

Application Number	CROWN/2025/0000002 and OTH/2025/1437
Location	Sevington Inland Border Facility, Mersham, Ashford, TN25 6GE
Grid Reference	03976 40758
Parish Council	Mersham; Sevington with Finberry
Ward	Mersham; Sevington South with Finberry
Application Description	Buildings, Goods Vehicle parking spaces, entry lanes, refrigerated semi-trailers, staff car parking spaces, access, site infrastructure, utilities, hardstanding, landscaping and ancillary facilities and associated works; and ongoing use of the site for an Inland Border Facility and Border Control Post, operating 24 hours per day, seven days per week.
Applicant	Department for Transport DfT, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs Defra and His Majesty's Revenues and Customs HMRC
Agent	Jones Lang LaSalle
Site Area	43.4 hectares

Introduction

1. This report involves the proposed Council response to a consultation being carried out by the Planning Inspectorate ('PINs'). Although the Council's Constitution delegates powers to me to respond to a variety of consultations typically received this matter involves consultation in respect of a new type of application and related determination procedure. Together with the circumstances of the case, I consider the matter to be sensitive and warrant reporting the matter to the Planning Committee for endorsement of the consultation response. The Recommendation section of the report sets out my suggested consultation response.
2. Earlier this year, changes were made to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 following on from the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. New section 293D of the Act, only effective from 01/05/2025, introduces the new **Crown Development Application ('CDA')** process allowing for a more direct route to obtaining planning permission for certain nationally important Crown

development.

3. A CDA has been made in relation to land at Sevington which comprises the existing Inland Border Facility ('IBF') and Border Control Post ('BCP').
4. When a CDA is made, that application is submitted to PINs rather than to the Council. The Council's role changes from the determining local planning authority to one of a **consultee only**.
5. The Council is required to provide initial administrative assistance to PINs in respect of the erection of site notices, the uploading of application material to the local statutory Planning Register, the issuing of consultation letters to residents directing them to the application documents on the PINs web-site (and the ability to make a representation via that web-site), Parish Councils and Community and technical consultees. The Council is also required to complete and return a questionnaire to PINs providing further detail in respect of planning site history, site constraints, the development plan and any pre-application discussions relating to the development that is subject of the CDA.
6. As a consultee, the Council is required to respond to PINs with its views on the merits of the proposal within a time-limited period. In this particular instance, this was initially identified by PINs as 12th September but an extension of time for the Council to respond has been granted given the date of the September Committee meeting. This extension of time to make a representation is given only to the Council.
7. Following the period for representations closing, PINs decide how to determine the application which could be by means of written representations, hearing or Inquiry (or combination of such for certain issues). That decision will be communicated to all those who have made a representation. Unless an application is recovered by the Secretary of State, PINs will issue a decision, typically with planning conditions. Monitoring compliance with planning conditions (including those that required further submissions) is passed to the local planning authority.
8. Members will be aware that the existing facilities and use of the site at Sevington flow from the Town and Country Planning (Border Facilities and Infrastructure) (EU Exit) (England) Special Development Order 2020. Article 4 of the Order provided the ability for a border department to make written submissions to the Secretary of State for approval in relation to a proposed use of land and the related relevant operations comprised as part of that proposed development.
9. A number of Article 4 applications were made in relation to the Sevington site. These were approved by the Secretary of State following prior 'engagement' with the Council and the local community. The development came into operation 1st January 2021. Under the provisions of the Order, the use of the

site is temporary and time-limited to 31st December 2025.

10. In 2024, discussions with the Sevington application team suggested that a planning application would be likely to be made to the Council to retain the site effectively 'as is' around the December 2024/January 2025 period. Pre-application advice was sought and the advice given emphasised the need to address known issues arising from the operation of the site to date as well as engage with the local community and immediate neighbours to ascertain the nature of any continuing localised problems. The applicant team also underwrote the cost of a 3rd party review of a draft Environmental Statement that would accompany an application. In the event, the application to the Council did not materialise in accordance with the timescale given. In June 2025, it was identified by the Sevington IBF Engagement Team that the Crown Development Application route was now available as the application pathway and that it would be this that would be followed. The application fee is therefore paid by the applicant to PINs.
11. The CDA proposes the retention of the existing development. No additional buildings are proposed although the application makes clear that a relatively small amount of work is still to be carried pursuant to that which has already been approved through the aforementioned Article 4 applications.
12. The existing operational site boundaries are proposed to remain 'as is' and this land is referenced in the application as 'Sevington West'. The land that is located to the east of Highfield Lane and also within the applicant's ownership/control is referenced in the application as 'Sevington East'. The CDA documentation makes clear that;
 - (i) no built development is to be situated or proposed on Sevington East, and
 - (ii) the proposal is that Sevington East, which is undeveloped farmland that has already been the subject of some landscaping and biodiversity enhancements pursuant to the Article 4 applications, will be secured and used for biodiversity net gain purposes for a period of 30 years.
13. Sevington East comprises 42.4 hectares. **Figure 1** below shows Sevington East edged in blue adjacent to the CDA red line 'application site' referenced as Sevington West.



Figure 1: The red-line application site (Sevington West) and adjacent blue-land (Sevington East)

14. **Annex 1** to the report shows the red and blue lines in greater detail.

Site and Surroundings

15. The site is not located in a designated national landscape and does not fall within or adjacent to a designated conservation area. Listed buildings are located to the west of the site on Church Road and these are referenced further below. The site falls with the Mersham Farmlands landscape character area as part of the 'Urban Fringe' of Ashford as defined by the Council's Landscape Character DPD 2011.
16. The site has been developed. Initially, this was through a small amount of development that was commenced following the grant of outline planning permission 14/00906/AS for a mixed-use comprising light and general industrial uses, storage and distribution uses and a small amount of retail uses ('storage and distribution' use) with associated s.106 agreement by the Council in 2017 and, subsequently, reserved matters approval for Phase 1 works (which constituted estate road layout, non-plot landscaping and sustainable drainage). The lawful nature of the small amount of works carried out by the previous owner were confirmed through issue of a Lawful Development Certificate i.e. the development had lawfully commenced.
17. As set out in the Introduction section, the site has then been developed into the existing facility. A high metal palisade fence with an anti-climb top element forms a continuous 'secure' boundary around the 'operational' area of the site. The CDA 'red line' site also includes land beyond the secure area, near St. Mary's Church and on the southern side of near Church Road. Sustainable drainage basins have been created in these areas and an all-weather surface

PRoW is located towards the edge of the site defined by post and rail fencing.

18. On the southern side of the site, new landscaping and high timber acoustic barriers have also been provided to certain areas to the north-east and north of homes on Church Road and Bridge Cottage on Highfield Lane. An overspill parking area developed to the south of the original alignment of Highfield Lane (and so located to the east of Bridge Cottage and to the north-east of Imber) is not provided with any acoustic barriers.
19. **Figure 2** below shows the high acoustic barrier adjacent to the Romeo parking area.



Figure 2: the acoustic barrier adjacent to the 'Romeo' parking area

20. **Figure 3** below shows the height of the barrier viewed from the J10A link road.



Figure 3: the acoustic barrier visible from the J10A link road

21. **Figure 4** below shows the acoustic barriers located on the southern side of the site together with the perimeter road from the HMRC area and the 'Tango' parking area.



Figure 4: the acoustic barriers on the southern side of the site, the adjacent perimeter road and the 'Tango' parking area

22. To the north of the site is a dual carriageway link road that connects new M20 J10A with a roundabout connection to the A2070 (Southern Orbital). This link road involves soft landscaping areas on its southern side i.e. between the edge of the footway/cycleway clear of the carriageway and the IBF palisade fence which defines the secure operational area. This area of land has some existing planting that flows from the Development Consent Order authorising the changes to the strategic highway network. National Highways is an executive non-departmental public body delivering the strategic highway network and sponsored by one of the stated applicants (the Department for Transport) and is wholly owned by the Secretary of State for Transport. As I set out later in this report, this is an important point in relation to the issue of the ability for the development to be acceptably landscaped and screened as a key entrance to Ashford from the M20 corridor and issues relating to visual impact and light pollution.
23. The A2070 connects to M20 J10 to the north and serves a number of developed and developing areas to the south such as Orbital Business Park, Waterbrook Park and Finberry. Secure vehicular access into the IBF, both for emergency and day-to-day use is from this link road. HGV traffic accessing the IBF via the M20 is directed to leave at J10A via signalised off-slips onto the J10A gyratory and then to the site via the link road. The M20 junctions, the link road and the A2070 (Southern Orbital) all form part of the strategic highway network.

24. To the north-east and east of the site are Kingsford Street (serving a number of homes), a longstanding southern water pumping station, emergency access into the operational element of the IBF site and a new turning head with Highfield Lane connecting to the southern side of this facility. From here, Highfield Lane now serves non-vehicular only with bollards securing that restriction. These streets and lanes form part of the local highway network. Highfield Lane continues south. It connects with PRoW upgraded to an all-weather surface in the manner envisaged by obligations contained within the 2017 s.106 agreement. That PRoW passes through the 'Sevington East' site and connects to Blind Lane further to the east. From that point the PRoW network into Mersham passes over agricultural land and paddocks and is unsurfaced.
25. Continuing southwards along Highfield Lane PRoW circles around the southern IBF secure parking area known as 'Tango' and then returns northwards where it connects with a retained section of Highfield Lane. A timber acoustic barrier is provided relatively close to the Lane at this junction point. As the Lane continues in a south-west direction, before a series of bollards near Bridge Cottage (a Grade II listed building) it connects again to PRoW that flows around this non-operational part of the application site. On the western side of this area, the PRoW is located on the eastern side of the hedge to Church Road. The PRoW then continues northwards where it is crossed by a new vehicular access created on Church Road to serve a secure IBF staff car parking facility. This car park access point has a manned entrance.
26. This southern part of Church Road has a number of homes located on its western and southern sides, some of which are Grade II listed (1 & 2 Maytree Cottages, Orchard Cottage, Ashdown and Ashdown Cottage) .
27. The northern end of Church Road serves the Grade II listed Court Lodge Farm with a farmstead group of buildings, St. Mary's Church (which is a Grade I listed building) and a new secure car park serving the Church. Shared cycle and pedestrian paths and public rights of way ('PRoW) connect to Church Road at its northern end close to the access into the new car park.

Proposal

28. The CDA seeks full planning permission for the existing Inland Border Facility ('IBF') and Border Control Post ('BCP'). This involves the retention of the existing buildings, Goods Vehicle parking spaces, entry lanes, refrigerated semi-trailers, staff car parking spaces, access, site infrastructure, utilities, hardstanding, landscaping and ancillary facilities and associated works; and the intended on-going use of the site for an IBF and BCP, operating 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

29. In summary, the proposals incorporate the following key components consistent with that which has already been developed and is in use;-
- 984 goods vehicle parking spaces;
 - Capacity for 240 goods vehicles in 42 entry lanes;
 - 357 staff car parking spaces, including 14 accessible bays and three Electric Vehicle;
 - Main access to the M20 junction 10a link road and an emergency access / small vehicle ejection point to the north, access off Church Road into the staff car park, emergency exit point onto Highfield Lane, additional pedestrian access points connecting to Highfield Lane and the two overflow HGV parking areas serving operational purposes;
 - Buildings and structures comprising a total of 16,348 sqm ('GIA') 17,277 ('GEA');
 - Space for 24 (19 permanent and five reserved) refrigerated semi-trailers;
 - Security fencing and noise attenuation bunds and fences to a maximum height of 5m;
 - CCTV columns, lighting columns to a height of 12m;
 - Drainage, hard and soft landscaping and ancillary infrastructure
30. **Figure 5** below shows key elements of the site layout. including the main access, the entry 'swim lanes' used to manage HGVs, the DEFRA operational area and open parking, the HMRC operational area and open parking, the driver welfare building within the HMRC operational area and the HMRC Access Road, the perimeter access road that begins north of the swim lanes and continues clockwise around the site to the south of the HMRC operational area, the staff parking area accessed from Church Road and two open parking areas ('Romeo' and 'Tango').

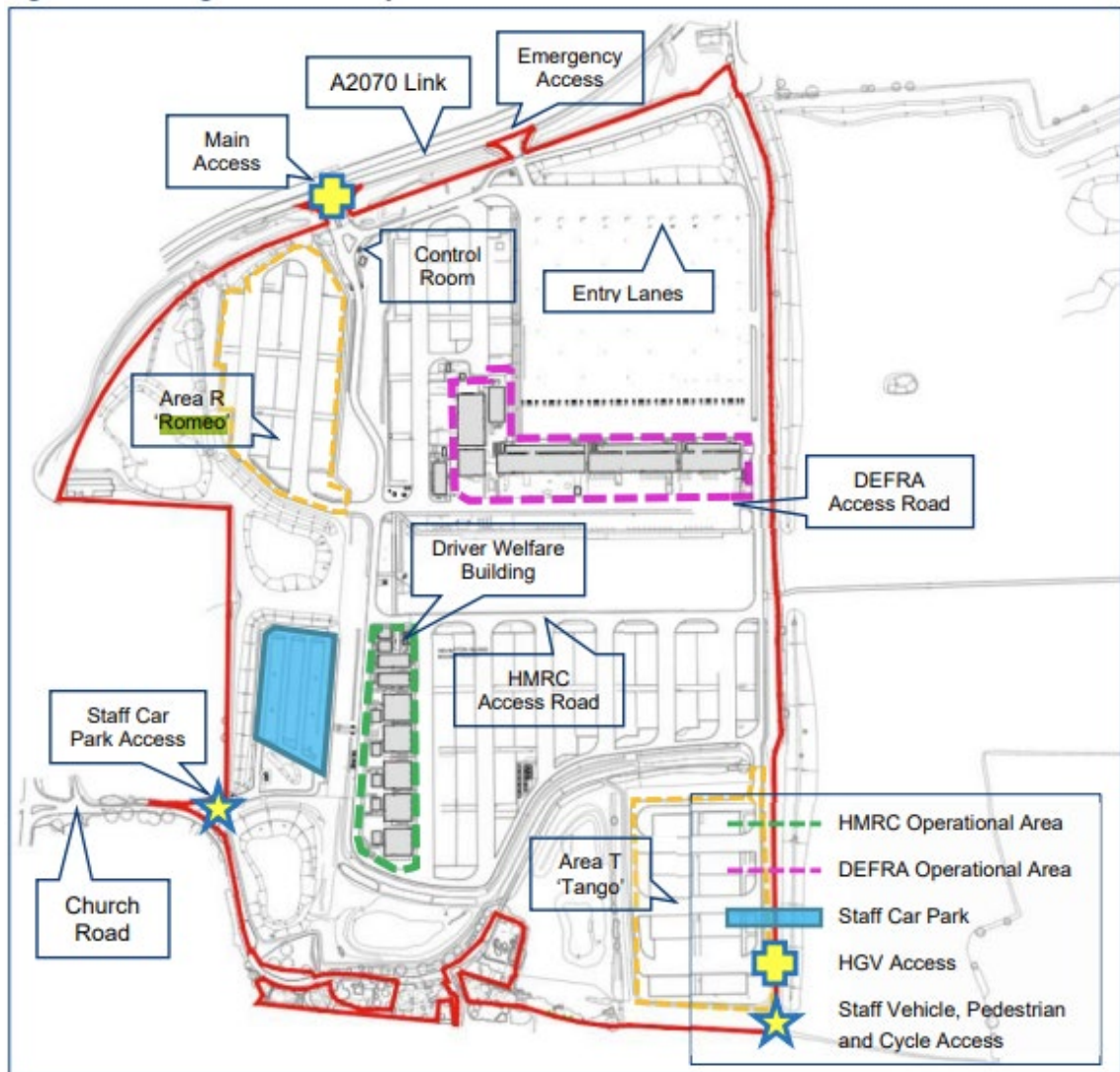


Figure 5: Key elements of the existing site layout

31. The applicant's Transport Statement identifies that the DfT use the 'Romeo' and 'Tango' goods vehicle parking areas in the north-west and south east of the Site as holding areas in the event of contingency traffic management plans/emergencies under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, as part of the Kent Resilience Strategy to remove goods vehicles from the SRN.
32. The CDA Planning Statement identifies that the facility is not yet operating at full capacity and therefore operations are anticipated as being intensified with worst-case thresholds having been assessed both previously in respect of the SDO process and also in the approach taken to the CDA application.
33. The CDA application makes clear that the full range of users of the site includes the Department for Transport (DfT), His Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC), Border Force, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Port Health Authority (PHA), and Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) for border readiness, CTC, ATA Carnet, SPS, CITES and other customs related checks, and market surveillance activities, to enable required checks to take place inland on traffic 'inbound' and 'outbound'

entering and exiting the United Kingdom (UK).

