 - Local Authorities;
 - Utility companies;
 - Aviation and transport infrastructure providers;
 - Racecourses, and
 - Civil engineering firms
- 2.2 The business therefore plays an important role in supporting construction, infrastructure and maintenance operations across the region.
- 2.3 Their yard in Sells Green is well-established with Coppard Plant Hire having been in situ since 2014 (the site was previously occupied by Roy Francis Plant Hire). It forms part of a small industrial estate on the northern side of the A365, a key arterial route. As the business grew so did the quantity and range of equipment it hires out. In addition, much of the typical equipment owned and rented is large and bulky, therefore requiring a wide area of open storage space to accommodate it and manage it efficiently. Around 2016, the existing storage yard reached its capacity and it became increasingly difficult to accommodate the number of items required for hire. In particular, the business needed sufficient space to store plant and associated equipment between hire periods; accommodate site welfare cabins used on construction sites; manoeuvre and load flat-bed lorries and delivery vehicles used to transport equipment to and from customer sites. In order to address these operational constraints, the company acquired Hillview Farm on the edge of the industrial estate (120m to the north) in 2017 to provide overspill storage space within areas of the underutilised farm yard. The items stored at Hillview Farm primarily comprise portable welfare cabins and vehicles which are temporarily stored between periods of hire.
- 2.4 Historically, Hillview Farm has always comprised a mix of storage and other uses alongside the agricultural activities. Before the purchase by Coppard Plant Hire, this included the storage and maintenance of a wide range of non-agricultural vehicles and machinery as well as waste tipping for earth and soil.
- 2.5 This mix of uses is reflected in the 2020 Seend Parish Character Assessment report which is a supporting document to the Seend Neighbourhood Plan. This report divides the settlement into 4 distinct character areas, one of which being titled "Industrial Estate" and this covers both the Coppard Plant Hire site and Hill View Farm. An extract from the report showing the character areas is set out overleaf:



Map 12: Sells Green and Martinslade - Character Areas

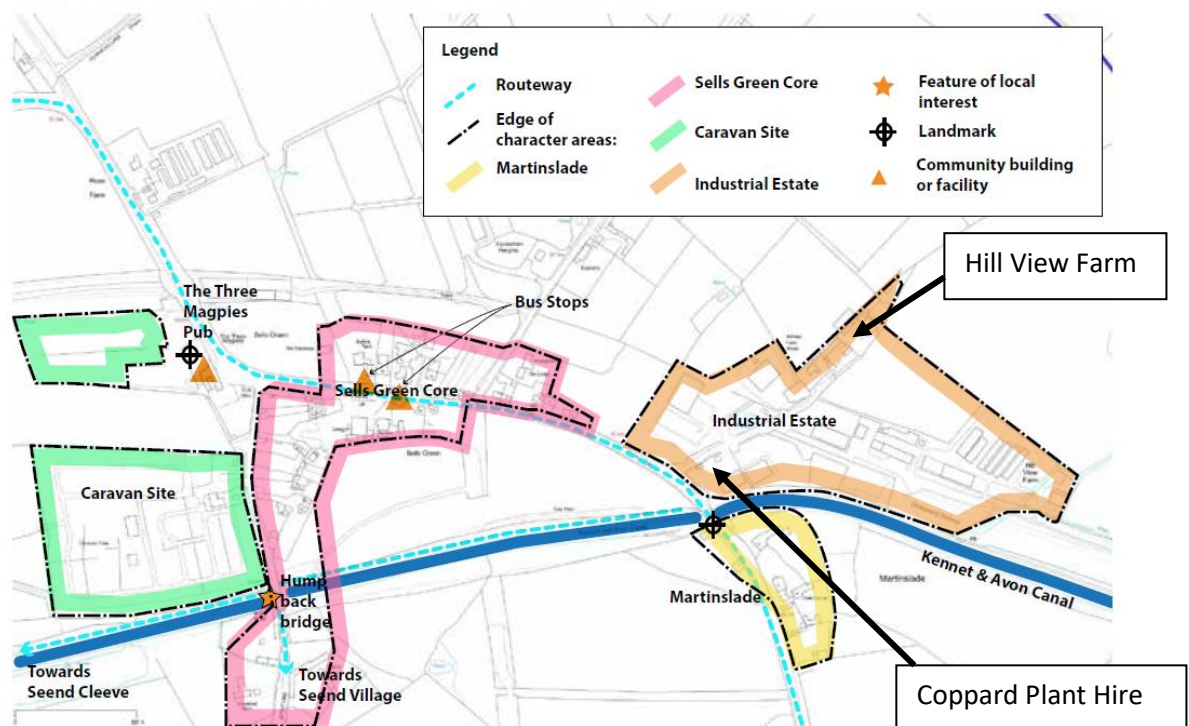


Figure 1: Extract from Seend Parish Character Assessment identifying the site within an industrial estate character area.

