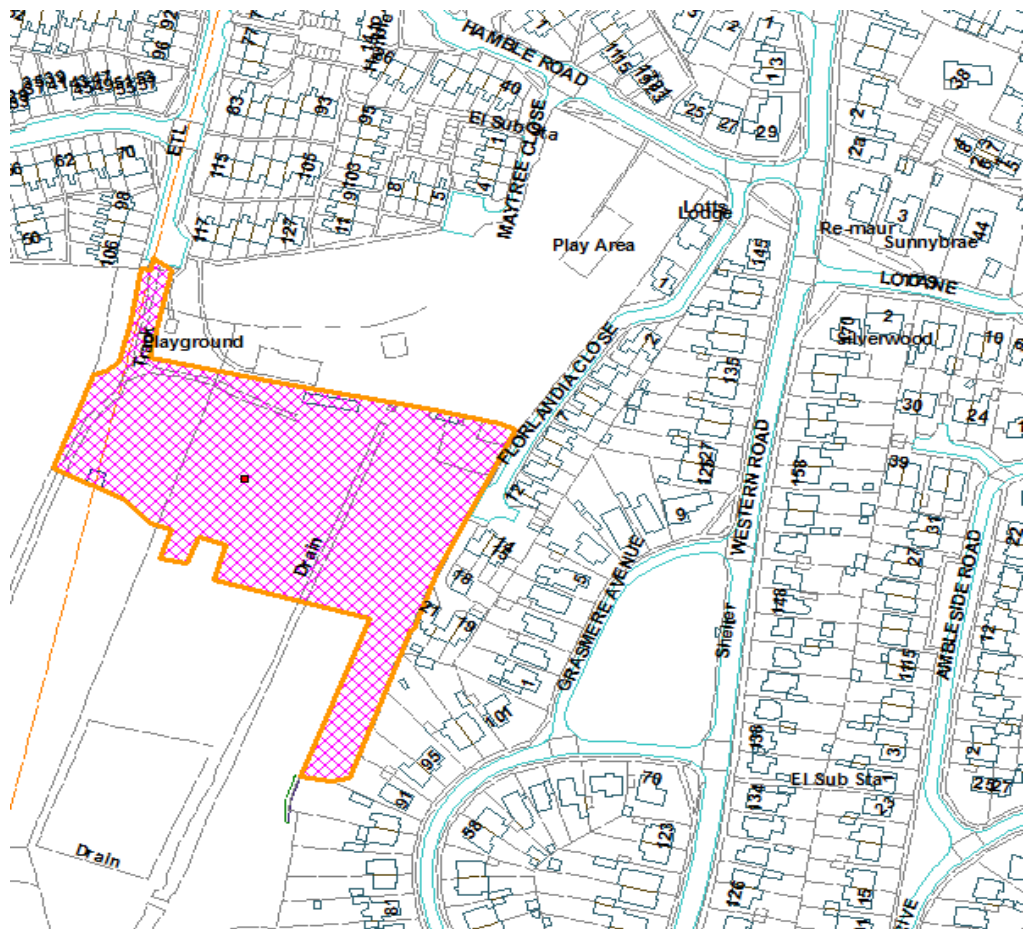


Application Number:	AWDM/1470/25	Recommendation - Approve, subject to s106 Agreement
Site:	Land South Of Test Road, Sompting	
Proposal:	Hybrid planning application comprising: (1) Outline planning permission (all matters reserved) for an additional polytunnel and Nature Trail. (2) The permanent retention of the existing temporary structures (shipping containers and compost toilet) under AWDM/2022/20. (3) Full planning permission for the phased construction of three new buildings to support the long- term growth and sustainability of the community farm, comprising produce storage, cooking and dining facilities, farm office, work room, toilets, plant room and store.	
Applicant:	The Sompting Settlement	Ward: Peverel
Agent:	Nicolas Pople Architects Ltd	
Case Officer:	Peter Barnett	



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Proposal, Site and Surroundings

The site sits to the south of Test Road in Sompting. The site (known as 'The Fen Farm' and 'Sussex Chilli Farm') is being used by the charity Sustainable Sussex as a community farm for food growing, mindfulness and wellbeing activities for mixed groups including those with learning disabilities and physical and mental health difficulties. The farm produces organic, healthy food which is supplied to local food banks and charities.