34. The CDA application documentation comprises as follows:-

- Application Form
- Planning Statement
- Design and Access Statement
- Environmental Statement (& Figures, Appendices)
- Environmental Statement Non-technical summary
- Site boundary and Ownership Plans

- Existing Site Sections & Sectional Elevations
- Existing Block Plan
- Plans and elevations of existing buildings
- Utilities Statement
- Transport Assessment
- 'Swim Lane' booth photo elevations
- Electrical Plant Photo Elevations (Substations and Generators)
- Ancillary Building Photo Elevations (First Aid, W/C, Security Hut, Portacabin and other Units)

- Draft Unilateral Planning Obligation
- Statement of National Importance

- Soft landscape Works Maintenance and Management Proposals (10 yrs)
- Landscape Masterplan and Detailed Planting Plans
- Arboricultural Report
- Biodiversity Net Gain Report

- 'Schedule of Deliverables'
- Pre-liminary Risk Assessment
- Operational Waste Management Strategy
- Off-Plan Area Measurement Report

- Lighting Survey Report
- Flood Risk Assessment
- External Lighting Assessment
- Energy Statement
- Economic Benefits Statement

Officer feedback

35. For the avoidance of doubt, I note that the Planning Statement includes commentary on officer feedback given prior to the making of the CDA, including during the period when the applicant identified to the Council, the local highway authority and the local community that the intention was to bring forward a planning application for retention of the facility to be determined by

the Borough Council i.e. before the ability to make an alternative CDA became a legal possibility through the changes to legislation effective from May 2025.

36. Furthermore, the Planning Statement also references that pre-application advice was sought from MHCLG between February and June 2025 in respect of the emerging CDA application process. This is noted: again, for the avoidance of doubt, the emerging CDA route was not identified to the Council until June 2025.
37. The Officer level feedback that was given covered a number of known planning concerns relating to the site as well as the importance of a range of supporting documents being provided in any application. These matters are covered further below in this report.

'Honouring key s.106 obligations' following the government purchase of the site for an Inland Border Facility

38. Since autumn 2020, the Council has been working with the DfT (the site owner) to complete a fresh s.106 agreement to 'honour' key financial obligations that were contained within the 2017 s.106 agreement relating to the planned storage and distribution use of the site.
39. Those financial obligations include contributions towards J10A (required to be collected from certain strategic development schemes and ultimately recycled back to a different part of Government as part of the funding arrangements for taking J10A forward), minor off-site highway infrastructure improvements to PRoW in Willesborough to improve a bottleneck that has capacity to impact on travel to work by non-vehicular means from that part of sub-urban Ashford and financial mitigation to then be passed on to the Diocese of Canterbury for upgrade works to be carried out to St. Mary's Church.
40. The St. Mary's mitigation was considered essential in order to mitigate the level of harm that would arise to the setting of the Church from the development of the site for storage and distribution purposes. Following the grant of outline permission 14/00906/AS, the Diocese moved forward with community consultation on the proposed works, and these were approved in early 2020.
41. Although the 'honouring the original agreement' s.106 was considered close to being finally concluded in Spring 2023, a stumbling block subsequently arose due to a previously undeclared lease by the DfT to South East Power Networks (SEPN) for power infrastructure crossing the site becoming apparent. This lease had the potential to frustrate the delivery of a draft s.106 obligation designed (with agreement by both the DfT and Council with input from KCC PRoW) to secure funding for the reestablishment of a PRoW crossing east-west through the site and its '(St.Mary's Church) viewing corridor' if, at some point in the future, a secure perimeter fence was no

longer required. It was the secure nature of the site that had led to PRow diversion around the edge of the site. Conceivably, a lack of future requirement for a secure site in part through a geographic scaling back of the Inland Border Facilities to be located at the site with a scaled back facility being located clear of the viewing corridor area through which a PRow might once again be provided was a possibility. Alternatively, whole site might become one surplus to government requirements in which case the PRow could be put back.

42. Following liaison between the DfT and SEPN, it was agreed that if a close liaison working approach were adopted by SEPN and KCC PRow, then the reestablishment of a PRow through the viewing corridor was considered deliverable with due care and fine tuning of alignment to avoid disruption to below ground power infrastructure. The Council redrafted and updated the legal agreement accordingly and included the necessary indexation to ensure monetary values remained undiminished as well as a small sum in relation to late payment interest which was to be treated as an 'additional Church Works contribution'.
43. Since that time, the Council has been unable to convince the DfT to move forward and complete the agreement. No substantive rebuttal has ever been received from the DfT as to why the approach in the updated s.106 agreement is unreasonable which has been frustrating, especially for the Diocese so that it can properly plan ahead and procure appropriate upgrades to St. Mary's with some certainty as to the nature of the surrounding community in the medium term. However, I am pleased to note that the application includes a draft Unilateral Undertaking which includes the financial mitigation previously discussed with the Council towards the St. Mary's upgrades although I note not towards the reinstatement of a PRow across the site if future circumstances allow. I deal with these matters further below in the report.

Planning Policy

44. The Development Plan for Ashford Borough comprises; -
 - (i) the Ashford Local Plan 2030 (adopted February 2019),
 - (ii) the Chilmington Green AAP (adopted July 2013),
 - (iii) the Wye Neighbourhood Plan (adopted March 2016),
 - (iv) the Rolvenden Neighbourhood Plan (adopted December 2019),
 - (v) the Boughton Aluph & Eastwell Neighbourhood Plan (adopted October 2021)
 - (vi) the Egerton Neighbourhood Plan (adopted March 2022)
 - (vii) the Charing Neighbourhood Plan (adopted July 2023)
 - (viii) the Pluckley Neighbourhood Plan Review 2023 (adopted July 2024)
 - (ix) the Aldington & Bonnington Neighbourhood Plan (adopted October 2024)

- (x) the Tenterden Neighbourhood Plan (adopted October 2024)
- (xi) the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2024-39 (2025) & the Kent Minerals Sites Plan (2020).

45. The relevant policies from the Development Plan relating to the CDA application are as follows: -

Ashford Local Plan 2030 ('ALP 2030')

- SP1 Strategic Objectives
- SP3 Strategic Approach to Economic Development
- SP6 Promoting High Quality Design
- SP7 Separation of Settlements

- EMP1 New employment uses
- EMP6 Fibre to the Premises

- TRA4 Promoting the local bus network
- TRA5 Planning for pedestrians
- TRA6 Provision for cycling
- TRA7 The road network and development
- TRA8 Travel Plans, Assessments and Statements
- TRA9 Planning for HGV movements

- ENV1 Biodiversity
- ENV3a Landscape
- ENV4 Light pollution and promoting dark skies
- ENV5 Protecting important rural features
- ENV6 Flood risk
- ENV8 Water Quality, Supply and Treatment
- ENV11 Sustainable Design and Construction – non-residential
- ENV12 Air Quality
- ENV13 Conservation and Enhancement of Heritage Assets
- ENV15 Archaeology

- COM1 Meeting the Community's Needs

- IMP1 Infrastructure Provision

Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2024-39 (2025) & the Kent Minerals Sites Plan (2020).

- DM7 - Safeguarding Mineral Resources

46. The following are also material considerations to the determination of this application.

- (i) Ashford Borough Council Climate Change Guidance for Development Management

Draft Ashford Local Plan 2042

On the 31 July 2025, the Council's Cabinet approved a consultation version of the draft Ashford Local Plan 2042 (Regulation 18). Consultation on the draft Ashford Local Plan will take place on 18 August – 13 October 2025. At present, the policies in this emerging Local Plan should be afforded limited weight.

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents

Landscape Character Assessment SPD 2011
Sustainable Drainage SPD 2010
Dark Skies SPD 2014

Government Advice

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023

47. Members should note that the determination must be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. A significant material consideration is the NPPF. The NPPF states that less weight should be given to the policies above if they are in conflict with the NPPF.

Planning History

The following is relevant; - .

14/00906/AS - outline planning permission granted 13/09/2017 for:-

'Development to provide an employment led mixed use scheme to, include site clearance, the alteration of highways, engineering works and construction of new buildings and structures of up to 157,616 sqm comprising: up to 140,000 sqm Class B8 (storage and distribution) use; up to 23,500 sqm of B1a/B1c Business (of which a maximum of 20,000 sqm of B1a); up to 15,000 sqm of B2 (general industry); up to 250 sqm of A1 (retail shops) and 5,500 sqm of Sui Generis to accommodate Kent Wool Growers together with ancillary and associated development including utilities and transport infrastructure, car parking and landscaping.'

The permission was also subject of an agreement under s.106.

19/00579/AS - approval of reserved matters granted 05/07/2019, for:-

'Approval of the appearance, landscaping, layout and scale of the 'Phase 1A works' being the works comprising the estate roads, the sustainable drainage system embedded within open space and the landscaping and layout of that open space

(including measures specifically designed for ecological/biodiversity enhancement purposes within that open space).’

19/01099/AS - Certificate of Lawfulness of Existing Use of Development – granted 15/08/2019. This confirmed that development in relation to outline planning permission 14/00906/AS and associated Phase 1A works approved under reference 19/00579/AS

The Town and Country Planning (Border Facilities and Infrastructure) (EU Exit) (England) Special Development Order 2020 - made by The Secretary of State for MHCLG on 24th September 2020. Planning permission was granted through Article 3(1) of this statutory instrument in respect to various changes of use of land, development and operations for the provision of border facilities and infrastructure.

Article 4(1)(a) of the SDO prescribes a pre-commencement condition requiring a written submission to the Secretary of State for approval for the use of the land and the operations comprised in the development, and subsequent receipt of the relevant approval.

Four separate relevant approvals were obtained by the Applicant, subsequent to written submissions, on 01/12/2020, 23/12/2020, 24/11/2021 and 28/04/2022, accounting for evolving operational requirements. The temporary permission expires on 31/12/2025, and upon expiry the land is required to be reinstated.

Consultation responses received from others

Recipients of CDA consultation are encouraged to view the application documents on the PINs web-site and make representations on the application to PINS through that portal rather than make representations to the Council in its role as consultee. The guidance notes for the new CDA process require any representations received by the Council on the application to be passed on to PINs and I confirm this has been the case.

As a matter of record, the following representations have either been made directly to the Council (and therefore have been forwarded to PINs under CDA process guidance notes) or have copied to the Council without it always being clear that the same comments have already been separately PINS and/or submitted because the party concerned wished to bring them directly to the Council's attention;-

KCC Public Rights of Way & Access Service – comment as follows;-

“The only comment we have regarding this application is that we would wish to see the retention of the s106 requirement to reinstate the original alignment of the direct route Sevington to Mersham Church should operation of the site as an inland border facility ever cease.”

Natural England ('NE') – raise no objection subject to mitigation measures being secured. In summary, make the following comments:-

(a) Continuation of current drainage arrangements whereby trade effluent is discharged outside of the Stour Valley catchment will need to be secured in order to mitigate the impacts from foul water on the Stodmarsh designated sites and the Planning Inspectorate become the competent authority to produce a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and be accountable for its conclusions. NE is satisfied with the applicant's mitigation measures - which are to continue with trade effluent being captured, stored in an on-site tank and then tankered away and treated outside the Stour Valley catchment removed - and would not expect to be consulted on the Planning Inspectorates Appropriate Assessment.

(b) Identify that in respect of the temporary permission pursuant to the SDO the conclusion reached was that the use of the site would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Folkestone to Etchinghill Special Area of Conservation ('SAC'). Confirm that as the proposal would not result in increased traffic compared to existing levels it is agreed that there would be unlikely to be an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC.

(c) An adjusted lighting strategy which allows lighting to be switched off in certain areas and shielded to prevent light spill will need to be secured. Express concerns that light spill is causing significant glare visible from the National Landscape at night. NE agree that the mitigation proposed in paragraph 7.3 of the LVIA (which seeks to adjust the lighting strategy to allow lighting to be turned off in certain areas and install shields to certain luminaires) should be secured in any permission that is granted. NE note that the installation of shields is more geared towards mitigating light spill to nearby residential properties, NE advise that directing lighting downwards (in instances where it cannot be turned off) will help to reduce glare and therefore provide betterment to the Kent Downs National Landscape.

Sevington with Finberry Parish Council – comment as follows:-

'1. Introduction

1.1. *During the public engagement, The Parish Council met with neighbouring Parish Councils to collect all relevant issues with the site. These issues were presented to the applicant in November 2024. The presentation made is included in support of our comments.*

1.2. *During the consultation period, a survey was distributed to 11 dwellings in the Parish closest to the site and a link posted in Parish noticeboards. The survey encouraged engagement with the submitted documentation whilst requesting opinion on suitability of proposals. 22 Responses were received and have been used to help determine important matters for this response. A summary of the survey results have been included in support of our comments.*

- 1.3. *The Parish Council recognises the employment benefit associated with the site and its necessity for operations post Brexit. However, the proposals as submitted fail to address the majority of issues which are fundamental to the site's impact on its surroundings.*
- 1.4. *As this is the only opportunity to effect change for necessary improvement of the site, we object to the proposals based on the issues raised below.*
2. *Site Aesthetics - Local Plan SP6 - Promoting high quality design / SP7 Separation of settlements / ENV3a Landscape Character and Design / ENV5 - Protecting important rural features / ENV13 Conservation and Enhancement of Heritage Assets / NPPF Section 12*
 - 2.1. *The site does not blend into its surroundings, with comments received comparing it to living next to a prison. The metal palisade fencing, temporary nature of the buildings and minimal green screening give the site a temporary aesthetic which is unfit for retention.*
 - 2.2. *Views of the site from the A2070 have been cited as much worse than expected.*
 - 2.3. *The staff entrance, off a country lane in a historic area of Sevington that leads to numerous listed buildings is extremely poor and not in keeping with its surroundings.*
 - 2.4. *Fencing facing countryside views is poor and at odds with its setting.*
 - 2.5. *Many of the buildings as currently designed and proposed for permanent permission do not meet the requirements of planning policy, both local and national, and would not be acceptable if proposed for a new development. The site must improve its interface with its surrounding environment through a combination of improved building aesthetics, screening, improved entrances and changes to the perimeter fencing.*
 - 2.6. *These improvements will help the site to blend better with its surroundings and provide a better working environment for those employed at the site.*
3. *Noise - Local plan S15 - Finberry Northwest (Relevant paragraph 3.193) NPPF Chapter 15*
 - 3.1. *Local residents have frequently reported noise issues to the Parish Council, some members of which live near to the site and experience the noise issues first hand.*

- 3.2. *General noise, tonal noise (humming, repeated sounding of horns, reversing sounders) and Low Frequency Noise (LFN) have been reported with some residents suffering impact to health and disturbed sleep. The complaints were supported by the local EHO following noise monitoring in two dwellings near the site.*
- 3.3. *The movement of lorries via an exit road between the acoustic fence and buildings has also been raised as a specific issue, resulting in noise reflecting off the buildings towards Church Road and the low frequency thrum of HGV's accelerating up the hill being heard inside houses.*
- 3.4. *Some parts of the site feature no acoustic barriers to residential property.*
- 3.5. *The noise report as submitted makes no consideration to the detailed assessment of tonal issues that have been raised. It is significantly less robust than the noise report as submitted for the SDO, which highlighted risks associated with some of the issues that local residents are reporting (such as refrigerated trailers kept to the north of the site). It also makes no reference to the operational changes that have been made which we are aware has had some beneficial impact during periods of lower operational demand.*
- 3.6. *The implemented acoustic strategy is not fit for purpose, with timber acoustic fencing providing very little attenuation at lower frequencies.*
- 3.7. *An independent noise impact assessment should be sought that considers all complaints made, with the recommendations implemented as part of any permission granted.*
4. *Landscaping - Local Plan SP6 - Promoting high quality design / SP7 Separation of settlements / ENV3a Landscape Character and Design / ENV5 - Protecting important rural features / ENV13 Conservation and Enhancement of Heritage Assets / NPPF Section 12 / Corporate plan 2015 Priority 4*
- 4.1. *Landscaping to the site had received planning approval in 2019 following public engagement and consultations. It was understood that the IBF would retain the approved landscaping.*
- 4.2. *Whilst the scheme has retained the areas of the landscaping, the planting, layout and accessibility is fundamentally altered and has left an extremely underwhelming aesthetic.*
- 4.3. *Poor maintenance has resulted in the death of planting that should now be established.*

- 4.4. *Proposals within the submission make some positive contributions to rectifying the landscaping with more mature planting and increased screening.*
- 4.5. *The survey responses highlight that the proposals fall short of what should be provided and that topsoil quality issues have not been addressed as part of the submitted documents.*
- 4.6. *It is understood that open landscapes are desired for security reasons, but consideration should be given to increasing planting to more effectively screen the site.*
- 5. *Lighting - Local Plan ENV4 - Light Pollution and promoting dark skies / NPPF Paragraph 125*
 - 5.1. *The lighting design for the site results in significant sideways and upward spread of light that travels well beyond the site boundaries. Areas protected during the construction works for biodiversity value are now flooded with light 24/7 as a result.*
 - 5.2. *Lighting has also been added indiscriminately to buildings, increasing glare, resulting in a significant impact to both the night sky and views towards Ashford from surrounding villages.*
 - 5.3. *It is noted that the proposals recommend baffles, dimming and operational isolation of lights as possible. The report notes that building attached lighting has been turned off, which does not appear to be the case in all locations, and should be removed to prevent its re-use.*
 - 5.4. *Responses to the survey were mixed between the proposals being acceptable but the columns are still too tall (31%) The proposals are insufficient and more needs to be done to reduce lighting impact (28%) and the proposals represent a good solution (21%).*
- 6. *Footpaths - ENV5 - Protecting important rural features / ENV6 - Flood Risk*
 - 6.1. *Footpaths have been adapted significantly from the proposals of the original approved planning for the site in 2019.*
 - 6.2. *Opportunities to re-introduce some of the original and proposed routes, particularly the link between Sevington Church and Mersham Church, should be considered. If this is not possible during the sites current use, it should be conditioned to be re-introduced should the site be decommissioned or its use changed.*