2.6 The report describes 'Character Area 1: Industrial' and lists its characteristics as follows:

- " - A general industrial site.
- Several companies are now located on the site, some with new buildings typical of any industrial site and some making use of old farm and early industrial buildings and temporary facilities such as old containers.
- Some agriculture is still practised on the site, some modern industry and some industry which is definitely not modern. ..."

2.7 As described above, both commercial and agricultural enterprises were historically run at Hill View Farm and the applicant was therefore unaware of the need for planning permission to run both commercial and agricultural enterprises at the site. They have carried this out, unaware and without cause for concern or complaint, since their purchase in 2017. It was only brought to their attention recently by the Council's enforcement officer. The purpose of this planning application is to therefore regularise the situation on site by seeking permission for a mixed use comprising agriculture and B8 storage (including open storage space).

2.8 In looking at the planning history of the site, there is none of direct relevance to this application.

3.0 CONTEXT

- 3.1 Both Coppard Plant Hire and Hill View Farm lie within the village of Sells Green, in the parish of Seend. The site is not covered by any national or local landscape designations.
- 3.2 In terms of the wider setting, Sells Green lies in a low-lying position at the base of the escarpment in the Avon Vale, with both Devizes and Seend positioned at a significantly higher level. It is largely clustered around the Kennet and Avon Canal and the A365. The landscape beyond the settlement has an essentially rural, agricultural character with a strong structure of hedgerows and trees.
- 3.3 The industrial estate is situated to the north of the A365, a key local arterial road connecting Melksham and Devizes. The A365 serves as a significant route for traffic, including designated goods vehicles (HGVs), connecting to the A350 at Melksham, which acts as the main north-south route linking Chippenham to the south west. The site is therefore well positioned to deliver plant and equipment hire on flat-bed vehicles to a range of regional sites.
- 3.4 Hill View Farm is situated to the northern extent of the industrial estate and comprises a range of buildings of differing age and design loosely arranged around the informal yard. It is directly linked to the Coppard Plant Hire site by the access road running through the industrial estate.

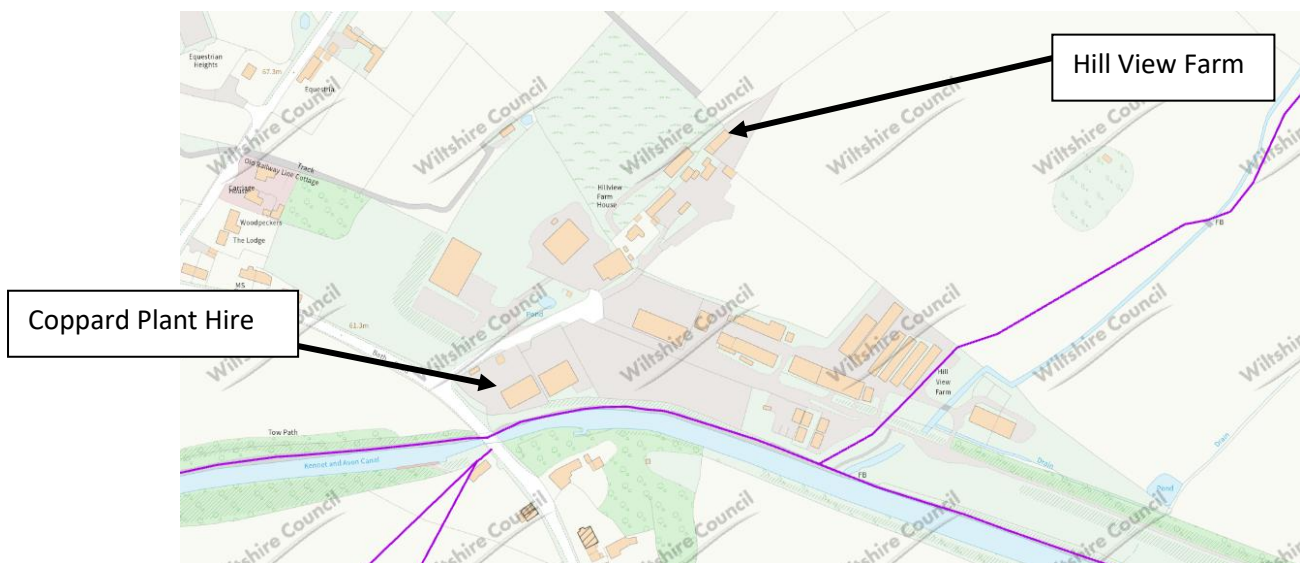


Figure 2: Location Plan – rights of way identified by purple lines (source Wiltshire Council's mapping system)



