

**HERTSMERE BOROUGH**

**APPLICATION FOR A HIGHWAYS DEPOT INCLUDING SALT BARN AT  
LAND OPPOSITE CHARLESTON PADDOCKS, ST. ALBANS ROAD,  
SOUTH MIMMS, HERTFORDSHIRE.**

Report of the Director of Environment

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Local Member:- J Usher

**1. Purpose of Report**

To consider planning application number 0/1050-02 for a highways depot and salt barn at land opposite Charleston Paddocks, St. Albans Road, South Mimms, Hertfordshire.

**2. Summary**

- 2.1 The application seeks planning permission for the development of a highways depot and salt barn to serve the southern/central area of the County. The application site comprises an area of 0.943 hectares on a triangular plot of land to the south of the Motorway Service Area (MSA) at south Mimms. The MSA is located at the interchange junction between the M25 and the A1(M), known as Bignells Corner.
- 2.2 The current depot is located on land to the north west of the application site. Whilst it has previously been adequate to provide the necessary cover for this area of Hertfordshire, the County Council is undergoing a rationalisation of its highway management processes including the rationalisation of the winter maintenance service. To improve delivery it was intended to create four 'super' depots capable of storing 3000 tonnes of salt at strategic locations around Hertfordshire. One of these depots was always envisaged to be in the southern part of the A1(M) corridor to serve the southern central area of the County, replacing the South Mimms depot, which has insufficient capacity.
- 2.3 The application has also been necessitated as the Highways Agency now wish to re-occupy the previously shared existing depot site in order to carry out winter maintenance of the M25 and A1(M) (their depots to the west and east being too far away to ensure adequate cover). The Highways Agency are also hoping to share the existing depot with four police authorities for the provision of a combined traffic control centre covering the northern section of the M25. The salt barn in the existing depot is fully used by the County Council and is too small to enable shared use with the Highways Agency.

- 2.4. Other than the application site opposite Charleston Paddocks, the County Council has not been able to identify any other site for a new salt barn. Until such a facility is provided the County Council is unable to make the existing depot available to the Highways Agency and police authorities. Additionally, the new contractor for Hertfordshire County Council's maintenance services is seeking to provide an operational highways depot facility in the southern districts of Hertfordshire.
- 2.5 In considering this application the main issues relate to:
- the appropriateness of this development in the Green Belt;
  - Local Plan policy relating to development within the South Mimms Motorway Service Area;
  - the proximity of the proposed development to Clare Hall Brook;
  - consideration of amenity issues for the residents and users of Charleston Paddocks.
- 2.6 As a departure from the Development Plan the application should be referred to the First Secretary of State.

### **3. Conclusion**

- 3.1 The report concludes that the development as proposed constitutes inappropriate development within the Green Belt, however special circumstances have been shown that warrant the setting aside of Green Belt policy in this instance. The special circumstances relate to the need for the County Council as Highway Authority to relocate to a large enough and strategically located highways depot, the lack of suitable and viable alternative sites and the fact that this application would allow the Highways Agency to utilise the existing depot to provide full coverage of the Motorway and Trunk Road network.
- 3.2 It is accepted that the depot and particularly the salt barn would have a visual impact, however it is considered that by the use of sympathetic materials and the provision of suitable and effective landscaping, this visual impact can be minimised. The report has also assessed the proposal against emerging local plan policy for the Motorway Service Area, the impact on Clare Hall Brook, the ecological impact and the effect on residential amenity and has concluded that the proposal is acceptable, subject to the views of the Environment Agency.
- 3.3 The report therefore concludes that, subject to the views of the Environment Agency and to no intervention from the First Secretary of State, the Director of Environment should be authorised to grant planning permission subject to appropriate conditions to include the submission of a code of practice to minimise the impact of reversing vehicle warning indicators, a detailed landscaping scheme to incorporate comments from the Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre, the retention of existing hedgerows, suitable

materials to be used in construction, details of all fencing to be submitted and the protection of Footpath No. 56.