- 6.3. *Respondents to the survey report poor maintenance of the footpaths, dog faeces and poor drainage. Dog waste bins would be beneficial. Of note is poor drainage design to the site staff entrance which results in surface water flowing down and out of the site from the staff entrance. Some of the water enters Church Road and some enters the footpath, washing away the surface material. A permanent solution to drainage issues is required and not addressed by this submission.*

7. Archaeology

- 7.1. *Archaeology information boards are proposed to the east of the site in the Parish of Mersham.*
- 7.2. *The post excavation assessment (May 2022) highlights significant findings in the Sevington area of the site. We therefore request that information boards relating to the findings are placed at more locations than currently proposed, such as on the footpaths near to the site entrance, Sevington Church and the footpath junction north of Bridge Cottage. The contents of the boards should be approved by the local Parish Councils and relate to findings as appropriate at each location.*
- 7.3. *We would also encourage the writing of a formal paper recognising the findings, which is recommended within the post excavation report.*

8. Traffic & Litter

- 8.1. *The increased HGV movements have resulted in significant increases in litter and congestion issues on local roads.*
- 8.2. *The functioning of Junction 10A must be scrutinised. The junction is partially traffic light controlled & numerous complaints have been received of significant congestion on non-controlled entry points due to significant consecutive HGV's using the junction.*
- 8.3. *Reports of increased road traffic accidents due to HGV's crossing lanes without notice needs investigation and resolution, possibly through more informative signage at motorway exits and on leaving the IBF.*
- 8.4. *The survey highlights a regular complaint to the council of significant littering along the A2070 and discarded bottles of urine around the site entrance. This suggests that there are no or inadequate facilities for the users of the site to dispose of such waste. The operator(s) of the site must take responsibility for the litter that their operation causes and ensure that there are end of trip facilities that are suitable for users of the site, which includes dealing with end of trip waste. For example,*

the provision of purpose made bins that can be used from the cab could significantly reduce this issue and should be implemented as part of this application to reduce litter and health risk to the local community.

- 8.5. *There are continued wrong turns resulting in HGV's becoming stuck and causing damage to vehicles and property, along country lanes. This specifically relates to Church Road and Cheeseman's Green Lane within Sevington area. Width restrictions and signage has done little to resolve and a more cohesive strategy, such as further improvements to signage and obscuring the staff entrance, which presents aesthetically as an entrance to the site from the A2070.*

9. Sevington Church S106

- 9.1. *Funds for Sevington Church to be concluded.*

10. Other matters

- 10.1. *Survey responses also raised the following issues:*

- 10.1.1. *CCTV cameras are intrusive and should not cover public areas (24%)*
- 10.1.2. *CCTV cameras should not be seen from public areas (24%)*
- 10.1.3. *The site should not be called 'Sevington IBF' (31%)*
- 10.1.4. *Residents should be compensated for lack of consultation & significant disturbance during construction (Noisy works 6am to 8pm 6 days a week plus Sunday mornings) (29%)*

11. Conclusion

- 11.1. *We recognise that the facility provides employment benefit to the area and provides essential services and hope that the site will continue to provide such benefits to Ashford for the long term.*
- 11.2. *The proposals submitted appear to seek to justify the retention of a poorly designed facility with aesthetics that would not be acceptable of any fresh application for a green field site when originally built, or today.*
- 11.3. *As this application seeks to retain a site that was to be returned to its original state at the end of the SDO period, the application must be considered as if it were not built, to ensure that the site forms a long term benefit to Sevington, Ashford and the wider towns and villages.*
- 11.4. *We cannot therefore support this application on the basis of the documentation as submitted and this opportunity must be used to*

secure the necessary upgrades to bring this site into line with the minimum that would be expected of any other development in Ashford and the surrounding towns.

- 11.5. *The Parish Council invites any discussion in relation to how the above issues can be mitigated as effectively and economically as possible.'*

Historic England – make the following comments (copied to the Council) as follows:-

"Summary

The Inland Border Facility (IBF) at Sevington, Ashford, causes a high level of harm to the significance of the grade I listed Church of St Mary by greatly compromising the church's remaining rural setting.

In our view the harmful impacts of the IBF could be reduced by deepening the areas of planting shown on drawing Landscape Masterplan Sheet 1 and by considering options to soften the planting in the viewing corridor (e.g. with a wildflower meadow in keeping with its historic rural character).

We also recommend that steps are taken to ensure that a capital contribution for the Church of St Mary, proposed as mitigation for development on the site of the IBF, can be secured and delivered.

Significance

The site is within the setting of several designated heritage assets, the closest of which being the Church of St Mary and a small collection of grade II listed buildings on Church Road. This cluster of historic buildings is the historic rural hamlet of Sevington, which mainly consisted of small farmsteads and agricultural workers' cottages, and had a historic functional relationship to surrounding agricultural fields as the land worked by each farmstead.

The field to the east of the Church of St Mary, prior to the construction of the IBF, made an important contribution to the church's significance as its historic rural setting that helped explain the church's rural origins.

An appreciation of this setting was enhanced by expansive views of the church across the site of the IBF, in which the church and particularly its visible church spire could be appreciated, alongside other historic buildings on Church Road as a rural historic hamlet.

This understanding of the church's origins and its association with a rural hamlet, remained, prior to the construction of the IBF, despite the expansion of Ashford to its west and north with both residential development and infrastructure associated with the M20. However, the IBF resulted in development almost entirely encircling the Church of St Mary. It is both the encircling of development and the type of development, which in the case of the IBF includes large scale industrial style

buildings that means that the church's once rural setting and its contribution to significance is now significantly reduced.

Measures within the IBF proposal to mitigate this visual impact, including a green buffer between the IBF and the church and a landscaped viewing corridor, which retains an important and historic visual link between the Church of St Mary and the Church of St John the Baptist in Mersham, are positive but sustain only a sense of its once expansive rural setting.

Impact

This proposal is to retain an existing Inland Border facility and Border Control Post which was consented in 2020 under a Special Development Order, a temporary form of consent.

The Inland Border Facility has greatly eroded the contribution to significance made by the remaining rural setting of the Church of St Mary despite the inclusion of landscape buffers along the site boundary and a viewing corridor.

Erosion of the church's rural setting to its east arises from the replacement of agricultural fields with hard standing, roadways, infrastructure including lighting and fencing and large-scale buildings towards the middle and south-west corner of the site. Acoustic attenuation panels are also very visible (particularly on the north-west corner of the site) and add to the sense that the church's rural setting has been greatly eroded. The overall visual impact of the development is also accentuated by a lack of soft landscaping within the development making the contrast between the development on the site and the former rural setting of the church all the more stark.

In our advice of 2020, we concluded that the harm to the Church of St Mary caused by the IBF would be towards the upper end of less than substantial in terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Having visited the area again recently, and for the purposes of assessing this application to retain the IBF, that remains our view.

Policy

Section 16 of the NPPF, Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment, sets out policies for decisions governing change in the historic environment.

Of particular importance to this application is paragraph 208, which notes that "Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal."

Paragraph 212 also applies. This states that "When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great

weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance."

And paragraph 215 applies, which requires that the harm to significance is weighed against the public (including heritage) benefits of the proposal.

Position

Landscaping was proposed to help reduce the visual impact of the IBF in 2020. To an extent, what has survived of this planting does help soften the visual impact of the development. But, to achieve the reduction in visual impact that was considered necessary in 2020, and which we consider remains important, there is scope to increase this, while also maintaining necessary security requirements. This is evident from both views in towards the site and from an assessment of the site on recent aerial photography.

Harm to significance could be reduced (paragraph 208, NPPF) by increasing the depth of planting shown close to the Church of St Mary on drawing Landscape Masterplan Sheet 1. This would help soften the view out from the churchyard along the viewing corridor and vice versa.

We also note planting is proposed on the site's northern edge. In views from the A2070, the church's spire can be seen behind a cluster of lighting columns and security fencing. The urbanisation of the church's setting in these views would also be reduced by maximising planting opportunities on the site's north edge.

We are pleased that the viewing corridor is retained in the application, but we note that its soft landscaping does not appear to be very successful with large areas of dry grass visible on aerial photography. Consideration of mechanisms to soften this, for example by planting it as a wildflower meadow in keeping with its historic rural character, may help soften its visual appearance. A condition of any consent, requiring that the landscaping is monitored and replaced where it fails, would also be beneficial.

For the duration of the IBF's site development history, a substantial package of mitigation for the Church of St Mary's has been proposed, because of the harmful nature of development secured.

This mitigation package comprised works to build a church car park and an indexed financial contribution to support proposals for the repair and re-ordering of the church to help secure its long-term future as a place for worship, mission and the local community. This package was secured by a Section 106 Agreement, and the construction of the car park. The car park has been built, which we welcome, but we understand that the financial contribution has not been paid in full, and that the current application includes a draft unilateral undertaking to secure payment of the balance.

The capital funds for the Church of St Mary are essential mitigation to the high level of harm caused by the IBF. We therefore urge the applicant, which is offering the undertaking, to resolve any outstanding matters swiftly so that the undertaking can be finalised and completed before the application is determined.

In reaching a decision on this proposal, the high level of harm to the significance of the Church of St Mary should be weighed against the evident public benefits of this proposal (paragraph 215, NPPF)

Recommendation

We recommend that steps are taken to ensure the landscape proposals adequately reduce harm to the heritage significance of the Church of St Mary. We also recommend that steps are taken to resolve any outstanding matters related to the capital contribution for the Church of St Mary, prior to determination of this application.

In determining this application, you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) of 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings and their setting or any features of special architectural and historic interest which they possess.”

Canterbury Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd – comment as follows;-

“Introduction

1 The development of the SIBF site has already caused substantial harm to the setting of the Grade I Listed Building, St Mary’s Church, Sevington. This impact was meant to be mitigated in three ways as part of the development consent:

- Protected views through the commercial site.
- A 30-bay church car park.
- A circa £200,000 contribution to ‘church works’ before development commences.

2 The first two were implemented but the third has not so far been forthcoming. There is an urgent need for church works funding and the Crown Development should not be approved in the absence of a legal obligation to make the overdue payment to enable works to proceed.



Satellite view of St Mary's and the SIBF May 2023 © Google Background

3 The 120-acre site was a Local Plan allocation for a logistics hub. The owners secured planning permission(14/00906/AS) in September 2017 for 1.7 million square feet of warehousing.

4 In a letter dated 23.10.2014(Appendix) English Heritage raised strong objections because of harm to the setting and sustainability of St Marys. The EH response was expressed in strong terms and included the following key paragraphs.

Sevington is significant as a small historic settlement that survives unusually intact and still with a strong sense of the agricultural setting that relates functionally to it and which provides an attractive buffer to nearby urban development. The spire of its church, a grade-I listed building of outstanding heritage significance, retains its intended commanding presence over the surrounding houses and this countryside despite the intrusion of nearby roads. These positive elements of the church's setting make a key contribution to its significance, as well as to many of Sevington's grade-II listed houses and farm buildings.

Particularly badly affected is the setting of the grade-I listed church of St Mary. The scheme could also compromise the future viability of that church, and possibly also of the adjacent farm. This application should therefore be refused unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm to significance is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm.

English Heritage recommends that you should treat the current application as constituting substantial harm to the heritage significance of the group of designated heritage assets at Sevington, and particularly the grade-I listed St Mary's Church. Planning permission should therefore be refused unless it can be demonstrated that these are wholly exceptional circumstances and that the substantial harm is 'necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss'. These are very high tests and this substantial harm to significance should therefore not be accepted lightly.

5. It is not credible to suggest that the SIBF has had any less impact on the setting of St Mary's than the original commercial development proposal. A key element of the significance of the Grade 1 Listed Building was its 'strong sense of agricultural setting'(above) and its 'commanding presence' over the countryside. The SIBF has all but destroyed this setting and any suggestion that the harm has been 'less than substantial' is surprising and cannot be relied upon. This may stem from the assessment methodology¹ applied by the applicants which was designed for judging the impact of roads and bridges not a nationally significant infrastructure development covering a site of 120 acres.

6 The package of mitigation measure summarised above were incorporated as formal requirements through the conditions attached to the original planning permission for the commercial development and the integral S106 Agreement. The owners sold the site to Department for Transport in July 2020 with the above obligations novated to DfT.

7 The Sevington Inland Border Facility (SIBF) was approved by Central Government under a Special Development Order (SDO). A subsequent Lawful Development Certificate 19/01099/AS confirmed that works had commenced lawfully on 31.7.19.

8 DfT accepted that the IBF caused substantial harm to the setting of St Mary's and that the church works contribution should have been paid before development commenced. Unfortunately, this did not happen. DfT took the position that a new S106 Agreement was required and that payment could not be made until a new Agreement had been made. Although the agreement was ready by the end of 2022

(sic), for various reasons DfT declined to sign the Agreement and argued it could not make the payment as a result.

9. So, the substantial harm to the setting of St Mary's anticipated by the parties has occurred and its physical condition has deteriorated considerably. Notably the spire is in poor conditions because of the loss of oak shingles and the ingress of rain and pigeons. The volume of droppings from the latter is causing significant damage.

Unilateral undertaking

10. DfT now propose a Unilateral Undertaking incorporating the following provisions relevant to St Mary's:

Church Works	means upgrade and repair works to St. Mary's Church, Sevington in order to help enable the church to meet the long term needs of the local community
Church Works Contribution (Remainder)	means the remaining balance of the corresponding sum secured under the Original S106 Agreement Two Hundred and Three Thousand Five Hundred and Seventy-Eight Pounds and Ninety-Three Pence (£203,578.93) for the funding of the Church Works (which for the avoidance of doubt shall be added to the £40,000.00 part payment already received by the Council pursuant to the Original S106 Agreement)
Additional Church Works Contribution (Remainder)	means the remaining balance of the corresponding sum secured under the Original S106 Agreement and the payment of the Church Works Contribution Remainder being Twenty Three Thousand Nine Hundred and Sixty One Pounds and Two pence (£23,961.02) for the funding of the Church Works
Church Works Contribution (Remainder) and the Additional Church Works Contribution (Remainder)	
The Owner covenants to pay to the Council the Church Works Contribution (Remainder) prior to completion of this Unilateral Planning Obligation and the Additional Church Works Contribution (Remainder) within 14 days of the date of the grant of the Planning Permission	

11. The 'Condition Precedent' clause on p.4 of the Draft Unilateral Undertaking means that, in effect, the contributions would not be made until 8 weeks after the date of the planning permission decision notice.

Legal and Policy Compliance

12. Completion of the mitigation measures incorporated into the Draft Unilateral Undertaking are essential to ensure legal and policy compliance, including the following provisions

- Town and Country Planning Act 1990 S70(2)
- Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 S38(6)

- Planning(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 relevant provisions
- National Planning Practice Guidance historic environment provisions
- Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework and paragraphs 207, 208, 209, 210, 212, 213 and 214.
- Ashford Local Plan 2030 policies SP1 and ENV13.

Response of Canterbury Diocese

13. The Crown Development Application is effectively seeking retrospective consent on a permanent basis for a development which has already caused substantial harm to an important heritage asset. It is therefore extremely important that permission is only granted with a legally binding agreement in place that makes the payment of the church works contribution mandatory within a very short space of time after the decision notice is issued.

14. The remedy of a Unilateral Undertaking as now proposed by DfT is essential if the harm that has already taken place is to be reduced and future serious deterioration of the important heritage asset, St Mary's Church, is to be prevented.

Conclusions

15. The Inspector is respectfully invited to conclude that the Crown Development Order should not be approved unless there is an effective formal mechanism to ensure that the church works contribution is made in a timely manner, taking into account the harm already caused to the heritage asset and the inevitable decline of the Grade Listed Building if there are any further delays in the funds coming forward.

KCC Ecology – comment as follows:-

'We advise that the following comments do not consider potential impacts associated with Stodmarsh SPA, SAC, SSSI and Ramsar. This application is for the following: Retention of the existing buildings, Goods Vehicle parking spaces, entry lanes, refrigerated semi-trailers, staff car parking spaces, access, site infrastructure, utilities, hardstanding, landscaping and ancillary facilities and associated works; and ongoing use of the site for an Inland Border Facility and Border Control Post, operating 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

Therefore, any ecological impacts associated with the construction have already occurred when the development was implemented.