The site was previously in use for the keeping of horses and contained large amounts of materials and rubbish which have since been cleared by the applicants, working with Sompting Estate. The site was included in the application for the residential development currently being constructed to the south and west of Sompting when outline permission was granted for the change of use of the land to community/education and agricultural/horticultural uses associated with a new Community Farm (AWDM/0323/19).

Since then, permission has been granted for three shipping containers and a disabled access toilet on the western part of the site, used as a temporary base for volunteer activities by Sustainable Sussex and the Ouse and Adur River's Trust's 'EPIC Project'. That permission expired earlier this year and the containers are now used by the farm for secure storage and staff welfare, as well as being used by river rangers at the nearby Sompting Brooks.

This application is a hybrid for the permanent retention of the existing temporary structures (shipping containers and compost loo) previously approved under AWDM/2022/20 and full planning permission for the phased construction of three new buildings to support the long-term growth and sustainability of the community farm, comprising produce storage, cooking and dining facilities, farm office, work room, toilets, plant room and store. Outline permission is also sought for an additional polytunnel and for a Nature Trail.

The three new buildings comprise:

Phase 1A - "The Stable Block" - a timber linear building to replace the dilapidated stable block in a similar position. It will contain a kitchen to process food grown on site, storage for tools and produce and staff changing/toilets. It will have a shallow mono-pitched roof with PV panels. It is to be timber clad at the sides and front with a fibre cement corrugated roof. It measures 33m wide, 3.5m high and 4.5m wide with a 1.4m deep overhanging roof canopy at the front (south) running across the entire frontage.

Phase 1B - "The Discovery Kitchen" - a smaller building where meals made from site-grown produce are to be served and education offered on healthy and seasonal eating. It will have a flat green roof and have the same durable material as the Stable Block for the kitchen half of the building, with a lightweight corrugated roof and timber structure infilled with glazing for the dining area. It will have a geometric shape with angled walls.

Phase 2 - "The Croft" - a larger building approximately 28m long and 4.6m high with a crescent shape (also with angled walls) for expanded cooking/cafe plus farm office, lunch area for staff and a flexible dining space for community events. It will have a

pitched roof, part sedum, part fibre cement corrugated sheeting, part flint and larch walls

The polytunnel is shown as being located to the south of an existing polytunnel on the eastern part of the site close to the produce growing area.

The Nature Trail is shown running along the eastern edge of the site starting from an existing gate in the SE corner of the Hamble Road Recreation Ground.

An outline proposal for an animal barn was originally included but has since been removed from the current application.

The site lies within the countryside and Local Green Gap.

Relevant Planning History

AWDM/0323/19 - Hybrid planning application for up to and including 469 homes comprising: (1) Outline planning permission (all matters reserved with the exception of access) for the erection of up to and including 373 dwellings, community orchard/growing space, non-vehicular links between the site and Worthing, traffic calming measures, associated landscaping, open space/recreation areas, ecological enhancements including improvements and extension to Cokeham Brooks Local Wildlife Site, and all other associated development works. (2) Full planning permission for 96 dwellings (part of the overall 469 dwellings comprising 2 no. 1-bed, 37 no. 2-bed, 40 no. 3-bed and 17 no. 4-bed homes, including 30% affordable housing) and all other associated development works, provision of formal playing pitches (Phase 1). (3) Change of use of land south of Hamble Recreation Ground to community/education and agricultural/horticultural uses associated with a new Community Farm. (Development site includes Land West of Dankton Lane leading from the East of Upper Brighton Road Sompting) - approved

AWDM/2022/20 - The installation of three shipping containers and a disabled access toilet used as a temporary base for volunteer activities by Sustainable Sussex and the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust's 'EPIC Project' on land to the south of Test Road and provision of 6no. car parking spaces and 6no. cycle spaces - 5 year temporary permission expired 31st January 2026

NOTICE/0035/22 - Application for Prior Notification of agricultural development for proposed poly tunnel for agricultural use - approved

AWDM/0534/23 - The erection of a Mongolian Yurt - approved

Consultations

West Sussex County Council: No objection from a transport/highways aspect subject to conditions to secure vehicle and cycle parking.