## **1. Description of the site and proposed development**

- 1.1 The application site comprises 0.943 hectares of a triangular plot of land to the south of the Motorway Service Area (MSA) at South Mimms. The MSA is located at the interchange junction between the M25 and A1(M), known as Bignells Corner.
- 1.2 The plot of land is bounded to the south by public footpath no.56, which runs parallel and within the curtilage of the proposal site. Behind the footpath is a boundary fence to the M25 slip road, which rises on an embankment from west to east, together with a drainage ditch at the base of the embankment. The site is bounded to the north by Clare Hall Brook, beyond which is the existing winter maintenance depot. To the east of the site is the old St. Albans Road, formerly the A6 Barnet to St. Albans Road. This road was bypassed and downgraded in the 1970s with the construction of the North East Ring Road, later to form part of the M25 Orbital Motorway in the mid 1980s. There are two private properties that gain access off this redundant carriageway. Beyond St. Albans Road are open fields/paddocks.
- 1.3 The site has previously been used by various contractors as a site compound, whilst undertaking surfacing works to the M25 and A1(M) motorways. It was also used as a major compound during the widening of the A1(M) in the mid 1980s. The site is currently laid to grass and is used as a paddock to graze horses.
- 1.4 The application proposes the use of the site for a general operational depot and for the construction of a salt barn for winter maintenance of the non-motorway highway network.
- 1.5 The salt barn itself is to be located in the middle of the site and would be constructed on a reinforced concrete raft that has a rectangular footprint of 49 metres long by 24 metres wide. This includes an enclosed space capable of storing 3000 tonnes of salt and covered vehicle loading areas at either end of the barns to prevent water contamination of the stored salt and allow loading of the gritting vehicles undercover. At its apex the structure would be 13.4 metres high, which allows large enough doorways at either end, suitable for articulated salt delivery lorries to off load totally undercover again preventing spillage and potential contamination to the surrounding environment. The barn would be clad by coloured Cementitious based roofing sheets supported on timber purlins held to the structural portal frame. The cement sheeting would be coloured reed green. The choice of timber over other materials is advantageous as it does not suffer the same effects of corrosion in the aggressive salt environment, has a softer appearance and the timber structure assists in reducing noise levels as opposed to a steel or concrete structure. The barn structure would be similar to those constructed at the Hoe Lane (Ware), Kings Langley and Coreys Mill (Stevenage) depots.
- 1.6 In addition to the salt barn the application proposes modular accommodation for staff of the depot. This accommodation would include changing rooms,

toilets, kitchen and a drying room. The single storey modular office block measures approximately 29 metres long by 6 metres wide and the modular accommodation would have a total floorspace of 320m<sup>2</sup>. The proposal also provides for 20 parking spaces for HGVs, parking for an unspecified number of cars together with extensive hard-surfaced circulation areas. A weighbridge is proposed at the access to the site and a vehicle wash would be located in the western corner of the site. Dedicated areas for the storage of bulk construction materials are shown on the plans and there would also be a requirement for the storage of approximately 10,000 litres of diesel fuel together with appropriate equipment for refuelling lorries. The application states that the proposed storage will comply with the Environment Agency's requirements for such liquids.

- 1.7 The application proposes that the whole site would be surrounded by a 2 metre high plastic coated chain link fence with angled barb wire tops for site security. In addition a solid wooden panel fence would be erected along the old St. Albans Road boundary near to the two private properties to mitigate against noise or visual pollution. The application seeks to maintain and protect the integrity of the footpath by setting aside a two metre wide strip of land, removing any irregularities and providing a free draining and easy to maintain route. The existing post and five rail fence to the M25 would remain in place. The depot fenceline would therefore be set within the application site to allow for the footpath.
- 1.8 It is proposed that approximately 2000m<sup>2</sup> of the application site would be landscaped and planted with appropriate trees and shrubs to suit the local environment and all existing boundary vegetation would be retained. The application provides for an earth bund along the boundary with the old St. Albans Road which would utilise material from excavation works. This again would provide further screening of the site from Charleston Paddocks.

## **2. Consultations**

- 2.1 Hertsmere Borough Council raise objections to the proposal on grounds of:
  - Inappropriate development in the Green Belt for which very special circumstances have not been demonstrated. It is stated that the proposal is therefore contrary to Policy 5 of the Structure Plan, Policy C1 of the Hertsmere Local Plan Post Inquiry Modification and Policy 2 of the adopted Local Plan 1991.
  - The proposed salt dome, workshop and office building and areas of hard-surfacing would be obtrusive in the landscape by virtue of their scale, height, bulk, siting and extent and the use of industrial materials unsympathetic to their landscape setting and harmful to the openness and visual amenities of the Green Belt.
  - The proposals include development in close proximity to the Clare Hall Brook which would prejudice flood defence interests and adversely affect

the character of the watercourse, and restrict necessary access to the watercourse for maintenance.