The ecological surveys carried out between 2012 and 2020 prior to works commencing on site confirmed the following species were present within the site or the wider area

- *Great Crested Newts*
- *At least 5 species of foraging bats with a number of bat roosts within the wider area*

- *Outlier badger sett in 2020*
- *At least 47 species of Birds recorded during breeding bird survey*
- *Dormouse within the boundary*
- *3 species of reptiles*
- *Water Voles within the stream 125m to the north of the site*
- *Suitable habitat for Invertebrates within the site/wider area – including two nationally scarce species were recorded*

Ecological mitigation was implemented prior to works commencing on site (including a reptile translocation) and areas of the site continue to provide suitable habitat for the species previously recorded on site. However, on going monitoring and updated surveys in 2024 detailed there was no evidence of badgers or dormouse being present within the site.

As no construction works are proposed we are satisfied that no ecological mitigation for is required however the on-going surveys have demonstrated that there has a been a decline in nocturnal species which is likely due to the lighting within the site. We note that the lighting assessment has made a number of recommendations to minimise the lighting impacts from the proposal, and we are supportive of these measures. We advise that if planning permission is granted a lighting plan must be submitted as a condition of planning permission to confirm the new lighting regime.

The submitted information has detailed that the Landscape Monitoring and Management Plan and the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan has been updated and will include additional measures including

- *Bat Activity surveys and bat box checks*
- *Breeding bird surveys*
- *Habitat surveys*
- *GCN surveys*
- *Reptile surveys*
- *Dormouse surveys*
- *Water vole assessment of water bodies on site.*

We have reviewed the submitted LMMP or LEMP and advise that we are satisfied with the proposed management but highlight that changes may be required following the results of the ongoing surveys.

We note that habitat enhancement is proposed of the land within the blue line habitat to allow the proposal to achieve a BNG which should increase opportunities for biodiversity or address any issues identified during the monitoring surveys. These measures have not been implemented yet and therefore must be implemented within the first planting season following planning permission being granted.

Biodiversity Net Gain

We have reviewed the BNG assessment has detailed that due to the proposed habitat creation in the blueline boundary a BNG of 65% for habitats and 58% for hedgerows can be achieved. We highlight that a condition assessment of the existing habitat on site has not been carried out so it is not clear if the habitats on site have already achieved the anticipated condition detailed in table 6 of the BNG assessment. In addition, the current google earth images have not demonstrated that the habitat creation in the blue line boundary have been implemented.

Therefore, currently the proposed BNG has not been achieved however we are satisfied if the habitat creation and habitat management is implemented within the site the proposal can achieve a BNG of over 10%.

This response was submitted following consideration of the following documents:-

- *Environmental Statement; Chapter 11*
- *Soft Landscape Works Maintenance And Management Proposals – 10 years; BCA Design;*
- *Landscape and Ecology Specification; November 2020*
- *External Lighting Assessment; Waterman; May 2025*
- *Biodiversity Net Gain Report; Watermans; March 2025.'*

ABC Economic Development: in summary, comment as follows:-

1. The proposal is considered to align with ALP 2030 Policy SP3 by:

- Retaining a strategic employment site identified in the Local Plan.
- Supporting employment levels and inward investment, locally and nationally.
- Contributing to the target of 11,100 jobs and 63 hectares of employment land between 2014–2030.

2. The current temporary SDO has seen this site at Sevington support, according to the applicant, at least 819 direct FTE jobs on site, formed mainly of HMRC and Defra staff including Ashford Port Health Authority staff. The applicant estimates that 59% of staff live within 10 miles of the site and 433 of those are Ashford Borough residents.

However, we would consider that, given the employment impact of this site, and subject to sections a – d being met, this proposal would support the objectives of Policy EMP 1.

3. The Council's position is that Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) is essential infrastructure and vital to the delivery of sustainable development with digital infrastructure increasingly important for business. Policy EMP6 of the ALP 2030 requires that all employment schemes proposed in the Ashford Urban Area shall deliver FTTP to their site. An FTTP statement has not been provided with the

application nor any indication as to inability of FTTP to be provided. An alternative would be the provision of superfast broadband. ABC Economic Development consider the proximity to the Sevington exchange means that FTTP should be a viable proposition.

Local resident – comment as follows:-

"1. Noise:

The noise emitted from the site has resulted in significant loss of amenity, regularly intrusive outside, often intrusive internally. The noise has impacted sleep and induces a feeling of nausea, particularly when continuous over several hours.

Noise issues from the site, in order of impact, are as follows:

- a. Low frequency noise from multiple idling engines and refrigerated trailers*
- b. Tonal noise from some refrigerated trailers when on electric hook-up*
- c. Reversing beepers*
- d. Clanging of curtain-sider poles.*
- e. Horns*

As the site is operational 24 hours a day, disturbance can happen at any time of the day or night.

Operation of refrigerated trailers on Diesel, when singular, creates a tonal noise which can be heard inside the house. When more than one, the noise phases, amplifying and cancelling out, which becomes extremely unpleasant both inside and outside the house. During winter when many engines are idling for warmth, the LFN can have the effect of distant rumbling thunder that can continue for days.

The route for HGVs to exit the southern part of the site is via a road which is closest to the residences on Church Road, between tall buildings, which reflect noise towards Church Road residences. As this is on a hill, the low drone of each and every accelerating HGV through the gears can be heard inside the house whenever this road is used. Any refrigerated trailers pass with a dominant tonal disturbance until they are well in the distance.

Whilst it is recognised that operational changes have been made to address repeated complaints from myself and neighbours, issues remain which are caused by the current arrangement and operation of the site. When the site is busy, the noise increases exponentially. Complaints made generate a response of 'the site was extremely busy, and there's nothing we can do about it' With the site expected to increase in use, it is fundamental that the site's configuration and acoustic treatment is improved.

The low frequency noise has impacted sleep and ability to spend time outside of the house pursuing hobbies. Its effect is that of an increasing sense of agitation, stress in the neck and shoulders and a slowly increasing feeling of nausea. Options to relocate were explored but costly. Therefore, to attempt to resolve, we have sought

advice and soundproofed our bedroom with acoustic insulation, mass loaded vinyl barriers and window treatment. Whilst this has helped, windows must be shut year round which is unpleasant for someone who previously enjoyed sleeping with the windows open.

During waking hours, our time is spent in the quietest rooms, usually to the rear of the house. Our living room and dining room are rarely used now, as it is often unpleasant. The local EHO has monitored noise in the house and confirmed elevated levels of LFN were present.

Issues were logged and a 70 page report detailing the noise issues and readings were submitted as part of the public consultation in 2024. The aim of providing this information was for the noise issues to be better understood and be addressed as part of the permanent application. The records of public engagement show noise issues being raised by numerous residents. However, the issue does not appear to be addressed or even acknowledged.

The noise report as submitted makes no consideration of the complaints made, nor does it consider any tonal or low frequency sources. It is therefore fundamentally flawed as it has not fully considered noise sources at the site. This alone is reason to refuse and for the applicant to address the site configuration and acoustic treatment.

The consideration of tonal noise, of which LFN can be considered, is detailed in guidance supporting the NPPF. There is also growing research in the health impacts of LFN.

The original noise report as submitted for the SDO highlights the requirement for refrigerated trailers to be kept to the northern part of the site. The current operation of the site requires refrigerated trailers to enter and dwell on the southern part of the site and the proposals as submitted appear to permit the site to emit significantly more noise than current.

Early residents meetings informed us that earth bund gabion style acoustic barriers would be used to provide the required attenuation. We were therefore surprised to see timber screening being installed, through which daylight could be seen in some locations. Timber fencing, with no absorptive materials, has minimal effect on LFN. The resulting effect is higher frequencies being attenuated, whilst the LFN becomes more dominant in the soundscape. The timber acoustic treatment is not fit for purpose.

Disclosure - I am located near High Speed 1. Any claim to the presence of High Speed 1 and associated noise generation outweighing disturbance from the IBF must be considered in context. High speed trains cause 5 seconds of noise every 15 to 30 minutes depending on the time of day, and not after 10pm or before 6am. Therefore, the noise impact from High Speed 1 on a busy day represents approximately 0.6% of the day. In addition, noise sources from the Waterbrook railhead are treated with significantly superior barriers.

2. Landscaping

The original proposed development provided significant benefit to local residents through quality landscaping and accessible spaces. This can be seen within Ashford planning application 19/00579/AS which provided details of the proposed landscaping and amenity.

During the initial works, we were informed that the landscaping was proceeding to the above approved plans and would not be part of the SDO. As the area took shape, it was clear the proposals were for a 'security no-mans land' with multiple cameras (now removed following complaint) and no planting. Objections were lodged and ABC Planning confirmed during a December 2020 Teams meeting with DfT representatives, the parish council and local residents that the buffer zone as being constructed was not in line with 19/00579/AS. Of particular note is drawing 'Stour Park Phase 1 Landscaping (Coloured) Sheet 2 April 2019.pdf' which demonstrates how the site was to provide significant accessible open space.

Following the aforementioned intervention, additional planting was proposed but the execution of the landscaping was poor with most trees dying and areas being left barren due to no topsoil (Google satellite images clearly illustrate areas with no topsoil). Whilst it is acknowledged that additional planting is proposed within this application, it is a far cry from what the area deserves and a move closer to the approved plans under 19/00579/AS should be provided along with a long term maintenance plan.

As a minimum, better quality soil, more planting and greater access to the footpath for local residents should be provided, giving the site the opportunity to disappear behind walls of green.

3. Lighting

The light spill from the site turns footpaths and areas designated as biodiverse areas, into permanently daylight spaces.

However, for me, the greatest issue is building mounted lighting which has been added inconsiderately, above existing barriers, glaring straight through my study window and into my sight line when at my desk.

The lighting at the site seems poor by design. Whilst baffles are proposed in the application to help mitigate, it does not go far enough.

4. Aesthetics

Considering the significant number of listed buildings near to the site (most of which are not recognised in this application), and its presence on a main route into Ashford, the sites aesthetics (entrances, buildings etc) are extremely poor. The staff entrance, in the heart of Sevington, near listed buildings and Church, is very poor. It would not be permitted as a new development today and therefore should not be

considered acceptable now. Its aesthetic also draws HGV's into Church Road, of which two became stuck just this afternoon as one followed another. Each HGV causes damage to the road, curbs and property whilst also delaying local residents and road users.

5. Utilities & Drainage

The site has had significant impact on local utilities, yet there appears to be no thorough impact assessment within the utilities statement. Whilst power has been upgraded and the significant power cuts reduced (172 in one year during early operation) brownouts regularly occur and water is significantly affected, particularly at night. Pressure at night can be so low, the washing machine fails with lack of water error and taps upstairs dribble.

Footpaths are continually impacted by drainage issues. During heavy rain, surface water flows from the site down the staff entrance road, flowing into Church Road, Sunnybank & entering the footpaths washing away the surface. The drainage design to other areas of the footpath adjacent to Church Road have failed to understand the existing drainage strategy, resulting in a continual flow of water needing to cross the footpath to reach the culvert / drain in the corner of the site that was a pre-existing feature of the site and largely ignored by the designers.

6. Name

Sevington is a settlement in its own right, recorded in the 1086 Domesday book. Following consultation, the previous proposed development made significant improvements to aesthetics and changed its proposed name from Sevington Park to Stour Park following requests for Sevington to remain the name for the settlement rather than a business park.

It appears none of the previous consultations, which were publicly available and a good starting point, were considered. Now 'Sevington' is only known by most as the lorry park.

Any opportunity to re-brand and change the name should be encouraged. The use of Sevington should never have been permitted without consultation and evidence was already available to suggest it would not be welcome.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposal submitted does not meet local or national planning policy guidance. Enhancements should be required to ensure that this ear and eyesore blends into its surroundings much better as an asset to Ashford rather than an embarrassment.

The national planning policy framework alongside local policy aims to enhance opportunities for development whilst protecting the amenity of existing development.

Passing this as it stands will be a significant failure of the planning system when this development could be adapted to operate in harmony with its surroundings.

8. Attachments

Noise issues as raised with the applicant.

ABC Environmental Protection – comments are included as part of the assessments set out in the following sections of this report.

Key pre-application issues raised by the Council & assessment of the application response

48. As indicated further above, a number of matters have previously been fed back to the applicant team by officers as issues needing to be addressed in any application coming forward for permanent retention of the facility. In summary, these were as follows:-

- (a) analysis of the economic benefits of the development,
- (b) the national importance of the facility remaining as a permanent facility,
- (c) the role of 'Sevington East' as a buffer to coalescence with Mersham,
- (d) the intended approach to securing biodiversity net gain,
- (e) the ability to comply with the on-going restrictions imposed by Stodmarsh i.e. overnight accommodation and nutrient neutrality,
- (f) visual impact mitigation: ability to reduce light-spill,
- (g) visual impact mitigation: reviewing soft landscaping
- (h) amenity / well-being impacts on adjoining/close occupiers
- (i) highway impacts: strategic network and local network
- (j) highway impacts: the role of clear signage & sat-nav
- (k) staff parking provision, the role of a Travel Plan, active travel & related public rights of way improvement opportunities
- (l) impact on heritage assets: the applicability of the Council's previous assessment in this regard, the intended permanent site layout & mitigation impact funding in relation to St. Mary's Church

(m) the applicant's draft unilateral undertaking

(n) any other matters

(a) analysis of the economic benefits of the development

49. The CDA is supported by an Economics Benefits Statement that considers the IBF's role within the local economy, including in terms of employment creation and other local economic impacts.
50. In terms of employment the IBF currently employs approximately 941 staff which equates to approximately 819 FTE (full-time equivalent) jobs. 433 employees are calculated to live within the Borough generating approximately £13.1m in wages which can be translated as a total annual expenditure of £5.1m thereby supplementing local economic growth. It is estimated that the total employment generates a gross direct GVA (Gross Value Added – a measure of economic output distributed through retained profit and wages) of approximately £38.1m per annum.
51. In addition, the current operations are estimated to support approximately 205 gross indirect jobs across a range of industries and occupation types (through its established supply chain) which generate a further £12.4m in GVA per annum.
52. The Economics Benefits Statement also cites benefits derived from local community investment, including in terms of workforce training and strengthening of employee networks, mentoring programmes with local suppliers, spending with SME's (around £2.38m was spent with SME's in the year July 2023-2024) and through facilitating 148 volunteer hours and community fundraising.
53. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider the IBF as a significant employer and one where a large proportion of its employees reside in the Borough. The operation of the IBF makes a significant direct and indirect contribution to national and local economic growth and in this respect is aligned with the policies SP1 (Strategic Objectives) and SP3 (Strategic Approach to Economic Development) of the ALP 2030, including to focus development at accessible and sustainable locations which utilise existing infrastructure and makes best use of brownfield land and to provide a range of employment opportunities and improve skills and attract inward investment.
54. The Council first allocated the Sevington site for employment development in the Urban Sites and Infrastructure DPD 2012 (which flowed from the 2008 Core Strategy and then granted outline permission for the storage and distribution use of the site. The CDA proposal provides would continue the site's contribution to local employment opportunities and so would help provide balanced growth in Ashford which has always been the Council's concern that growth must not just be about new homes. Current and ongoing

benefits would be lost if planning permission for the retention and permanent operation of the IBF were to be refused. The economic consequences of this would be far reaching and include the local impacts arising from potential unemployment, loss of wages and associated loss of spending on the local economy. The applicant's Economics Benefits Statement calculates that the worst case scenario of not retaining current IBF operations could be a 30% increase in the number of unemployed residents in the Borough and worsening of unemployment deprivation, either directly as a result of job loss or through a reduction in employment opportunity as existing employee become competitors for local job opportunities.

55. In my view, taking into account policies SP1 and SP3 of the ALP 2030, the economic and socio-economic benefits associated with retaining the IBF are therefore substantial and weigh heavily in favour of the Council supporting the proposal to retain the use beyond the temporary period set out in the SDO.
56. The CDA seeks to secure the retention and ongoing operation of border infrastructure which is identified in the WMS as being of national importance.
57. The Statement of National Importance ('SNI') states that notwithstanding the temporary nature of the original planning permission granted through the SDO, there remains a critical requirement for the continuing operation of the IBF which is strategically vital to facilitate border security checks, including documentary and physical checks taking place on goods entering and exiting the UK to provide protection in respect to the UK's biosecurity and public health.
58. The site is strategically located on the M20 which is part of the Strategic Road Network with strategic highway network connectivity to the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel facilities at Folkestone thereby fulfilling the operational criteria for the IBF.
59. The application documentation identify that no other alternative sites for this mandatory function have been identified and if planning permission were to be refused, there would be a need to identify and establish a new location that would meet all operational requirements with the associated expense, resource and time implications. I accept that this would not be beneficial situation in terms of providing essential border security.
60. I therefore agree with the conclusion in that the continued and permanent use of this site for border infrastructure is of high strategic importance to serve the critical purpose of border security in the national interest. It follows that this function is also of regional and county level importance, and, in my view, this weighs heavily in favour of supporting the proposal.