Comments:

Access Arrangements

The applicant proposes to utilise the existing vehicular access to the South of Test Road. There are no apparent visibility issues at the existing point of access onto the maintained highway. The LHA do not anticipate that this proposal would give rise to a significant material intensification of movements to or from the site.

An inspection of collision data provided to WSCC by Sussex Police from a period of the last 5 years reveals no reported incidents of personal injury near to the access. Therefore, there is no evidence to suggest the existing access is operating unsafely or that the proposal would exacerbate an existing safety concern.

Parking and Internal Layout

The applicant proposes a total of 9 nos. car parking spaces, including 4 nos. marked disabled parking bays. The car parking layout will be revised to extend the existing gravelled area to accommodate appropriate bay dimensions and allow safer circulation and manoeuvring within the site. Safe and secure parking provision for 6 nos. bicycles is made with the installation of two ground mounted bicycle racks to promote sustainable travel.

The existing farm track will be extended to allow access for fire and rescue services to the proposed buildings in compliance with building regulations.

West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service: 1) Prior to the commencement of this development, details showing the proposed location of the required fire hydrants shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

2) Prior to the first occupation of any new build commercial premises forming part of the proposed development, the required fire hydrants shall be fully installed and made operational in the approved location. The fire hydrants shall be maintained thereafter for the lifetime of the development.

3) Prior to the first occupation of any of the new build commercial premises forming part of the proposed development, they will notify the West Sussex County Council's Fire and Rescue Service that the fire hydrant(s) have been installed and are operational, to ensure that the Fire and Rescue Service are aware that the hydrant(s) is now a usable asset in the event of a fire.

The fire hydrant shall thereafter be maintained as part of the development by the water undertaker at the expense of the Fire and Rescue Service if adopted as part of the public mains supply (Fire Services Act 2004) or by the owner / occupier if the installation is retained as a private network.

Local Lead Flood Authority (LLFA): Original Comments: We are concerned that there are no drainage arrangements provided within the Flood Risk Assessment. As the site is at risk of surface water flooding and fluvial flooding we would expect to see, at a minimum, that any proposed drainage infrastructure is safe for all rainfall return periods up to and including the 1% AEP event [Annual Exceedance Probability] plus appropriate climate change allowance. Confirmation needs to be provided on any proposed drainage on site. Without this information, the LLFA cannot pass detailed comments on the proposals.

We object to this planning application in the absence of an acceptable Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and Drainage Strategy relating to:

- The site is at risk of fluvial and surface water flooding.
- No information on proposed or existing drainage.
- The development does not comply with NPPF, PPG or local policy

Comments following receipt of revised FRA: No objection subject to conditions

Adur & Worthing Councils:

- ***Environmental Health Officer:*** No objection

- ***Planning Policy:*** It is considered that it has been demonstrated that the community farm is a thriving and successful local community asset. Whilst permanent facilities are not usually supported in a countryside location, it is considered on balance that the proposed layout and design of facilities (with the exception of the animal barn) has been carefully measured and thus the impact on the local green gap will be negligible.

Southern Water: The water supply and sewers services at this location are the responsibility of Leep-Water and Wastewater. There is an agreement [‘inset agreement/NAV agreement’] in place between Southern Water and Leep-Water and Wastewater for the supply of water and sewerage services. The connection/ discharge points to the public network and agreed discharge flow rates must be complied with the agreements terms

Sussex Police: From a crime prevention perspective consideration should be given to the siting of intruder alarms to protect these buildings when not in use once building works are complete. Property marking should also be a consideration so that if farm equipment was stolen and subsequently recovered it can be returned to their rightful owner.

Lighting is an effective security measure and a useful tool for public reassurance in that it enables people to see at night that they are safe or to assess a developing threat and if necessary, identify a route they could take to avoid a potential issue, although I am mindful that due to the location that dark sky policies may need to be implemented. It is also recommended that contact is sought by the developer with the local Neighbourhood Police Team (NPT) to establish good relations whilst the development is in the construction phase.

Sompting Parish Council: Fully support this project and wish them all the best going forward.