Figure 3: Aerial photograph showing the proximity of Hill View Farm and Coppard Plant Hire site

- 3.5 The farmyard, to which this application relates, already benefits from some landscaping with trees and hedging to sections of the boundary. Views of the site are generally long distance, from the surrounding rights of way network, and seen within the context of the existing buildings and wider industrial estate. Given that these are transient and of significant distance from the site, no demonstrable harm is caused. However, there is a gap in the planting on a section of the boundary running NE-SW which allows short-lived views of a distance between 250m-350m from Footpath SEEN31. This footpath links Sells Green and Rowde. The submitted plans therefore show the introduction of a new hedge to this section of the site to filter views of the external storage. We therefore submit that although parts of the site are visible, they are certainly not unduly so nor is the site seen in isolation.
- 3.6 As shown on the submitted plans, the area used for the external storage associated with Coppard Plant Hire is outlined in a green hatch. The existing buildings on site are used interchangeably between agricultural or storage associated with the plant hire business. The typical height of equipment stored in this area ranges from 2.6m (welfare cabin) to 4.2m (a trailer with equipment fixed ready for transport).
- 3.7 Photographs of the site and surrounding context are provided overleaf:



Figure 4: Existing Coppard Plant Hire site



Figure 5: Storage within the existing Coppard Plant Hire site



Figure 6: Hill View Farm – the application site – now used as overflow storage space for Coppard Plant Hire



Figure 7: View from within the yard, looking south-east towards buildings within the industrial estate



Figure 8: View from footpath SEEN31 looking towards the storage area and the section of the site where there is a gap in the hedge which is to be planted with a mixed native hedge – second photo is a closer zoomed image



Figure 9: View within the application site of the section of the boundary to be planted with a new mixed native hedge

4.0 PLANNING POLICY

- 4.1 Under the provisions of section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.2 At the current time, the Development Plan comprises the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS); 'saved' policies of the Kennet District Local Plan; Seend Neighbourhood Plan and any adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance (e.g. Wiltshire Design Guide).
- 4.3 At the national level, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is the foremost material consideration. This is supplemented with the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). At the local level, the Seend Character Assessment report is a material consideration.
- 4.4 The pertinent policies and guidance are set out in the associated tables:

WILTSHIRE CORE STRATEGY

Policy	Title
CP 1	Settlement Strategy
CP 2	Delivery Strategy
CP15	Spatial Strategy: Seend Community Area
CP34	Additional employment Land
CP48	Supporting Rural Life
CP51	Landscape
CP57	Design and Place Shaping
CP60	Sustainable Transport
CP 61	Transport and Development

SEEND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Policy	Title
SP1	Locally Distinctive, High Quality Design
SP4	Landscape and Local Key Views
SP11	Sustainable Development in Seend Parish

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

Chapter	Title
2	Achieving sustainable development
6	Building a strong, competitive economy
12	Requiring Good Design
15	Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

5.0 PLANNING ASSESSMENT

5.1 The key planning issues relevant to this proposal are:

- Principle of the scheme,
- Design and wider impact upon visual amenity and landscape character,
- Highway safety,
- Other matters.

Principle of development

5.2 As noted above, this application seeks retrospective permission for the change of use of part of Hill View Farm to a mixed use comprising agriculture and B8 storage (including open storage) in support of the nearby Coppard Plant Hire business.

5.3 Coppard Plant Hire Ltd is a well-established, family business which has grown significantly and now maintains a substantial fleet of plant and machinery serving a wide range of sectors including construction, infrastructure, utilities and local government. The business provides an important service to the construction and infrastructure industries and makes a meaningful contribution to the local and regional economy.

5.4 As described in Section 2.0 of this statement, as the business expanded, the storage and operational capacity of the existing yard in Sells Green became increasingly constrained. The applicant therefore acquired Hillview Farm to the north of their existing site to provide additional storage space. The underutilised farmyard provides a logical extension to the existing plant hire operation, allowing the business to function efficiently and continue operating from its long-established base.

5.5 It is accepted that the site lies outside of the main market towns and any defined Limits of Development. However, in practical terms it is an underutilised site that forms part of an established commercial area. Both the NPPF and WCS allow flexibility in their approach to employment development to accommodate scenarios such as this.

5.6 Chapter 6 of the NPPF recognises the importance of supporting the development needs of businesses, emphasising that planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can “invest, expand and adapt”.