- 2.2 The County Council as Highway Authority does not wish to restrict the grant of permission.
- 2.3 Environment Agency views will be reported orally to the Committee.
- 2.4 Highways Agency has no comments to make.
- 2.5 Thames Water has no objection to the application.
- 2.6 Transco have submitted plans showing the approximate position of plant in the location. Examination of these plans reveal that the plant should not be affected by the proposal.
- 2.7 Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre do not object to the application on ecological grounds, however state that the hedgerows present on all sides of the paddock act as valuable wildlife corridors linking adjacent fields and other habitats and these should remain intact during and following any development of the site.
- 2.8 Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust comment that provided that an assurance is sought that the salt barns would not affect the integrity of Claire Hall Brook, they would not oppose this planning application. Of particular concern to the Trust would be the drainage and maintenance of the yard where the potential for leakage could occur.
- 2.9 Neighbour notification letters were delivered by hand to the neighbouring highways depot and Herts Constabulary Police Post. Additionally the Motorway Service Station and the owner/occupiers of Charleston Paddocks were notified. Two site notices were erected and an advert was placed in the Borehamwood Times in accordance with County Council procedure. At the time of writing two letters of objection have been received. The objections can be summarised as:
  - the application is premature in light of the preparation of a detailed development brief which is to guide the improvement and rationalisation of land use within Special Policy Area M14 of the Local Plan Post Inquiry Modifications 2000;
  - the proposal is in too close proximity to the residential property of Charleston Paddocks and there would be a loss of privacy and amenity particularly at night when road gritting would be required;
  - the proposal would require the destruction of natural green countryside which is home to a lot of wildlife;
  - there is concern about how surface water is to be disposed of and how this would affect Charleston Paddocks;

- there are existing traffic problems within the Motorway Service Area.

### 3. Planning Considerations

3.1 The principal issues to be taken into account in determining this application are:-

- the appropriateness of this development in the Green Belt;
- Local Plan policy relating to development within the South Mimms Motorway Service Area;
- the proximity of the proposed development to Clare Hall Brook;
- consideration of amenity issues for the residents and users of Charleston Paddocks.

The relevant development plan policies are:

Structure Plan Policy 5 (Green Belt) and Hertsmere District Plan 1991 Policy 2 (Green Belt).

In addition this report will also consider the relevant policies of the emerging Local Plan (Hertsmere Local Plan Post Inquiry Modifications Version 2000), C1 (Green Belt), C15 (Development Criteria in the Green Belt) and M14 (South Mimms Special Policy Area).

The report will assess if the special circumstances put forward by the applicant are sufficient to outweigh the general presumption against inappropriate development in this instance.

#### Green Belt

3.2 The application site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt and a Landscape Development Area as defined within the Hertsmere District Plan First Review (adopted 1991).

3.3 Policy 5 of the Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991-2011 states that there is a presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt, except in very special circumstances, for purposes other than those detailed in PPG2 "Green Belts". The adopted Local Plan (1991) and the emerging Local Plan (Post Inquiry Modifications 2000) contain similar policies, Policy 2 and Policy C1 respectively. Paragraph 3.12 of PPG2 states that:-

*'...The carrying out of such operations and the making of material changes in the use of land are inappropriate development unless they maintain openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt.'*

3.4 The application proposes the erection of one building of a permanent nature, the salt barn, and the placement of modular accommodation on site for

operatives of the depot. The application also proposes fencing, ancillary features such as a vehicle wash and weighbridge and the construction of a bund. As such the application cannot be said to maintain openness or contribute to the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. Therefore the application proposes inappropriate development.

- 3.5 Paragraph 3.2 of PPG2 states that inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development will not exist unless the harm caused by reason of inappropriateness is clearly outweighed by other considerations. As such, very special circumstances need to be demonstrated to warrant the setting aside of Green Belt policy.