(b) the national importance of the facility remaining as a permanent facility

61. The CDA is supported by a SNI submitted on behalf of the Department for Transport ('DfT'), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ('Defra') and His Majesty's Revenues and Customs ('HMRC').
62. The SNI has been prepared in accordance with the guidance set out in the Written Ministerial Statement ('WMS') made by Matthew Pennycock as Minister of State for Housing and Planning on 13th February 2025.
63. The WMS sets out that the Secretary of State will in general only consider a development to be of national importance if, in his/her opinion, 'the development would, amongst other things 'contribute towards the provision of national public services or infrastructure, such as new prisons, defence, or border infrastructure'.
64. The Planning Statement makes clear that the 'border infrastructure' nature of the existing use (and the CDA before PINs to retain such) means that the planning matter under consideration is one of national importance.
65. Although it is arguable that the quantum of employment resulting from the proposal may be lesser than might have been expected had the site been not developed for its current use and had, instead, been delivered in accordance with the outline planning permission for storage and distribution uses, the cited national importance is one that should be afforded significant weight in the planning balance and, as per the preceding sub-section, the employment generating development contributes towards the balanced growth of Ashford. The Council's emerging draft ALP will obviously need to react to changing economic circumstances affecting planning for employment and react accordingly in terms of policy approach and any necessary site allocations for employment generating development.

(c) the role of 'Sevington East' as a buffer to coalescence with Mersham

66. The purpose of Policy SP7 (Separation of Settlements) of the ALP 2030 is to maintain the separation of settlements and preserve their individual character and identity.
67. While the outline planning permission for the logistics park (ref: 14/00906/AS) primarily addressed development at Sevington West and a linear planting belt on the eastern side of the narrow and partly sunken Highfield Lane, the subsequent evolution of SP7, and particularly the emphasis on avoiding coalescence, has clearly directly informed the applicant's intended treatment of Sevington East in respect to its relationship with Mersham.
68. Sevington East, comprising approximately 42.3 hectares of undeveloped farmland, is excluded from the red line boundary for this application – it is shown as blue land i.e. adjacent/adjoining land within the applicant's ownership/control. This deliberate exclusion is one that can be considered a

clear response to the policy objective of maintaining settlement separation.

69. Para 4.9 of the CDA Planning Statement references deliberate exclusion of Sevington East from the red line boundary as a response to previous officer pre-application feedback on the important coalescence issue. The application highlights that Sevington East is therefore not earmarked for built development and has already been subject to approved landscaping and biodiversity enhancements under two separate LEMPs, secured through the Special Development Order (SDO) process.
70. The application now proposes to secure the undeveloped Sevington East site for biodiversity net gain ('BNG') purposes. In my view, through existing landscape commitments as well as the legal safeguards necessary to secure BNG, the proposal would align well with the strategic planning objectives of ALP 2030 Policy SP7.
71. My conclusion is that the applicant's proposals for Sevington East would play an important role in preserving and enhancing an existing large undeveloped green buffer. This buffer would contribute positively to achieving the aims of the ALP 2030 by helping prevent the coalescence of built development at Sevington with the outer edges of the village of Mersham. The approach to Sevington East is supported as a matter of principal. BNG will need to be secured in accordance with an acceptable BNG Plan. There are some outstanding issues needing the applicant's attention in relation to the landscaping belt along the eastern side of Highfield Lane and I cover those further below in this report.

(d) the intended approach to securing biodiversity net gain

72. Section 15 of the NPPF encourages planning decisions to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. At a local level, ALP 2030 policy ENV1 (Biodiversity) sets out the parameters that developments should adhere to in order to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
73. As the development was completed in advance of BNG becoming mandatory on 12th February 2024 and given that no new development is proposed within this application, the development would be exempt from mandatory BNG requirements. However, the applicant has voluntarily undertaken a retrospective BNG assessment using the statutory metric, for both on-site and off-site (Sevington East) BNG. As stated above, Sevington East, a parcel of undeveloped farmland within the applicant's ownership, is proposed to be secured by the applicant for BNG purposes for a minimum of 30 years via a legal agreement. This would therefore safeguard Sevington East from future development whilst ensuring it is improved, maintained and managed to yield long-term ecological value.
74. The combined BNG from both the IBF developed at Sevington West and the Sevington East proposal demonstrates a significant ecological uplift. The

overall outcome is a +65.35% net gain in habitat units and a +58.49% net gain in hedgerow units, based on the statutory biodiversity metric. These gains are achieved through the creation and enhancement of a diverse range of habitats, including mixed scrub, other neutral grassland, lowland meadows, ponds, and urban tree. These features are considered to contribute to habitat enhancement and biodiversity net gain, in accordance with ALP 2030 policy ENV1 (Biodiversity).

75. The long-term success of the biodiversity enhancements proposed at the site is underpinned by a comprehensive applicant strategy for management and monitoring. The strategy sets out how BNG would be achieved and sustained across both sites (Sevington West & Sevington East) in order to continue to deliver ecological value over time. Two LEMPs provide the overarching framework for habitat creation, enhancement, and stewardship, detailing the specific design objectives, environmental considerations, and mitigation measures.
76. The submitted Soft Landscape Works Maintenance and management Proposals outlines a detailed 10-year schedule of cyclical maintenance activities in order to achieve the original aims and objectives of the LEMPs.
77. KCC Ecology provide ecological advice to the Council (and a number of other authorities in Kent). The County Ecologist has highlighted to the Council that a condition assessment of the existing habitat on site has not been carried out and so it is not clear whether the habitats referenced have already achieved the anticipated condition as detailed in Table 6 of the BNG assessment. In addition, the current Google earth images have not fully demonstrated to the County Ecologist that the habitat creation in the blue line area, i.e. Sevington East, have been implemented. However, the County Ecologist is satisfied that if the proposed habitat creation and habitat management were implemented then the proposal would be able to achieve a BNG in excess of 10%.
78. On this basis, I am satisfied that a BNG in excess of 10% could be achieved. Notwithstanding the issue as to such matters being a voluntary rather than mandatory gain, I consider the applicant's proposal respond well to ALP 2030 ENV1 and would recommend that PINS ensure the management and monitoring of the created habitats is secured for a period of 30 years.

(e) the ability to comply with the on-going restrictions imposed by Stodmarsh i.e. overnight accommodation and nutrient neutrality

79. Stodmarsh Lakes lie to the east of Canterbury and form a Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar site, Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Parts are also designated a National Nature Reserve (NNR). It is a site of national and international importance for a range of water dependent habitats and wildlife that relies upon them. The Stodmarsh Lakes are fed by the Great Stour and water entering the watercourses in the Stour catchment. This catchment covers a significant portion of East Kent,

including the Local Authorities of Maidstone, Ashford, Folkestone & Hythe, Canterbury and Dover.

80. In July 2020, Natural England first issued an Advice Note to Ashford Borough Council. The Advice Note set out that there were excessive nitrogen and phosphorous levels in the Stodmarsh Lakes and that the water within the Lakes is in an unfavourable condition with the potential to further deteriorate.
81. In view of relevant case law, and the consequence of the Advice, any development proposing overnight accommodation within the Stour catchment, or discharging water to a WwTW in the catchment is required to prevent further deterioration of the Stodmarsh Lakes by evidencing that it can achieve 'nutrient neutrality'. Nutrient neutrality provides a mechanism by which development that would otherwise be prohibited on the grounds of nutrient pollution may be given consent if mitigation is put in place.
82. The CDA confirms that the site currently does not accommodate overnight stays, does not have the facilities to accommodate such and that these are not intended as part of the proposal before PINs. Reference is made to overnight stays being catered for by the existing Ashford International Truck Stop located a short distance to the south-west of the site at Waterbrook Park.
83. I note that the CDA confirms that any effluent from the use of the site will continue to be tankered away from the site for treatment outside of the River Stour catchment and that NE do not raise any objection to the proposal. As NE point out, PINs become the competent authority under the Habitats Regulations. In conclusion, my view is that the proposal would accord with the wastewater planning objectives enshrined in policies ENV1 (Biodiversity) and ENV8 (Water Quality, Supply and Treatment) of the ALP 2030.

(f) visual impact mitigation: ability to reduce light-spill

84. Paragraph 198 of the NPPF outlines how planning decisions should ensure new development is appropriate for its location, taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development.
85. The NPPF advises that that this should be achieved, including by (para. 198 c) limiting the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation.
86. At a local level, ALP 2030 policy ENV4 (Light Pollution and Promoting Dark Skies) is relevant and sets out the parameters that external lighting schemes are expected to adhere to. It also expects proposals to demonstrate clear regard to the guidance and requirements of the Council's Dark Skies SPD 2014.

87. The site directly adjoins the built-up confines of Ashford as defined by the A2070 Link Road and M20 motorway to the north and is adjacent to open countryside to the south and east.
88. The CDA is supported by an External Lighting Assessment ('ELA') which is underpinned by a Lighting Survey Report. The ELA confirms the existing lighting installation comprises 339 external light fittings mounted between 8 and 12 metres above ground. It details the existing approach to lighting controls and sets out Recommendations to reduce lighting impacts moving forwards: these are discussed further below.
89. For the purposes of assessment, the ELA considers that the site is located within light zone E4 which is defined as 'urban' (as per paragraph 9.51 of the ALP 2030). No parts of the Borough lie within a designated dark sky zone (zone E0) and whilst I agree with the ELA that the site cannot be described as zone E1 (natural surroundings that are intrinsically dark), or E2 (rural surroundings with low levels of brightness) I am not persuaded that it could reasonably be defined as zone E4 (urban with high brightness). In my view, the site is a sensitive urban fringe location.
90. In any case, I accept that external lighting is required to facilitate the safe and secure operation of the facility which operates throughout the day and night all year long. Much of the site is used for surface level HGV parking and, as a consequence, it is largely open. The layout of the site is such that the buildings that exist (and which are not being further added to by the proposal) and landscaping located within areas on the site outside of the secure palisade fence operational area provide limited visual screening, including of artificial light which is highly visible from and experienced by the local community beyond the site boundaries.
91. The application documents note that since the first installation of the external lighting measures have been implemented to reduce lighting impacts from the site. In 2021, the approach to external lighting in two emergency 'holding areas' in the north-western and south-eastern parts of the site was changed such that the lighting is switched off during under normal conditions and only operated under emergency conditions when overspill areas of parking are required.
92. The application documents also identify that lighting columns were removed from the viewing corridor running through the centre of the site and that baffles have already been installed on lights located close to dwellings that are near to the site. External lighting is also identified as having been removed or fully isolated from Inspection Sheds 4 and 5 located on the western side of the site. Across the site, application documents identify that external lighting has already been realigned to be fully horizontal as opposed to being tilted. Furthermore, it is identified that although the external lighting is

controlled by Photocells and a Master Photocell activates the lights in response to the daylight lux levels, a lighting control system has been installed to enable the Site Operator to dim or completely switch off lighting in non-operational or reduced operation areas overnight.

93. More recently, measures have been taken to reduce the lighting impacts from the HGV 'swim lanes' that located on the north-eastern side of the site. The applicant identifies that these are remotely controlled and that lighting is switched off to such areas when these are not in use. The applicant's Planning Statement refers to pre-application stage feedback from residents in this regard citing the welcoming of proposals to switch-off swim lane lighting when not operationally required.
94. The ELA includes an assessment of the lighting levels on adjacent dwellings based upon the original use of the site pursuant to the SDO with all installed lighting operational ('Assessment A') and an assessment of lighting levels based upon the mitigation measures that were implemented in 2021 ('Assessment B').
95. I consider Assessment A to be largely irrelevant to consideration of present-day impacts; however the results from Assessment B demonstrate that the existing lux levels at the site boundary and adjacent to the residential areas are at a compliant level between 0 - 0.2 lux. Whilst this may be the case, the ELA includes a photograph survey from the site boundaries that highlights the impact of the existing lighting in the form of glare from luminaries (defined in the Dark Skies SPD as the uncomfortable brightness of a light source when viewed against a darker background) and from a clear sky glow impact resulting from upward light spill into the night sky.
96. Notwithstanding the lighting impact mitigation measures implemented since 2021, the submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) identifies how the artificial lighting at the application site is visible in short, medium and long-distance views over a wide area. The LVIA states that even with mitigation measures in place (which are discussed below), the development would still be visible at night time to the residents of Church Road looking east and towards the application site, by PRow users looking south-east towards the application site, by residents of the farm located off Blind Lane looking west towards the application site, residents on Hythe Road looking south towards the application site and recreational users of the North Downs Way who will all experience long-term, local, moderate (significant) adverse effects. I concur with those LVIA conclusions.
97. I note that Kent Downs National Landscape team have submitted a written representation highlighting their concerns, including in relation to the impact of external lighting on the long uninterrupted views from the Kent Downs National Landscape after dark but also on duller days and at dawn and dusk.

Natural England have also expressed concerns that light spill is causing significant glare that is visible from the National Landscape at night. The Council notes the lighting is also highly visible in views from the village of Mersham and the village of Aldington, the latter being located on a discernible ridge and with views back towards the site and the town of Ashford beyond.

98. The impacts arising from both glare and sky glow are also documented within the submitted Statement of Community Involvement which identifies lighting impacts as one of the key themes arising from consultation and engagement. Separately, over the period of the site's operation the Council has received complaints from local residents relating to light pollution. The harm identified above is further corroborated by interested parties who have cited the issue of light pollution from the site and associated impacts on dark skies and residential amenity in their written representations to PINs on this application.
99. In recognition of the existing and ongoing harm from light pollution, the Council, via pre-application advice with the applicant in 2024, advised the applicant to review their lighting strategy and to consider appropriate mitigations to minimise the extent of visual and environmental harm. Specifically, Officers recommended that the existing impacts should be addressed through investigating a reduction in the scale and the extent of the existing 12m high columns across the site, as well as potentially adapting luminaires. Officers also recommended investigating the use of timers or movement sensors to lighting in areas of the site that are used less frequently as this could significantly help reduce the impact of the development. Officers also advised the need to address any adverse lighting impacts individually raised by residents as being piercing / intrusive through, for example, the adjustment of luminaires or the fitting of baffles / cowls to prevent 'direct glare' etc.
100. The applicant acknowledges the harm being caused by the existing external lighting and whilst it is not proposed to reduce the scale or extent of the 12m high columns (which the applicant cites are required to comply with the relevant British Standard relating to lighting in outdoor workplaces) the applicant's ELA recommends the following measures be implemented:
 - All column luminaires to be fitted with baffles - to remove the impact of direct glare;
 - Consideration of dimming of the luminaires to a lower wattage in different areas of the site - to create a lower average lux level and minimise the indirect light spillage which appears to be impacting on the dark sky issue due to potential reflection from the finished road surfaces.

- Review the capability of the lighting control system - to assess the flexibility of switching off certain circuits at night.
- Assess the actual operation of the site to determine areas which are not needed to be operational on a daily non-emergency basis - to control those areas accordingly using the lighting control system to switch off certain circuits at night.

101. The ELA notes that an Implementation Plan, informed by these recommendations to reduce lighting impacts is being prepared in collaboration with the site operator. That implementation plan is not, however, provided in the CDA and so although the ELA Recommendations are ones that I consider are generally welcome, there is no certainty at this time as to what the final package of measures will be: 'a consider, review and assess' approach could, regrettably, result in a no-change is possible lighting situation. Given the feedback that has been given on lighting to the site operator during the temporary SDO use and the feedback that officers and the local community gave in response to 2024 consultation and engagement events, it is disappointing that the applicant is still unable, in summer 2025, to have concluded a Plan and include that as part of the CDA setting out a clear position as to what it is technically able to do and what it will do within a clear timetable if permission is granted by PINs.
102. Notwithstanding these concerns, in my opinion, it is essential that a Lighting Mitigation Plan is secured by a planning condition with a Plan giving full details of the measures outlined in the ELA, including a clear timetable for implementation at the site and programme of monitoring and recording to review their success. Such Plan would need to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Council in its role as Local Planning Authority.
103. I note that the applicant also commits to fully implementing the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) which includes small areas of additional planting that could serve to provide additional screening at the site boundaries. Landscaping both within and beyond the operational boundary of the site has a part to play in reducing lighting impacts emanating from the site and I recommend that landscaping should also be secured by planning condition. I set out further below in this report my assessment of the applicant's additional landscaping proposals (including where I consider more work is necessary from a review of the success of that which has been planted to date).
104. In conclusion, I acknowledge that the operation of the site requires the use of external lighting to keep those using and working at the site safe. I also recognise that by reason of the size and highly open layout of the facility, the requisite lighting that is required is necessarily extensive. However, it is not yet clear that it is the minimum level of lighting that is necessary for the use

purpose as is required by policy EN4 of the ALP 2030 which accords with the importance of this issue as set out in the NPPF. I accept that since the initial installation of the lighting at the site the applicant has introduced some welcome measures to mitigate light pollution impacts and although the submitted evidence demonstrates that the existing lighting levels at the site boundaries are within acceptable lux limits, the reality is that the use continues to cause nuisance and visual harm through direct glare and sky glow from upward light spill.