Representations

7 letters of support received from occupiers of 18 Test Road, 11 Florlandia Close, Ball Tree Surgery, 23 Herbert Road, 10 St Mary’s Close plus addresses in Worthing:

- Fully support application.
- Will allow community farm to continue and expand its valuable work for local residents
- Clear commitment to sustainability and local food production
- Enhanced biodiversity
- Will offer important educational opportunities
- Opportunities for local employment, volunteering and skill development
- Applicants have worked hard to transform the neglected land into a haven for wildlife
- Beneficial to wellbeing of volunteers

- Ball Tree Surgery has been referring patients to the farm as there are direct benefits for mental and physical health
- Support but would like assurance that livestock likely to make a noise are not kept on site
- Community asset
- Well designed buildings which blend into landscape and will enhance area

Relevant Planning Policies and Guidance

Adur Local Plan 2017 Policies 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36

Sustainable Energy SPD (August 2024)

WSCC Guidance on Parking at New Developments (Sept 2020)

National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)

Relevant Legislation

The Committee should consider the planning application in accordance with:

Section 70 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) provides that the application may be granted either unconditionally or subject to relevant conditions, or refused. Regard shall be given to relevant development plan policies, any relevant local finance considerations, and other material considerations; and

Section 38(6) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 that requires the decision to be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Planning Assessment

Principle

This site lies outside of the Built Up Area Boundary, and within the Local Green Gap - policies 13 (Adur's Countryside and Coast) and 14 (Local Green Gaps) of the Adur Local Plan 2017 apply.

Paragraph 3.46 of the Adur Local Plan states:

'Given the limited amount of countryside in Adur, it is important that the few uses allowed in the countryside and gaps genuinely require a countryside location and cannot be located elsewhere. The countryside is generally unsuitable for active recreation or leisure uses requiring permanent built facilities.'

Policy 13 states that *'Outside of the Built up Area Boundary development will only be permitted where the need for a countryside location is essential'* with essential agriculture or horticulture being listed as exceptions.

It is recognised that Fen Farm is a community farm project operating in partnership

between Sustainable Sussex and Sompting Estate and led by local volunteers with aims to provide inclusive opportunities for growing food, promoting healthy lifestyles, supporting wellbeing, and engaging disadvantaged members of the community. Food that is produced on the farm is donated to local food banks and charities.

The proposal seeks the permanent retention of existing facilities, combined with the phased introduction of new buildings, to provide essential infrastructure deemed necessary to support the long-term operation of the Fen Farm Community Farm.

The Planning Policy Manager has stated that:

“It is considered that it has been demonstrated that the community farm is a thriving and successful local community asset. Whilst permanent facilities are not usually supported in a countryside location, it is considered on balance that the proposed layout and design of facilities (with the exception of the animal barn) has been carefully measured and thus the impact on the local green gap will be negligible.”

It is evident that Fen Farm provides a significant positive benefit and that the new buildings will help to engage further with the local community. The animal barn has been removed from the application and all new buildings are within the eastern part of the site where they will not have such an intrusive impact in the Gap due to hedge and tree screening to the west and their scale and design. The proposal is therefore considered to be acceptable in principle.

Visual amenity

Additional polytunnel and Nature Trail.

The proposed polytunnel is shown as being located to the south of an existing polytunnel on the eastern part of the site close to the produce growing area. That part of the site is screened by hedgerow and shrubs from wider views and the introduction of an additional polytunnel to help with growing produce will not cause visual harm. Although permission is sought in outline, it is anticipated that it will be of similar size to the existing. Details would be dealt with under a future reserved matters application.

Another outline proposal is for the Nature Trail. This is shown running along the eastern edge of the site starting from an existing gate in the SE corner of the Hamble Road Recreation Ground. The final details of the surface would be dealt with under a future reserved matters application. The long term intention is to provide a trail around the entirety of the farm holding (which includes land outside of the current application site), finishing at the site entrance off Test Road but further details will be provided as part of a subsequent application. It is considered that the trail will be an attractive feature of wider community benefit and it will complement the other uses on the site.

Permanent retention of the existing temporary structures (shipping containers and compost loo)

The containers and compost toilet are on the western part of the site and support the day-to-day operations of the farm. The shipping containers have been sited and designed to be discreet and screened from public view with no visual intrusion to

neighbouring properties. While they protrude into the Local Green Gap, they are not considered to be intrusive or compromise the aims of gap policy. Only one of the containers is currently timber clad and it is recommended that the other is also clad in a similar material to improve its appearance.