#### Need

- 3.6 Information supplied with the application has highlighted three areas of need which are submitted as contributing to special circumstances sufficient to warrant the setting aside of Green Belt Policy. The three areas relate to the need for the Highway Authority to have a winter maintenance depot of sufficient capacity from where it can meet prescribed response and completion times for winter maintenance salting; the lack of alternative viable sites in this area; and the need for the Highways Agency to ensure an adequate speed of response to its own gritting network (motorway and trunk road network).
- 3.7 Firstly, national standards for prescribed response and completion times for winter maintenance salting are set out in the document “Delivering Best Value in Highway Maintenance – Code of Practice for Maintenance Management July 2001”. It is accepted that the County Council as Highway Authority should seek to meet these standards and that a failure to meet these standards will compromise public safety and also leave the Highway Authority liable to litigation in the event of accidents that occur as a result of a failure to meet timescales. To meet these targets it is therefore imperative that the Highway Authority has a strategically placed depot.
- 3.8 Whilst the current depot has previously been adequate to provide the necessary cover for this area of Hertfordshire, the County Council is undergoing a rationalisation of its highway management processes. A significant part of this process is the rationalisation of the winter maintenance service. To improve the delivery it was intended to create four ‘super’ depots which would involve the construction of purpose built, environmentally friendly salt storage facilities, with each depot capable of storing 3000 tonnes of salt at strategic locations around Hertfordshire. The first three depots were completed during October 2001 and are located at Coreys Mill in Stevenage, Hoe Lane on the outskirts of Ware and at Railway Terrace, Kings Langley. The location of the fourth depot was always envisaged to be in the southern part of the A1(M) corridor to serve the southern central area of the County.
- 3.9 The existing salt barn at South Mimms, adjacent to the application site, has a capacity for storing 2,400 tonnes of salt. This has been adequate to cover 10

gritting routes, however, with the final closures of existing depots and the assimilation of the detrunked 'A' roads from the Highways Agency, it is now necessary for the South Mimms depot to cover 15 gritting routes and as such the salt barn needs a capacity for 3000 tonnes of salt. With the limited size of the existing salt barn, the County Council would not be able to meet the timescales mentioned above for the 15 gritting routes and as such needs a larger facility.

### Alternative Sites

- 3.10 An initial site search exercise was conducted in October 2000 by Davies & Co on behalf of the County Council to look for alternative sites for a highways depot. The study concentrated on areas in the southern central area of the County and as such considered sites in Welwyn, Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and Welham Green. The study considered the market availability of a number of sites and also any constraints attached. This initial study identified a site at Chequersfield in Welwyn Garden City as having potential for dual use with a waste recycling site, however the site has severe abnormal ground conditions. Use of this site as a depot alone would incur prohibitive costs in terms of ground remediation. The report concluded that, predominantly because of the size of the site needed, there were no other suitable alternative sites readily identifiable in these areas.
- 3.11 This study has been updated for this application and found that, of the sites originally identified two years ago, there has been a conspicuous reduction in the already limited range of opportunities. The updated report concluded that there are no alternative sites currently available nor likely to be available in the near future to satisfy operational requirements.
- 3.12 As no viable alternative sites have been found for a new depot, it needs to be considered if the South Mimms site would be able to provide adequate cover for the southern central quadrant of Hertfordshire. The proposed depot site is located at the junction of two motorways and two primary routes and this location is considered to be ideal for response during winter conditions, providing the opportunity to get east, west and north rapidly via the motorway network and routes south by either the A1(M) or the A1081. Additionally the location at South Mimms is strategically well positioned to cope with the detrunked routes which the Highway Authority will inherit from the Highways Agency in April 2003. These roads will include the A41, A414, A405 and A1001.

### The Need For The Highways Agency To Relocate

- 3.13 In March 2001 the Highways Agency submitted a planning application to Hertsmere Borough Council for a motorway maintenance depot on the same site as the application being considered here. Hertsmere Borough Council refused this application as they considered there were no special circumstances sufficient to warrant the setting aside of Green Belt policy. The Highways Agency had submitted this application as there is a gap in their network of

motorway maintenance compounds to provide adequate coverage of the motorway network. The Highway Agency's maintaining agent currently run their services out of Breakspear Depot, Hemel Hempstead (junction 8 of M1) and Blunts Farm Interchange, Essex (junction 27 of M25/junction 6 of M11), a gap of approximately 30 miles. The Highways Agency's policy is to have winter maintenance depots located at regular intervals of approximately 12-15 miles along the Motorway/Trunk Road network to ensure an adequate speed of response to gritting the network. This is due to high traffic volumes on these routes and the increased use of new types of surfacing materials that require quicker treatment with salt in adverse weather conditions. The Highways Agency consider that the gap in between the above two mentioned depots seriously compromises their ability to satisfactorily maintain the M25 and A1(M) during the winter months. The Highways Agency are therefore keen to take occupancy of the existing South Mimms depot.