5.7 Paragraph 85 of the NPPF states that:

“Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.”

5.8 Paragraph 87 further confirms that planning decisions should recognise the locational requirements of certain types of development, including storage

and distribution operations which require accessible locations that support the efficient movement of goods and equipment.

5.9 These provisions are directly relevant to the current proposal, which seeks to regularise the use of land to support the operation of a well-established plant hire business.

5.10 The Wiltshire Core Strategy is an economically-led Plan that prioritises building a competitive economy, including the retention and expansion of existing businesses. Core Policy 34 (Additional Employment Land) recognises that flexibility is required for employment sites outside main towns and supports proposals that assist in retaining and expanding existing businesses where this contributes to local economic growth.

5.11 The relevant part of CP34 is copied below:

Outside the Principal Settlements, Market Towns and Local Service Centres, developments will be supported that:

- i. are adjacent to these settlements and seek to retain or expand businesses currently located within or adjacent to the settlements; or
- ii. support sustainable farming and food production through allowing development required to adapt to modern agricultural practices and diversification; or
- iii. are for new and existing rural based businesses within or adjacent to Large and Small Villages; or
- iv. are considered essential to the wider strategic interest of the economic development of Wiltshire, as determined by the council.

Where they:

- a. meet sustainable development objectives as set out in the policies of this Core Strategy and
- b. are consistent in scale with their location, do not adversely affect nearby buildings and the surrounding area or detract from residential amenity and
- c. are supported by evidence that they are required to benefit the local economic and social needs and
- d. would not undermine the delivery of strategic employment allocations and
- e. are supported by adequate infrastructure.

5.12 In response, we comment that the site the site offers a convenient and accessible location within an existing commercial area and directly supports the continued operation of Coppard Plant Hire at Sells Green. It is readily accessible to the wider transport network within the region.

- 5.13 The scale of the proposal is modest, relating to a limited area of open storage within an existing farmyard. No new buildings are required and there is no encroachment into surrounding agricultural land. The site is already developed in practical terms but underutilised.
- 5.14 The proposal will support the continued operation and growth of a local business. Were the application to be refused, the range and quantity of plant and equipment for hire would be drastically reduced and this would have a consequential economic impact both directly to the business and in terms of jobs but also indirectly in respect of the local economic spend associated with the business.
- 5.15 It also important to emphasise that there are no other suitable alternative sites for the relocation of the additional storage space required by Coppard Plant Hire within the immediate area. The industrial/employment sites within the town do not have any suitable sites and it would not be practical or economic to split the storage space across two separate sites or wholesale relocate the business. The application site provides an appropriate and efficient use of an underutilised farmyard, without displacing higher-density employment uses elsewhere.
- 5.16 There is an established vehicular access with very good visibility in both directions and there are bus stops close to the site entrance. It is clearly evident that this is a form of development that meets the sustainable development objectives of the core strategy (criteria a, b, c and e of CP34)
- 5.17 The site does not represent an isolated rural location, but forms part of a wider commercial area at Sells Green, characterised by a range of employment and industrial activities. This is recognised within the Seend Parish Character Statement, which identifies the area as having an established industrial character. The proposed use is therefore consistent with the existing function of the area.
- 5.18 In practical terms, the additional storage space enables Coppard Plant Hire to continue operating efficiently from its established base, rather than seeking alternative premises further afield. The proposal therefore represents a pragmatic and sustainable solution.
- 5.19 To conclude on the matter of 'principle', we therefore submit the following:
- (i) the proposal will improve the operational efficiency of a successful, local business, operating nationwide within the plant hire/construction sector;
 - (ii) there is no suitable alternative site in the immediate locality, and, as follows within this statement:
 - (iii) there is no adverse impact on the character of the surrounding landscape, no unacceptable increase in vehicular traffic or additional reliance on the private car and the environment of any nearby dwellings will not be adversely affected".
- 5.20 We therefore state that the proposal conforms with policy CP34 of the WCS as well as the relevant advice and guidance within the NPPF.