New buildings

The proposed new buildings, “The Stable Block”, “The Discovery Kitchen” and “The Croft” are all single storey and will be well screened by vegetation thus minimising harm on the surrounding landscape in terms of visual impact. They are to be located towards the northern end of the site and will replace previous stables and other structures that were present on the site. The design, scale and use of materials will be appropriate for this countryside location and they will not be unduly intrusive features, being positioned in a small cluster rather than spread out across the wider site.

This part of the site is well contained and the wider impact is not considered to be significant. The aims of the Local Green Gap policy are not considered to be compromised by this proposal.

Residential amenity - effect on existing dwellings

The proposal will increase activity and the number of visitors to the farm, to the benefit of the local community. The nearest residents are in Florlandia Close to the east, over 50m away and on higher ground, and those in Test Road further away to the north. The buildings will not cause undue harm to amenity but the activities and cooking do have the potential to increase noise and smells. The applicant has requested that hours of use are not conditioned for the reason that *“operational hours naturally fluctuate throughout the year”* and that *“flexibility in opening times is essential to ensure the effective and safe running of the community farm.”*

Typical hours are set as follows:

Existing hours of opening:

General farm opening to beneficiaries (sessional supported volunteering roles):

10:00 – 16:00, Tuesday to Sunday

Early harvesting:

From 08:00 as required

Proposed hours of opening:

General farm opening to beneficiaries (including The Stable Block, Discovery Kitchen and The Croft, sessional supported volunteering roles):

10:00 – 16:00, Tuesday to Sunday

Early harvesting:

From 08:00 as required

Nature Trail (Public access):

9:00 – 17:00, Monday to Sunday

Limited public opening of The Croft: To be confirmed (anticipated Saturday or Sunday)

While unnecessary or overly restrictive limits on opening hours should be avoided, it is nevertheless necessary to consider the amenity of neighbouring residents. Late

night use of the buildings could generate noise and lights at a time when it would be expected to be quiet in such a countryside location. As such, it is recommended that the use of the buildings be restricted to the hours of 7am-9pm every day. also for reasons of neighbouring and rural amenities and character, and traffic, the buildings should also be used ancillary to the use of the farm and not to be operated independently or for any other purposes.

Controls over external lighting and details of any cooking extract systems should also be covered by condition.

With these suitable controls in place, it is considered that residential amenity will be adequately protected.

Accessibility and parking

A total of 9 nos. car parking spaces, including 4 nos. marked disabled parking bays, are proposed, close to the main entrance, on a gravel surface. Existing bicycle storage facilities for 6 nos. bicycles will be retained.

The existing gravel farm track will be extended to allow access for fire and rescue services to the proposed buildings in compliance with building regulations.

Flood risk and Drainage

Part of the site lies within Flood Zones 2 and 3. This does not include those parts of the site where new buildings are proposed. The main flood source is a watercourse running north-south along the eastern edge of the site. A Drainage Strategy and Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been submitted and has been amended to meet the LLFA requirements. The FRA advises that the use of the land for agriculture is classed as being 'Less Vulnerable' and an Exception Test is not required. A Sequential Test has been carried out because of the requirement to direct development towards areas of lowest flood risk. It demonstrates that the proposed buildings are outside of Flood Zones 2 and 3 and that safe escape is possible to the west.

For surface water drainage it is proposed to use a rainwater harvesting system to capture and re-use rainwater for farm irrigation. Two rainwater harvesting tanks are proposed (both of 16000 litre capacity) to capture run off from the Phase 1A and Phase 2 buildings, with any overflow to be directed to an existing pond on the site. The smaller Phase 1B building will drain directly to the pond.

The LLFA has no objection to the proposal subject to a number of conditions requiring detailed designs of a surface water drainage scheme for each phase, details of the maintenance and management of the sustainable drainage scheme, a requirement for the development to be carried out in accordance with the Flood Risk Assessment and verification that the surface water drainage system has been constructed in accordance with the submitted details once completed.

It is therefore considered that the development is safe from flood risk and will not increase flood risk elsewhere.

Sustainability

The Design and Access Statement confirms that a site wide energy strategy of using heat pumps will provide sustainable heating and servicing to the buildings. The long linear south-facing roof of Phase 1A will feature a 54m² horizontal array of photovoltaic (PV) panels, to support the sites' energy needs.