105. Whilst further mitigation is welcomed, the CDA contains no specific proposals or Implementation Plan that enable a more informed conclusion to be reached on lighting impacts and so there is no certainty that any proposals that might come forward for approval (following a grant of permission by PINs) would be able to either fully or partially mitigate the impacts that currently exist. Therefore, I consider there is potential that external lighting could continue to have significant adverse effects on the residential amenity of local residents, and the rural character of the surrounding area (including the National Landscape). Conceivably, light spillage could have an adverse impact on nature conservation and the full realisation of the applicant's intended approach to biodiversity net gain.

106. In my opinion, even taking into account the mitigation measures already implemented and the further measures that might form an Implementation Plan in relation to the ELA, the proposal conflicts with the Council's 'dark skies' approach and results in unacceptable harm that renders the development contrary to the NPPF, policy EN4 of the ALP 2030 and the Dark Skies SPD. That harm, and how it might be able to be fully or partially mitigated, will need to be weighted in overall the planning balance by PINs.

(g) visual impact mitigation: reviewing soft landscaping

107. The site falls within the Mersham Farmlands Landscape Character Area as defined in the Council's 2011 DPD. This Character Area has some variations and page 22 of the 2005 Studio Engleback work that is referenced in the DPD identifies Sevington High Fields as having:-

- Open arable farmland on a gentle rise being crossed by Highfield Lane (which is bounded with hedgerows) and being dominated by Sevington Church
- A line of poplars delineating the brook
- The noise from the M20, CTRL and bypass (A2070 Southern Orbital) being very apparent.

108. The CDA includes a Landscape Masterplan, Detailed Planting Plans and a Landscape Maintenance and Management Plan ('LMMP'). It is acknowledged

in the CDA Planning Statement para 4.10 that these submissions seek to respond to the officer feedback given at pre-application stage.

109. It is also identified that the Landscape Environment Management Plan ('LEMP') approved through the SDO/Article 4 application process has been reviewed in preparation of the LMMP. Confirmation is given the applicant is committed to delivering already approved landscape schemes, implementing any elements not already delivered and to replacement of failed planting.
110. The Landscape Masterplan identifies the location of three areas of easements within the red-line application site that impact on the ability to deliver additional tree planting. These comprise;-
- a 'heritage easement' - comprising the central viewing corridor running in a broadly east-west axis across the central part of the site between Highfield Lane and the paddock area adjacent to the St. Mary's Church,
 - a 'utilities easement' – comprising an east-west area on the northern side of the site located within the secure operational area between the principal access from the J10A link road and the new turning head at the Kingsford Street/Highfield Lane junction, and
 - a 'gas easement' - relating to a high pressure gas mains running through the site from the south-west at Church Road, through the site between the staff car parking area and buildings and leaving the site on the eastern side of the principal access from the J10A link road.
111. The Landscape Masterplan shows proposed additional tree planting clear of these easements both (a) within the securely fenced operational area and (b) outside the securely fenced operational area (i.e. in areas that are currently soft landscaped and near sustainable drainage features). The fine detail of proposed planting is shown on four separate Detailed Planting Plans.
112. Through the Article 4 application process since 2020, the Council has previously commented on observed landscaping deficiencies needing to be rectified (dead / storm damaged trees), has raised concerns about planting failures and, in the light of failures, has raised concerns about the level of on-going care and maintenance to landscaping. Given that background, the applicant's proposal for some additional planting to be provided within the red-line application site is welcomed.
113. On the northern side of the site east of the principal access, I accept the limitations that are imposed by the easement for utilities leaving relatively limited depth belts of land clear of existing sustainable drainage basins within which additional planting can be established. I also accept that larger species trees would be unlikely to be desirable located close to the operational area security fence. However, I consider that there appears to be scope for the plans to be refined further though incorporation of additional trees to help

soften the visual appearance of the site by filtering views as far as possible.

114. **Figure 6** below shows Detailed Planting Plan Sheet 3 and a planting belt between the easement and the perimeter security fence with my annotations of additional trees adopting a staggered tree arrangement where the depth of the planting belt increases.

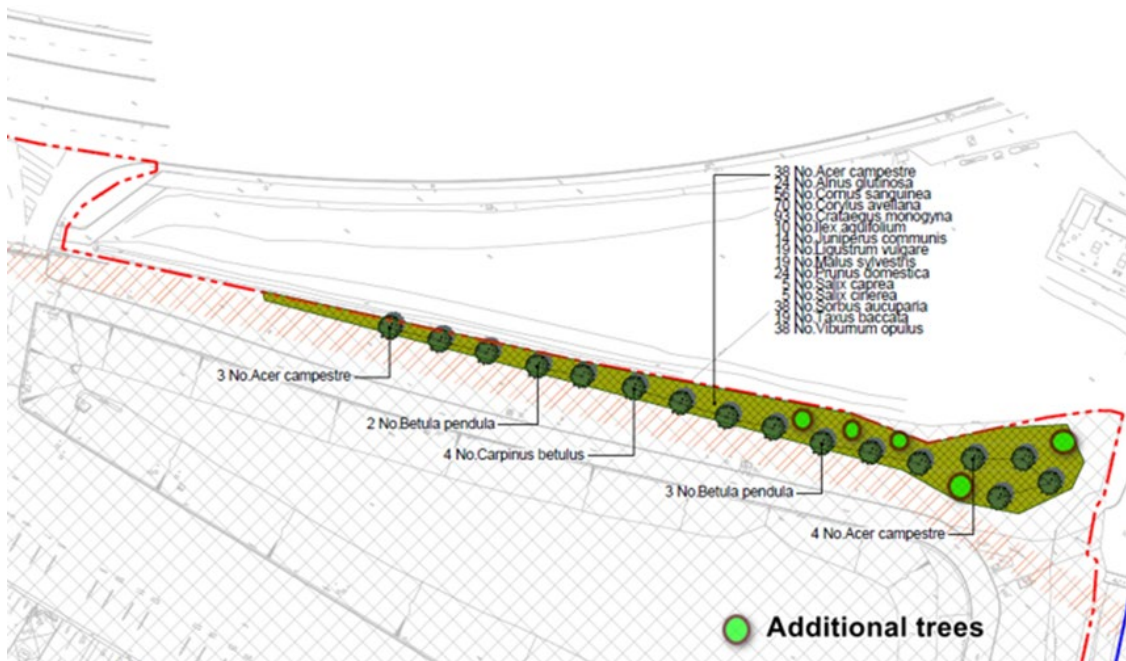


Figure 6: Detailed Planting Plan Sheet 3 with my annotations of additional planting

115. On the same side of the site west of the principal access to the J10A link road, i consider that there is an underutilised space shown on Detailed Planting Plan Sheet 2 that could beneficially be sued to accommodate additional tree planting as per **Figure 7** below.

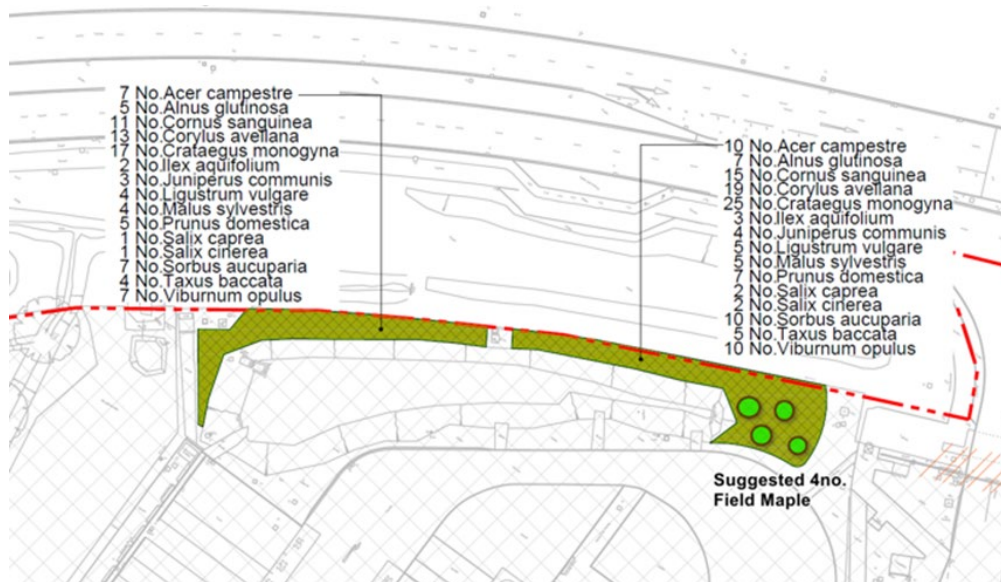


Figure 7: Detailed Planting Sheet 2 with my annotations of additional planting

116. On the western side of the site located within the red-line site but beyond the security fence around the operational area, Planting Plan Sheet 5 shows a new planting group located adjacent to the 90-degree bend of the PRow close to the paddock that wraps around the curtilage of St. Mary's Church. I accept that this new planting group would have a beneficial role in helping filter views and soften the relationship between the development and the Church. However, as per **Figure 8** below, I suggest there is scope to strengthen that group through additional tree planting and I question whether the ground may be too dry for the intended use of *Salix Alba* (White Willow).

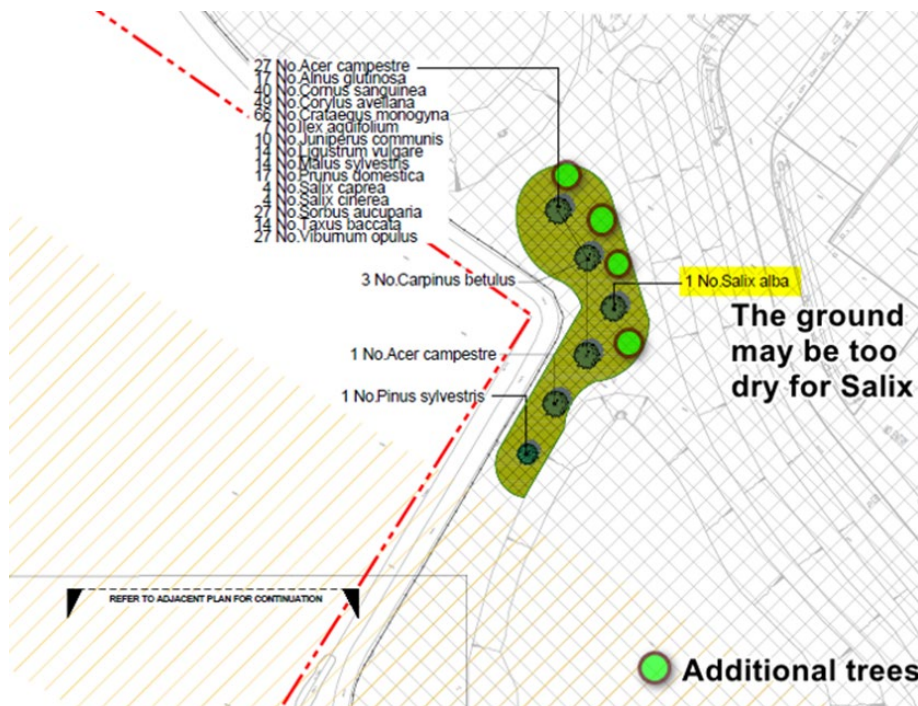


Figure 8: Detailed Planting Sheet 5 and my annotations of additional planting

117. South of this proposed group, a linear belt of trees is proposed between the PRow and the existing staff car parking area. **Figure 9** below shows the proposal which is supported helping visually enclose the site in an appropriately soft manner. This belt of landscaping is welcomed.



Figure 9: Detailed Planting Sheet 5 – planting adjacent to car park

118. On the southern side of the site, Detailed Planting Sheet 4 shows additional planting on the southern and western sides of the existing sustainable drainage basins. Planting in this part of the site is generally starting to mature and help partly screen the high acoustic barriers that have been created to manage noise impacts around the perimeter of the operational area. I consider this further planting would be beneficial and, together with the existing hedgerow along Church Road would help further soften the visual relationship to homes along that Road as well as have potential to reduce lighting impacts. Whilst I accept that the high-pressure gas main running through this area sterilises a significant level of further tree planting, there are constraint free areas of tree planting opportunity as per **Figure 10** below which I consider ought to be considered by the applicant to strengthen the sense of green buffer to nearby homes.



Figure 10: Detailed Planting Plan Sheet 4 and my annotations of additional planting

119. No new landscaping is proposed in the heritage easement area. The CDA suggests that the layout and associated landscaping of the east/west axis 'viewing corridor' through the central part of the site will be retained and will have an amenity role for staff working at the site. The viewing corridor was conceived as a way of mitigating the site development impact on the rural setting of St. Mary's and with a PRoW passing through that part of the site and providing connection westwards through a paddock to the entrance into the Church and eastwards to Mersham.
120. When the Council considered landscaping details for the emerging storage and distribution use, the landscape architect's plans provided for an area that would be attractive to linger within (in good weather on a lunchbreak) as well

as move through. **Figure 11** below shows the intended layout of the area with a gently meandering PRow passing through it together with a Google image of that which exists.



Figure 11: (top) the approved reserved matters for the landscaping of the heritage easement and (bottom) the same east-west area as developed and currently proposed not be landscaped further (Source: KCC)

121. Whilst I accept that the secure nature of the site has a practical bearing on the ability to fully landscape this area in the manner originally approved by the Council – trees being located close to the palisade fence constituting a security matter - and prevent a PRow through the area, overall I am not convinced that further landscaping of this area would be impossible. The applicant identifies that the area will function as an open-air resource for employees to use when on a break etc. I consider that will be less likely to become a reality if this area is not improved as a key space. I consider that there is scope to plant trees and understorey planting clear of the SEPN easements and clear of the security fence to Highfield Lane that would make it a more successful green space. That approach would beneficially soften this part of the site, soften the setting of St. Mary's Church in the wider landscape and give some benefits in terms of reducing light spillage.
122. I note the comments of Historic England ('HE') that landscaping carried out to date does not appear to be very successful with large areas of dry grass visible on aerial photography. Alongside the ideas raised above, I consider HE's suggestion of softening through wildflower meadow planting is an

excellent idea. It could a clear visual theme carried through the site through the viewing corridor from east to west where the new PRoW passes close to the paddock adjacent to the Church.

123. Notwithstanding the additional planting that is proposed and the suggestions above for its improvement, the fundamental nature of the use is one that creates a large visually hard open operational site that is secured by a stark security fence with anti-climb top. Significant areas of hardstanding and high light columns predominate. Compared with the outline planning permission granted for storage and distribution use, the current and proposed use is one that has a significantly reduced site coverage by buildings. Hardstanding areas, both 'in use' and 'not in use' by HGVs using the facility, are therefore rendered more visible to the wider locality than would be the case if they were more visually contained through the presence of buildings across the site.
124. As mentioned in the previous sub-section of this report, tree planting has scope to help visually contain the site and reduce harmful lighting impacts alongside softening and filtering daytime views into the site. Pre-application feedback requested consideration of planting belts within the site hardstanding areas to help visually soften and break up the site and, in turn assist with a reduction in light spillage. I consider belts in an east-west orientation would help particularly when the site is viewed from the north. However, the applicant's position is that for site safety and security reasons, such tree planting belts cannot be carried out and that only the planting set out in the previous section can be provided. For this reason, I consider that the applicant should therefore seek to strengthen tree planting beyond the defined application red-line site.
125. My understanding is that the northern secure palisade fence to the J10A link road represents the boundary between the DfT acquired site and land forming part of the Strategic Highway Network as developed by National Highways (formerly Highways England) in accordance with the DCO.
126. National Highways is an executive non-departmental public body that is sponsored by the DfT and the DfT is part applicant. National Highways receives its funding and strategic direction from the DfT. This area 'beyond' the red-line application site is not shown edge in blue in application documents but given the interrelationship between National Highways and the DfT I consider that there are arguable grounds to suggest that this land beyond the site ought to be shown as 'blue land' on the applicant's plan.
127. Notwithstanding that point, the Council made clear in its feedback to the DfT during the course of the temporary permission the existence of planting failures needing to be rectified and that includes the site frontage. The landscaping planting plans for such areas are now archived and so not available to view on the NSIP web-site.

128. Recent officer inspection of this area reveals that planting progress is disappointingly slow with a large number of failures and plants struggling to take. **Figure 12** below shows these zones along the northern frontage with my assessment of % failure.