Impact on the character of the surrounding landscape

- 5.21 The site lies on the edge of an existing industrial estate and abuts the open countryside between Devizes and Sells Green.
- 5.22 Core policy 51: Landscape of the WCS states that *“development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character and must not have a harmful impact upon landscape character, while any negative impacts must be mitigated as far as possible through sensitive design and landscape measures”*.
- 5.23 Policy SP4: Landscape and Local Key Views of the SNP requires planning applications proposing development and infrastructure schemes which are of a scale that could impact on the Parish landscape, to demonstrate how the proposal responds sensitively to the Parish landscape character.
- 5.24 As described in Section 3.0 of this statement, the site is very well related to the industrial estate, being directly linked via the internal road network and because of its close proximity to buildings and commercial activities taking place.
- 5.25 The farm yard contains a number of modern utilitarian buildings, including agricultural buildings, former workshops and a caravan. The surrounding area contains a mixture of agricultural buildings, industrial structures, storage yards and commercial premises which collectively form a working landscape with a strong operational character at this part of the settlement. This is as described within the Seend Character Assessment report.
- 5.26 Much of the outdoor storage will be screened because of the positioning of the existing buildings either within the site or the wider industrial estate and because of the limited height of the outdoor storage. A maximum height of 4.2m for the areas of open storage would allow for the continued storage of welfare cabins (which are 2.6m in height) as well as vehicles with equipment loaded on a trailer ready for transport (maximum height of 4.2m). The height of 4.2m aligns with the permits required for the transportation of plant and equipment. This maximum figure is very modest in comparison the scale and height of the surrounding buildings and given the transient nature of the equipment to be stored.
- 5.27 Furthermore, the yard is well contained within its context, with only glimpsed views afforded through the gaps in tree cover from the public rights of way running along the higher land towards Rowde. From this distance, the farm yard simply appears part of the industrial estate and any open storage would be viewed against the backdrop of the existing industrial estate and surrounding buildings.
- 5.28 Closer to the site, existing tree and hedge cover, as well as the existing built form of the industrial estate, largely screen the application site. In particular, there are no views directly afforded from the canal towpath. As previously noted, there is a gap in the planting on a section of the boundary running NE-SW which allows short-lived and transient views from Footpath SEEN31. Although these views are not considered detrimental given the surrounding context, the submitted plans nonetheless show the introduction of a new



mixed-native hedge to this section to filter views of the open storage. Not only will this planting mitigate any adverse effects of the outdoor storage but it will also bring about secondary benefits in respect of breaking up and screening views of the existing yard and structures at Hill View Farm.

- 5.29 To conclude on the visual impact of the scheme, the application site forms part of an existing farmyard area and it is visually associated with the wider commercial activity present within the Sells Green. Given the contained nature of the site, the limited height of the open storage, the proposed landscaping and the location within an established employment area, it is considered that the proposal would not result in any unacceptable harm to landscape character or visual amenity.
- 5.30 The development therefore accords with Core Policies 51 and 57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and policies SP1 and SP4 of the Seend Parish Neighbourhood Plan.

Highway safety

- 5.31 Turning to matters of highway safety, policies CP60 and CP64 deal with the traffic impacts of development and parking standards. These policies aim to ensure developments adequately address matters of access arrangements and road safety alongside adequate parking provision.
- 5.32 Access to the site is to remain as existing; through the industrial estate to connect to the A365. The existing access has a wide opening with good visibility in both directions and there is sufficient turning space within the site for vehicles associated with both the agricultural and storage associated with Coppard Plant Hire.
- 5.33 This is a retrospective application and the storage use has been taking place since 2017 without causing any adverse impact in respect of highway safety. Moreover, the number of traffic movements is similar to those associated with agricultural activities that could run from the site and this is a realistic fall back position that must be taken into account.
- 5.34 For the aforementioned reasons, the scheme is therefore considered to comply with the requirements of CP60 and CP64 and the NPPF having regard to matters of highway safety.

Other Matters

- 5.35 As the application is retrospective in nature, the development is exempt from the statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.
- 5.36 There are neighbouring properties within close proximity of the site – no demonstrable harm is therefore caused to residential amenities.

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This Planning Statement has demonstrated that the retrospective change of use of land at Hillview Farm to a mixed agricultural and B8 storage use for Coppard Plant Hire is acceptable in principle. The proposals responded directly to an operational need arising from the continued growth of the company and the limited capacity of its existing yard. They represent a logical and sustainable expansion of the established business on an underutilised farm yard set within a recognised industrial landscape at this part of Sells Green,
- 6.2 As set out in this statement, due to the site context, limited views and additional landscaping, there would be no demonstrable harm to the character or appearance of the surrounding landscape. Additional landscaping is proposed to strengthen screening and further integrate the site with its surroundings.
- 6.3 The proposals will cause no wider harm having regard to matters of neighbour amenity and highway safety.
- 6.4 We therefore submit that the proposal will support a successful local business, help maintain employment and contribute to the rural economy without causing unacceptable harm to landscape character, amenity or the wider environment.
- 6.5 The development is therefore considered to accord with the Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework, and the Local Planning Authority is respectfully requested to grant planning permission.