High levels of insulation in the floors, walls and roof elements of each building will meet or exceed the thermal performance requirements set out in the Building Regulations, ensuring that the buildings are energy-efficient and sustainable in their use.

Ecology and biodiversity net gain

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment has been submitted in support of this application.

The site does not fall within or adjacent to any statutory designated sites. However, it is immediately adjacent to Cokeham Brooks Local Wildlife Site (LWS). The development is not considered to have any direct or indirect impacts on this LWS or any other designated sites in the surrounding area, or on priority habitats in the surrounding area. Removal of on-site habitats is considered insignificant and will be sufficiently offset through on-site planting as part of the development.

The ecological impact of the proposed development is therefore considered to be very minimal. Ecological enhancement measures will be fully incorporated into the development and can be secured by condition.

These measures include:

- Installation of bird nesting boxes. These will be located on the northern elevation of the P1A building, which provides a sheltered area protected from human disturbance.
- External lighting design will follow best practice guidance to avoid disturbance to nocturnal wildlife.
- All recommended mitigation measures to minimise ecological impacts during construction will be followed.

In terms of biodiversity net gain, the report concludes that the proposal would achieve a +21.41% net gain in habitat units and a +35.97% net gain in hedgerow units on site. A Biodiversity Gain Plan and Habitat and Management and Monitoring Plan will need to be submitted and approved pre-commencement. Being on-site, this will need to be maintained and monitored for up to 30 years and this will need to be secured via a s106 Agreement.

Recommendation

Approve

Subject to the completion of a s106 Agreement to secure BNG (including BNG monitoring fee) and the following conditions:-

1. Approved Plans
2. The development for which full planning permission is granted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission
3. The development for which outline planning permission is hereby granted shall be commenced before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission or two years from approval of the last Reserved Matters whichever is later
4. Details of the Reserved Matters associated with the polytunnel and nature trail granted outline approval (the Reserved Matters) shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority within three years from the date of this permission to include:
 - (i) appearance
 - (ii) means of access
 - (iii) landscaping
 - (iv) layout
 - (v) scale
5. Construction Management Plan
6. External materials to be agreed
7. No part of the development shall be first occupied until the vehicle parking spaces have been constructed in accordance with plans and details to be submitted to and approved by the LPA
8. No part of the development shall be first occupied until covered and secure cycle parking spaces have been provided in accordance with plans and details to be submitted to and approved by the LPA
9. Prior to or in conjunction with the submission of each reserved matters application, detailed designs of a surface water drainage scheme shall be submitted to and agreed with the Local Planning Authority. The approved scheme will be implemented prior to the first occupation of the development
10. Prior to the commencement of development, construction drawings of the surface water drainage network, associated sustainable drainage components and flow control mechanisms and a construction method statement shall be submitted and agreed in writing by the local planning authority
11. The development hereby approved shall not be occupied until details of the maintenance and management of the sustainable drainage scheme have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority
12. All development shall be constructed in accordance with the submitted and approved Flood Risk Assessment
13. Upon completion of the surface water drainage system, including any SuDS features, and prior to the first use of the development; a survey and verification report from an independent surveyor shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The survey and report shall demonstrate that the surface water drainage system has been constructed in accordance with the approved details
14. The ecological protection and enhancement scheme as specified in the submitted Preliminary Ecological Appraisal & Biodiversity Net Gain (dated September 2025) shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and implementation programme.
15. The buildings hereby approved shall not be used outside the hours of 7am-9pm every day
16. Details of cooking extract system to be agreed
17. No external lighting without approval

18. Details of energy efficiency measures including details of PV panels and type, noise level and position of ASHPs
19. Use of buildings to be ancillary to use of farm and not to be operated independently and not for other purposes.
20. Prior to the commencement of development, details showing the proposed location of required fire hydrants shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Prior to the first occupation of any new build commercial premises forming part of the proposed development, the required fire hydrants shall be fully installed and made operational in the approved location. The fire hydrants shall be maintained thereafter for the lifetime of the development.
21. Container to be clad within 6 months in accordance with details to be agreed
22. Details of road surfacing material to be agreed
23. Development shall not commence unless and until a Biodiversity Net Gain Plan and Habitat and Management and Monitoring Plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.