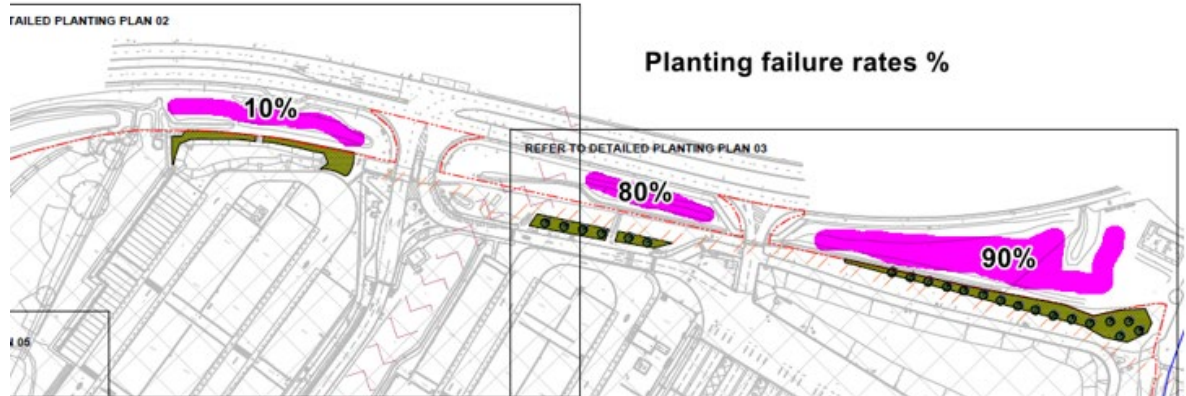


Figure 12: the northern frontage to the site – zones of planting failure

129. This could potentially be due to a combination of factors such as poor sub-soil (lack of top-soil after the J10A link road was created), a lack of irrigation and generally more dry conditions restricting growth and the suitability of the planting species that were selected to a frontage that has an exposed and windy character. A number of photographs taken of the frontage at a site visit 05/09/2025 are set out on **Annex 2** to this report. Conversely, there are pockets along the frontage where growth is much better, for example, located in the shelter of the Church which points to the need for a nuanced planting scheme for areas prone to buffeting by the prevailing wind.
130. At the time of dealing with the application 14/00906/AS for storage and distribution uses, the intention was that a National Highways tree planting scheme along the southern edge of the J10A link road would be supplemented by a tree planting scheme delivered by the developer of the storage and distribution park i.e. a combination of public and private sector landscaping.
131. Given the limited planting within the operational site that the CDA applicant states can be provided, I consider that it is logical to require the DfT applicant, working with National Highways, to work to improve the landscaping approach taken beyond the northern secure fence frontage. This would be beneficial in visual impact terms by filtering views as well as helping mitigate lighting impacts. The anti-climb top to the security fence and the failure of J10A link road planting combine to create a less than successful entrance to Ashford from the M20. A more thoughtful approach is requested involving revisiting frontage landscaping, assessing the causes of failure, formulating a well-considered response and pro-actively delivering and maintaining that planting to maturity. This matter could be the subject of a planning condition.

132. The linear planting belt on the eastern side of Highfield Lane is on an elevated bund created from soil removed from Sevington West during its construction. Historically, there have been planting failures here too although that is less immediately obvious due to the retention of planting alongside Highfield Lane. Tree planting in bunds can be challenging, and my suggestion would be that the same review of the northern frontage should critically examine this area too with a view to improved planting. **Figure 13** below shows this area and my assessment of planting failures.



Figure 13: the Highfield Lane landscaped bund and planting failures

133. In conclusion, as currently proposed, I consider that the applicant's landscaping plans within the site do not comply with Policies SP1 (Strategic Objectives), SP6 (Promoting High Quality Design), ENV3a (Landscape) and Policy ENV13 (Conservation and Enhancement of Heritage Assets) of the ALP 2030. This will be a matter for PINS to weigh in the planning balance, but I recommend that the Council seek improved delivery of landscaping given the proposal to permanently retain the facility: in this regard, providing there is commitment from the DfT and National Highways to work proactively with the Council on such improvements then a planning condition approach could be considered by PINS.

(h) amenity / well-being impacts on adjoining/close occupiers

134. The CDA clarifies that public engagement commenced in August 2024 with a first round of two events held locally during October 2024 as well as a strategy involving door-knocking with near neighbours, flyers, social media and an engagement website. One of the aims of this approach was to obtain direct feedback as to the experience of the local community living near the Sevington site.

135. Based on this approach, the applicant's Planning Statement suggests the following key themes emerged;-
- (i) Lighting impacts – high visibility and 'glow' at night impacting on dark skies with some residents citing an amenity impact
 - (ii) Traffic impacts – misdirected HGV issues and increased traffic
 - (iii) Landscaping issues – instances of failed planting and landscaping not having been delivered pursuant to the SDO and related approvals, suggestions of opportunities for enhanced biodiversity creation
 - (iv) Noise impacts – residential amenity impacts through onsite movement of HGVs, particularly at night.
136. Subsequently, a second round of two events was held in January with a focus of identifying how the matters raised with the prospective applicant team had been investigated with potential mitigation to inform any application explained including;-
- (a) Lighting proposal – to switch-off 'swim lane' lighting when not operationally required,
 - (b) Traffic impacts – to implement a signage strategy across the surrounding highway network
 - (c) Landscaping issues – to implement the LEMPs, to replace failed planting, to review opportunities for additional landscaping.
137. I have dealt with landscaping and lighting in the previous sub-sections, and these do not need further comment.
138. With regards to noise impacts the CDA is supported by an Acoustic Report. The methodology, including noise monitoring locations were agreed in consultation with the Council's Environmental Protection team. In summary, a baseline year for noise from traffic and rail (without the IBF at Sevington West) was selected (2022) as M20 J10a was fully operational at this time and traffic volumes had returned to pre covid levels. These levels were modelled and predicted the noise levels that would be experienced at the nearest sensitive receptors. In addition, a current day baseline acoustic survey was carried out in November 2024. The development was fully operational prior to and during November 2024 and the data was used to compare the predicted data from 2022.
139. The Acoustic Report considers the noise from existing fixed plant and building service plant, standby generators, operational noise such as HGVs movements around the site and road traffic data. A number of assessments were carried out depending on the noise source including:

- A BS 4142 assessment was carried out to assess the onsite noise levels from measured and predicted fixed sources such as plant, break out noise within commercial buildings (inspection sheds) and standby generators and from onsite vehicle movements (HGV's) along with the processes involving external loading/unloading and refrigerated HGVs.
- Ambient measurements taken outside sensitive receptors. The data gathered from these was compared and acoustic feature corrections were made.
- A CRTL (road traffic) assessment was carried out to predict the 2026 basic noise levels (BNL) L10 18hr (with and without development) with data provided by the Transport report.

140. Relevant conclusions of the Acoustic Report include:

- Noise levels from fixed plant and building services – not considered to be significant
- Noise from standby generators – negligible (except for one location – R5 (Sunnybank) negligible/minor adverse nighttime period) – very occasional/emergency situation therefore no additional mitigation proposed.
- Operational noise (from HGVs movements within the site, refrigerated vehicles hooked up and noise from external mobile plant in the inspection sheds) – it is noted as the most dominant noise source from the site. An additional +3dB penalty has been added to the assessment for tonality at some locations.

141. The site already has constructed earth bunds and installed acoustic barriers on the site to mitigate the noise that might be experienced by neighbouring residents. The Council's Environmental Protection Team ('ABC EPT') is aware of an emergency overflow parking area to the south of the site (Site reference - 'Tango') that does not have any acoustic mitigation around its boundary. However, the ABC EPT understand that this area is only used on very rare occasions for short term use in extreme cases, although data has not been provided showing the actually annual use of this part of the site. If this area of the site were to remain used only occasionally, then ABC EPT would accept the application justification for minimal mitigation in relation to this area. However, if intended to be used on a more regular basis in the future, then ABC EPT identify that the site would need to provide suitable mitigation or restrictions (such as daytime use only).

142. By way of background, the Council initially received a number of complaints in 2021 from residents along Church Road and have received further complaints in 2023 in one in early August 2025. The investigation in 2021/22 identified

noise disturbance from operations at the site including fixed plant, idling HGVs (including those with refrigeration units) and noise from HGVs travelling around the site (in particular HGVs travelling on the perimeter road to the south of the site). The investigation involved liaison with DEFRA and DfT and after a meeting in 2022, it was decided that complainants should report the problem directly to DfT so that the site operator could investigate and resolve the reported areas of disturbance directly. ABC EPT understand that the complainants then corresponded directly with the DfT for further investigation and problem resolution.

143. In April 2023, the Council received two further complaints from residents. DEFRA and DfT were contacted again and following advice, the sites dedicated complaint email contact was provided and sent to each complainant. In addition, incident log sheets were also sent out by ABC EPT to the complainants. The case was subsequently closed as no further contact was made to ABC EPT by the complainants or contact made to the site.
144. The Council received one further complaint that was registered in August 2025 from a resident in Mersham regarding the noise from the IBF. Incident noise logs for completion and return were issued by ABC EPT to the complainant. To date, the EPT has not received any further information or communication from the complainant and as a result, have not investigated further.
145. ABC EPT note that a local resident has submitted a representation to the CDA consultation regarding ongoing low frequency noise from HGVs moving or idling on the site, noise from refrigerated HGVs and additional noise from reversing beepers, clanging of curtain sider poles and horns from the site with reported minimal improvement to such noise disturbance over the years since the site has been in use. The representation reports that issues were logged with the site previously (including verbally and as a report as part of the public consultation in 2024). In reviewing the Acoustic Report submitted by the applicant, there appears to be no mention of this report or comments made by this resident in which case ABC EPT cannot ascertain whether such matters have been fully addressed by the applicant in arriving at its conclusions.
146. In the absence of sufficient information, ABC EPT recommend that the following matters are investigated and fully addressed by the applicant:
 - Additional investigation of the reported low frequency noise from HGVs, tonal noise from refrigerated HGVs, reversing beepers, clanging of curtain sider poles and horns in their analysis of the recorded data in their response;
 - Further consideration into the use of the perimeter road to the south of the site used by the HGVs to exit the site. The applicant will need to consider alternative routes out from this part of the site avoiding the perimeter road, particularly during the nighttime period.

- Revisit and address the comments, information and submissions received as part of the public consultation in 2024;
 - Provide information showing the number of days per annum the emergency parking area ('Tango') has been used since the site opened.
147. Although not a matter expressly identified in consultation feedback, the impact of the development on air quality is a material planning consideration and is a topic that is scoped into the ES.
148. The air quality monitoring carried out by ABC EPT continues to indicate there is, in general, 'good' air quality within the borough. The air quality objectives for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) are being met and, in general, levels are reducing each year.
149. The Air Quality Report submitted by the applicant as part of the ES assesses the likely air quality effects of the development. It discusses the baseline air quality conditions, reviews ABC's monitoring data and the likely significant air quality effects of the development as well as the consideration of the likely evolution of baseline in the absence of the development. Suitable reports, data, guidance and dispersion models were used to establish the likely impacts on local air quality from activity at the site.
150. The dispersion modelling has taken into account the local background levels and meteorological conditions. Data from 2019 was used as baseline date (the year before COVID) and 2026 calculated data used for 'with' and 'without' development. ABC EPT consider both to be acceptable data points and is content that the modelled data is satisfactory and shows a negligible impact on the annual mean NO₂ concentrations at all existing receptors.
151. To ensure compliance with ALP 2030 policy ENV12 (Air Quality), ABC EPT recommend ongoing site management to ensure that vehicles do not idle for excessive periods of time and that electric hook ups are provided and used for refrigerated vehicles when they are parked.
152. In conclusion, I agree with the points made by ABC colleagues in respect of the Acoustic Report and how far matters raised to date have been taken into account (and, if accepted, have been translated into measures that would reduce the disturbance cited) as well as the need to critically review the layout in the southern areas of the site and how disturbance from use of the perimeter exit route could be avoided by internal replanning as well as provide clear information as to how the HGV parking area without any acoustic barriers known as 'Tango' has previously and is currently actually being used on an annual basis (with that informing analysis as to whether mitigation would be appropriate).

(i) highway impacts: strategic network and local network

153. The applicant's Transport Assessment identifies that a review of the historic accident data in the vicinity of the Application Site and the assessed road network raises no specific patterns or concerns with respect to road safety.
154. The impact of the proposed development upon the highway network surrounding the site has been assessed and the applicant considers that it has been demonstrated to have a negligible impact compared to the baseline situation at the majority of junctions within the study area. M20 Junction 10a, is the only junction assessed that is likely to experience a material impact from the Proposed Development, with both the A20 eastbound and A20 westbound approaches forecast to experience increased queuing from the Base scenarios in 2026 and 2036.
155. Nevertheless, the modelling illustrates that the junction would already be operating at above its practical and actual capacity respectively in the 2026 and 2036 Base scenarios, and likely to require mitigation of the associated queuing and delay, irrespective of the proposed development. The application identifies that potential measures to improve the operation of M20 J10a and to mitigate the impact of the development will be discussed with National Highways (as strategic highway authority) and KCC (as the local highway authority).
156. The applicant goes on to state that the proposed development integrates with other committed and planned development such that the cumulative residual impact would not be severe. The Transport Assessment demonstrates that the proposal can be accommodated within the surrounding highway and transport networks and that there would be no material traffic impact caused by the retention and continued operation of Sevington IBF.
157. In accordance with Paragraph 116 of the NPPF, the applicant considers that there are no material transport or highway reasons why the highway authority should withhold or refuse planning permission.
158. The CDA clarifies that the site already serves a role in emergency situations by accommodating HGVs which would otherwise clog the Strategic Road Network, and it is proposed that this use in emergencies as part of the Kent Resilience Strategy (KRS) would continue. Reference is made to the 'Romeo' and 'Tango' parking areas located at the opposite sides of the site.
159. It is identified that electric hookup points will be provided for refrigerated good vehicles.
160. I note the applicant's findings in relation to the lack of any severe impacts that would arise to the highway network. Obviously, the Council should defer to KCC as the local highway authority in this respect and i understand that they will be making representations to PINS on the merits of the application and

will counter that claim if they have any evidence to suggest it is incorrect.

161. As the matter currently stands, I have no evidence to suggest that there would be a severe impact arising from the proposal and so my conclusion is that it would appear to accord with ALP 2030 Policy TRA7 which seeks to ensure that proposals generating HGV traffic movements are able to be accommodated in terms of capacity and road safety.
162. Nevertheless, I do note the Transport Assessment references queuing issues on the A20 east and west arms to the J10A gyratory and that the proposal would have some less than severe impact in this regard. My own observations suggest that queuing already occurs on both A20 arms during the peak periods (observed westwards tailing back beyond the Tesco mini roundabout). The speed of vehicles moving on the J10A gyratory and the lack of signalisation for those joining from either direction on the A20 means that vehicles have to wait excessively for a gap in traffic. Although this appears to point to design flaws in the National Highways design of J10A, I welcome the suggestion that the applicant will discuss mitigation to overcome this queuing with National Highways and KCC. Signalisation and the creation of additional lanes on the A20 approaches to the J10A gyratory would appear to be likely solutions which could be relatively easily accommodated.

(i) highway impacts: the role of clear signage & sat-nav

163. Early operational phases of the IBF were marked by notable challenges in HGV access, particularly involving misdirected vehicles using inappropriate minor lanes or unsuitable turning locations. These issues were highlighted by the public engagement carried out, where residents expressed concerns about increased traffic and misrouted HGVs affecting local road networks.
164. To address these problems, the applicant states that a comprehensive signage strategy has been implemented within the surrounding highways network. The strategy has been designed to direct goods vehicles to the correct access points via Junction 10a of the M20, thereby avoiding Junction 10 and deterring HGVs from attempting to access the site via Church Road or any other minor routes which whilst might be close to the site do not provide any access to it.
165. In addition to physical signage, the applicant states that improvements in digital navigation have played a key role in addressing the routing concerns of residents. It is suggested that the integration of accurate address point data and updates to sat-nav systems have significantly reduced the incidence of misdirected HGVs. The applicant's Planning Statement identifies that these enhancements have subsequently reduced the harm caused to the local highway network, ensuring that drivers are guided to the correct entry points that align with the internal operational design of the facility. Furthermore, it is stated that ongoing collaboration with National Highways and Kent County Council (KCC) as the local highway authority is proposed to explore additional

improvements, particularly in the light of traffic modelling that forecasts increased pressure on M20 Junction 10a in future years.

(k) staff parking provision, the role of a Travel Plan, active travel & related public rights of way improvement opportunities

166. The application proposes to retain the existing 357 staff car parking spaces accessed from Church Road. The Planning Statement confirms that this quantum is consistent with the level of need and the approach advocated by Local Plan Policy TRA3(b) for sui generis uses. Since the site has been operational, I am not aware of any issues of overspill parking by staff and so I agree that the level of provision is acceptable given the context of the site and related levels of employment. Were that to change at some point in the future then provision would need to be reassessed. The staff parking area should be subject of planning conditions to restrict its use for that purpose only.
167. The CDA is accompanied by a Staff Travel Plan dated 2022. Policy TRA8 of the ALP 2030 requires Travel Plans flowing from Transport Assessment to be secured, typically by planning condition. I generally concur with the findings of the applicant's Transport Assessment that the development would have no significant effects either on or off-site relating to staff travel.
168. However, the Travel Plan supplied was designed to support a temporary development the monitoring period that was embedded within it is almost complete. Therefore, whilst I continue to endorse the overall objectives set out in the 2022 version in terms of promoting car sharing and sustainable and active travel measures, I am concerned that the Travel Plan is not fit for purpose in relation to the permanent facility that is proposed. A new Travel Plan should be secured by planning condition and should indicate appropriate targets and measures to secure stated objectives.
169. Amongst the sustainable travel measures in the 2022 Travel Plan are the provision of a dedicated shuttle bus, operated by Zeelo, which provides direct connections between the site and Ashford International Station for commuting staff and is available to staff free of charge. The Zeelo service timetable is designed to align with staff shift patterns. It will be important to assess the impact that this service has on staff travel given that the survey of travel in the 2022 Travel Plan identified that 86% of staff used a car to travel to work with 60% as single driver and 26% as car share with 6% using the Zeelo shuttle and 5% walking and cycling.
170. I note that the site is well located to encourage active travel with cycle and pedestrian access facilitated via the staff access point on Church Road, which connects to existing footways and PROWs. I comment further below in respect of other connectivity opportunities.
171. The diversion and upgrades of public rights of way (PRoW) around the site has been completed in accordance with the terms of the SDO and there are

no proposals as part of this application to amend or enhance any PRoW in the vicinity of the site. Through the creation of J10A and its associated link road, there are good routes for pedestrian and cycle travel to the site and the staff entrance and generally good accessibility from sub-urban Ashford.

172. As mentioned elsewhere in this report in respect of the draft s.106 unilateral undertaking, funding to improve an impediment to non-vehicular travel on local highway network in Willesborough is retained as was the case with the 2017 s.106 agreement. In purchasing and developing the site, the site owner has worked with KCC to deliver PRoW upgrades, The retention of Highfield Lane for non-vehicular movement and other new surfaced PRoW – including the route eastwards to Blind Lane - all work well for commuting and enable the community to pursue an active lifestyle whether walking, jogging or cycling.
173. I am, however, disappointed that the applicant has not taken up my suggestion to fund PRoW upgrades further eastwards beyond Blind Lane into Mersham. The surfaced PRoW ends at the outskirts of the village rather than in the village: the latter would help provide a car free route connecting people with places (including Sevington West as a long-term employment site). 'Coalescence' and 'connection' are, clearly, not the same planning issue and I consider this is a missed opportunity for the government applicant to demonstrate real commitment to the planning aspirations set out in the NPPF through funding development of additional car-free movement infrastructure which could help lift the number of people walking and cycling to work above the 5% figure evidenced by 2022 survey work..
174. Overall, I am satisfied that the approach to staff car parking provision is an acceptable one in the context of the development and the location. A planning condition is recommended to secure an updated Staff Travel Plan to be agreed by the Council in consultation with KCC as the local highway authority with the Plan reviewing the success of the 2022 version and updating objectives, targets, measures and how the Plan will be monitored as appropriate.

(I) impact on heritage assets: the applicability of the Council's previous assessment in this regard, the intended permanent site layout & mitigation impact funding in relation to St. Mary's Church

175. As I set out in the Proposal section to this report, there have been delays in fully moving the full heritage asset impact mitigation measures forward.
176. The comments made by Historic England – set out in the consultation section - are fully endorsed.
177. Whilst the central viewing ('no-build') corridor has been retained in the IBF layout the detailing of this space is a long way from that which was envisaged when the Council granted permission for storage and distribution use and approved reserved matters. This central area was intended to retain the

important visual link between the churches at Sevington and Mersham with that historic link being reinforced by the PRow running through it linking the two settlements.

178. Lifting the visual character of this area through the measures that I have suggested – together with HE's suggestion of the use of wildflower planting - would help to mitigate the adverse impacts of the development on the historic rural setting enjoyed by St. Mary's Church. The wildflower planting approach is one that could further soften earth bunds and areas around sustainable drainage basins towards the edges of the site. As I have mentioned, improving planting on the J10A link road frontage would help reduce the urbanisation of the hinterland to the Church through the presence of high acoustic fences, lighting columns and vast areas of hardstanding.
179. The delivery of the Church car park, a useful asset previously missing supporting use of the premises, was very welcome. There do appear to be tree planting opportunities to soften this facility further in the green edges that surround it (**Figure14** below) and I would encourage the applicant to see what can be done in this regard.



Figure 14: space for potential tree planting around new Church car park

180. That leaves the issue of the capital funds to be passed to the Diocese for repair and related reordering, as necessary and appropriate to the new circumstances in which the Church finds itself (i.e. a change from a planned storage and distribution use to a secure government use). The funds will secure the long-term future of St. Mary's as a place of worship for the local community as well as ensuring that the building continues to exist and visually celebrate the long history of Sevington. As HE identify, the capital funds are essential mitigation given the high-level harm that is caused by the IBF. I note

that comments on the matter from the Diocese and sympathise with their frustrations about the delay in the release of those funds so that they can proactively move forward. I therefore very much welcome the applicant's intention to facilitate the prompt release of funds, as set out in the draft Unilateral Undertaking, if planning permission is granted.

181. Subject to those funds being secured and the applicant positively engaging with reviewing landscaping around and through the site in the manner suggested, my view is that the proposal would accord with Policies SP1 and ENV13 of the ALP 2030. Ultimately, it will be for PINs to weight heritage impacts and type and quality of mitigation planned to deal with the high level of harm which exists in the planning balance.

(m) the applicant's draft unilateral undertaking

182. The CDA includes a draft Unilateral Undertaking from the Secretary of State for Transport (c/o the Department of Transport) to the Borough Council pursuant to s.106 of the Town and Country Planning Act. As the name suggests, this is made unilaterally rather than through agreement.
183. The owner covenants to pay the J10A works sum within 14 days of the date of any planning permission granted by PINs. This was one of the matters covered by the draft 'honouring the obligations' s.106 that has not been able to be concluded. The obligation is policy compliant and is supported.
184. The owner proposes to pay the Pedestrian and Cycle connection Improvement Contribution prior to completion of the agreement together with an additional contribution within 14 days of the grant of permission. The combination deals with the passage of time and will enable KCC to carry out off-site works benefitting car-free travel to work. The approach is supported.
185. The owner proposes to carry out Habitat Enhancement Works to the Off Site BNG Land within 36 months of the date of the grant of permission and to maintain the Off Site BNG Land for a period of 30 years from the date of completion of the Habitat Enhancement Works. The approach is supported, the enhancement works are welcome and securing the maintenance of the land at Sevington East will ensure that an appropriate buffer is created preventing coalescence as per ALP 2030 Policy SP7.
186. The draft unilateral undertaking does not contain a commitment to reestablish a PRow, if future circumstances allow, through the viewing corridor crossing the site. This was a matter that the 'honouring the s.106' draft agreement sought to tackle with a commitment to funding if future site circumstances allowed: such circumstances being unknown at the time due to the SDO temporary permission. Given that the proposal is for the grant of planning permission to retain that which exists and the existing functions provided which require a large secure perimeter fence, the likelihood of a change in circumstances reducing the need for such security is now more remote. In the

circumstances, I accept the applicant's position not to take this matter forward through the Unilateral Undertaking. Should the need for secure use of the site cease in the future and other planning applications come forward for redevelopment then the Council can require the reestablishment of a PRoW through the corridor.

187. The Undertaking does not make a commitment to providing a financial sum to KCC for the monitoring of its Travel Plan as would be the usual case for substantial employment development. Whether there is any expectation of the applicant that KCC will comment on the evolved Travel Plan that is clearly required given the 2022 version being in need of update is a matter for KCC. In the circumstances of the case, I do not consider that the Council needs to comment further on that issue.
188. Whilst it could be argued that further indexation could be applicable to some the sums concerned given the passage of time since work on a s.106 agreement became stalled, I am mindful that the applicant has not sought a view from the Council on this point and, to all intents and purposes, the obligation approach in the Undertaking is to roll those previously accepted sums forward. In the circumstances of the case, where the Council is not the determining planning authority, I see little benefit in pursuing this matter further and consider of utmost importance is to be able to secure and release the sums for positive planning benefits.
189. My conclusion is that the Unilateral Undertaking secures matters that the Council has been working on securing with the applicant since the site came into operation and accords with ALP 2030 IMP1

(o) any other matters

190. I am aware of some local concerns in respect of dog fouling on the PRoW around the site (potentially due to lack of waste bins) and degradation of the surface in some areas. In respect of the former, I do not consider that this would be a matter for the applicant and suggest it is reviewed by the Parish Council working with the Refuse and Street Scene Team at ABC on the locations which appear prone to fouling. The Council moved some time ago to multi-use bins rather than dedicated dog bins. In respect of surface degradation of PRoW this is a matter for KCC as the local highway authority. From my own experience, the PRoW is well-used for walking and cycling (as illustrated by **Figure 15** below) but even with that usage the surface may need periodic maintenance: concerns in this regard should be made to KCC.



Figure 15: cyclist using Highfield Lane 05/09/25

191. I have not covered matters of archaeology in this report and this subject would fall to KCC to lead, review and make representations upon.
192. Sevington has a very interesting archaeological history and the archaeological works carried out as a result of the creation of the IBF has helped with further understanding with remains indicating Bronze and Iron Age activity; Iron Age routeway along the ridge of the site, signs of Roman and Anglo-Saxon burials; medieval and post-medieval activity mill complex just off Church Road; post medieval activity; and the survival of the Royal Observer Corps ('ROC') cold war underground unit. Therefore, these finds place Sevington as an important focus for community for thousands of years.
193. It is highly likely that further archaeology associated with the above, including could still survive within the Sevington East area. Any future proposals, including works relating biodiversity enhancements or landscaping, could impact on significant archaeology on that land and so I would encourage continued liaison between the applicant's archaeological advisors and KCC in this regard.
194. When dealing with the grant of outline planning permission for the storage and distribution use, the Council required signage/information boards to be provided in appropriate publicly locations to celebrate the ROC. Although the PRow network has altered in response to the need for IBF security, there are still good opportunities for such information boards to be provided by the applicant working together with KCC as ABC and the Parish Council and given the points that I have made above, the information boards should celebrate the more recent finds.

Human Rights

195. This is ultimately a matter for PINs as the determining authority.
196. In preparing this report i have taken into account the human rights issues relevant to this consultation. In my view, the “Assessment” section above and the Recommended consultation response below represent an appropriate balance between the interests and rights of the applicant (to enjoy their land subject only to reasonable and proportionate controls by a public authority) and the interests and rights of those potentially affected by the proposal (to respect for private life and the home and peaceful enjoyment of their properties).

Conclusion

197. The Council granted planning permission for storage and distribution uses as part of a balanced approach to growth in the development plan through the creation of jobs and new homes. The purchase of the site by the government, although providing a different use, has local employment benefits. Given the stated national importance of the application proposal to retain the site beyond the lifespan of the SDO, those benefits will remain.
198. Although the proposal brings with it some adverse impacts (the perimeter security fence & lighting overspill impacts as a result of a more open site & sub-optimal landscaping) my view is that taking into account the national importance and the employment benefits that arise, the Council should not formally object to the proposal but should, instead, seek to ensure that those matters accepted by the applicant as still needing to be improved are tackled through further submissions as well as the applicant working with others (such as National Highways and KCC) to devise necessary mitigation. I also suggest that a planning condition restricting the use to that applied for would be appropriate.

Recommendation

The Council make the following response to the PINs in respect of the consultation on application CROWN/2025/0000002:

1. Landscaping: the Council requests that an enhanced soft landscaping scheme, including planting plans and details of their ongoing management, is secured by appropriate planning condition(s). The soft landscaping scheme should include, but not be limited to;-

(i) review and enhancement of the soft landscaping beyond the northern secure fence frontage to J10A, in collaboration with National Highways where necessary,

(ii) review and enhancement of landscaping on the bund located eastern side of Highfield Lane,

(iii) Areas of opportunity within the site both located outside secure fence as

well as areas within the secure fenced area as per the suggestions set out in this report, and

(iv) improved landscaping within the viewing corridor in order to lift its visual character including the suggestions of tree planting, understorey planting and wildflower planting as set out in this report.

2. Ecology: the Council requests that implementation of the submitted LMMP and LEMP, including provision of the habitat enhancement works within the first planting season following planning permission being granted is secured by appropriate planning condition.

3. Biodiversity Net Gain & securing Sevington East as an undeveloped buffer: the Council welcomes the applicants' intention to provide and secure biodiversity net gain and the role that Sevington East will have in that respect. The Council requests that these matters are secured by the proposed Unilateral Undertaking and that the approach to BNG is one that ensures long-term maintenance.

4. Staff Travel Plan and Active Travel: the Council requests that an updated Staff Travel Plan to include a review of the success of the 2022 version with updated objectives, targets, measures and details of monitoring is secured by an appropriate planning condition. This is required to address the cumulative impacts of major development on air quality and to encourage the use of sustainable transport modes and active travel. For the reasons set out in this report, the Council expresses disappointment that funding for upgraded off-site PRow between the site and the village of Mersham is not proposed.

5. Highways: the Council requests that mitigation necessary to the J10A gyratory junctions with the A20 (both east & west bound) to resolve current and anticipated queuing issues is secured with proactive liaison taking place between the applicant, National Highways and Kent County Council.

6. Lighting: the Council requests that a clear and detailed Implementation Plan, informed by the recommendations for measures to reduce lighting impacts set out in the External Lighting Assessment is secured by appropriate planning condition(s). This Plan must be one that balances the requirements for on-site safety and security with the need to mitigate adverse effects on the residential amenity of local residents, the rural character of the surrounding area (including the National Landscape) and nature conservation/biodiversity enhancement. It must take into account areas of the site that are infrequently used and require the site operator to significantly reduce or totally extinguish lighting in those areas when not in use.

7. Noise: the Council requests that an updated Noise Impact Assessment is secured by an appropriate planning condition. The Noise Impact Assessment should include but not be limited to:-

- (i) additional investigation of low frequency noise from HGVs,
- (ii) tonal noise from refrigerated HGVs,
- (iii) reversing beepers,
- (iv) clanging of curtain sider poles and horns,
- (v) the use of the perimeter road to the south of the site used by the HGVs to exit the site and
- (vi) take into account other relevant submissions made as part of the public consultation in 2024.

The Noise Impact Assessment should provide information showing the number of days per annum the emergency parking areas ('Romeo' and, especially, 'Tango') has been used since the site opened and should include measures to mitigate identified noise impacts, including but not limited to consideration of alternative HGV routing within the site to avoid use of the perimeter road, particularly during the nighttime period, given its location relative to homes as sensitive noise receptors.

8. Air Quality: the Council requests that a Site Management Plan is secured by appropriate planning condition. The Site Management Plan shall include but not be limited to measures to mitigate impacts on air quality, including a requirement that vehicles do not idle for excessive periods of time and that an appropriate number of electric hook up points are provided for refrigerated vehicles when parked in the different areas of the site and site management actively directs vehicles to those hook up points. This will assist with both air quality as well as reduce noise impacts. The Council also requests that Electric Chargers are provided to facilitate HGV transition to use of that technology.

9. Fibre to the Premises: the Council notes that an FTTP statement has not been provided with the application and that no indication has been given in respect of the inability of FTTP to be provided. The Council consider the proximity to the Sevington exchange means that FTTP should be a viable proposition. If that cannot be provided, then alternative provision of superfast broadband should be secured by planning condition.

10. Nutrient neutrality: the Council note that the applicant's proposal does involve overnight accommodation and that, notwithstanding, effluent from the employment use of the site would continue to be tankered away. The Council note that PINs become the competent authority under the Habitats Regulations..

11. Signage and Sat-Nav: the Council welcomes recent signage improvements designed to reduce instances of the rural road highway network being incorrectly used to access the site and welcomes on-going collaboration between National Highways and Kent County Council to explore all sensible signage improvements including liaison with sat-nav as necessary to ensure guidance given to drivers in respect of the access from the J10A link road is correct.

12. Impact on heritage assets: the Council welcomes the approach in the draft unilateral undertaking to ensure that capital funds are finally able to be released to the Diocese.

13. Unilateral Undertaking: the Council supports the other non-heritage obligations covered by the Undertaking.

14. Celebrating archaeological finds: the Council would wish to see archaeological finds fully referenced in post-excavation reports and celebrated by information boards and signage as appropriate and in appropriate publicly accessible locations in order to celebrate the history of Sevington.

15. Restricting the use applied for: the application proposal involves a sui generis use and the Council request that any grant of planning permission is subject to an appropriate planning condition that ensures that alternative uses of the site (or the diminution of certain uses accompanied by the intensification of others – for example general HGV parking uses similar to the periodic use of the ‘Romeo’ and ‘Tango’ parking areas) are brought within planning control.

(A) Authority to be delegated to the Strategic Development & Delivery Manager and (acting) Planning Applications Manager or the Assistant Director – Planning & development to:

(i) make any adjustments to the Council’s comments as detailed above as may, in their opinion, be required AND

(ii) submit written representations, address any hearing or give evidence at Planning Inquiry according to the application determination pathway to be advised by PINs

Background Papers

All papers referred to in this report are currently published on the Ashford Borough Council website (www.ashford.gov.uk). Those papers relating specifically to this application may be found on the [View applications on line](#) pages under reference OTH/2025/1437) and the PINs web-site <https://find-crown-development.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/applications/885d6bd3-c6b3-495f-a820-d4633a1d00a9/application-information>

Contact Officers:



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