- 3.14 As explained above, the existing depot is too small for the County Council itself, let alone for a shared use with the Agency, and the County Council cannot make the existing depot available to the Agency until it has found a replacement facility for its own needs. The relocation of the County Council depot to the application site would therefore enable the Highways Agency to occupy the existing depot and as a result provide adequate winter maintenance cover for the Motorway network in this area. It should be noted that the Highways Agency require a salt barn of up to 2000 tonnes capacity and as such the existing facility would be entirely suitable.
- 3.15 It is therefore considered that the need for a large enough and strategically located highways depot for the County Council as Highway Authority, the lack of suitable and viable alternative sites and the fact that this application would allow the Highways Agency to utilise the existing depot to provide full coverage of the Motorway and Trunk Road network, contribute to very special circumstances sufficient to outweigh Green Belt Policy in this instance.

#### Evaluation of Visual Impact

- 3.16 Although it is considered that special circumstances have been justified to warrant the setting aside of Green Belt Policy in this instance, it is important to consider the visual impact of the facility in this location and its impact on the openness of the Green Belt.
- 3.17 The salt barn needs to house, at capacity, 3000 tonnes of salt and to enable vehicle unloading and loading within its confines. It therefore requires that the building must be of sufficient size to enable this. Consequently this application proposes a building 49 metres long by 24 metres wide and reaching a height of 13.4 metres at the apex. Whilst this is a significant building, its visual impact will be minimised due to the location of the site. Firstly, the site is well screened by existing vegetation on all boundaries and it is stated in the application that all existing boundary vegetation will be retained. Secondly the embankment on the southern boundary (which forms the slip road to the M25) rises significantly above the site so that only the top of the building will be

visible from the Motorway. The built development of the existing depot would screen the proposal from wider views to the north.

- 3.18 The style of the building and the materials used in its construction will also allow the development to be sympathetic to its environment. The timber frame building and Cementitious cladding give the building a softer appearance. Inspection of the recently constructed salt barns at Hoe Lane and Coreys Mill has shown that the buildings are not visually unattractive and certainly the Hoe Lane development does not appear incongruous in its Green Belt location. With a condition attached to ensure the correct materials and colours are used in construction, it is considered that the visual impact of the salt barn would be minimised and would be sympathetic to and compatible to its landscape setting. The remainder of the development, including the modular accommodation and vehicular facilities, would be screened by the existing vegetation and the proposed additional landscaping and earth bund.
- 3.19 Although the proposal will result in the loss of Green Belt land, it is considered that because the application has incorporated a sympathetic design and use of materials, provides for additional landscaping within and on the boundary of the site and because of the location of the site between the existing built development of the Motorway Service Area and the M25, the proposal will not compromise the wider openness of the Green Belt.
- 3.20 Policy C15 of the emerging Local Plan states that *inter alia* development in the Green Belt should take advantage of site contours to minimise the visual impact, use materials which are in keeping with those of the locality, should ensure that the scale, height and bulk of the development is sympathetic to its landscape setting and existing trees, hedgerows and other features of landscape should be retained and reinforced by additional planting of native species. It is considered that, as discussed in the above three paragraphs, the application has taken account of, and accords with, this emerging policy.

#### Emerging Local Plan Policy

- 3.21 The proposals map of the Hertsmere Local Plan Post Inquiry Modifications 2000 highlights the whole of the Motorway Service Area (MSA) under Policy M14. Policy M14 states *inter alia*:

*‘The Special Policy Area is defined on the Proposals Map and remains washed over by the Green Belt. Within the defined SPA planning permission will only be granted for development for facilities for the movement of people and goods on the motorway network, including those supporting the immediate needs of drivers, passengers and their vehicles.*

*Development proposals which might exacerbate existing traffic or environmental conditions, or prejudice the rationalisation and improvement of the area, will be refused. The site of Charleston Paddock will be held in reserve for motorway related uses to assist the rationalisation of the area.’*

- 3.22 Whilst it is accepted that the application for a new highways depot in itself does not relate to a motorway related use, it is considered that the removal of the County Council from the existing site to the application site will provide an opportunity for the Highways Agency to take occupation of the existing depot and as such provide a complete winter maintenance service to the motorways in the area. The existing depot site is also large enough for the Highways Agency to share the site with four police authorities for the provision of a combined traffic control centre covering the northern section of the M25. The application will therefore allow for a rationalisation of the winter maintenance services for both the County Council as Highway Authority and for the Highways Agency. The proposed development allows for a depot and salt barn of sufficient capacity to cover the 15 gritting routes of southern central Hertfordshire and allows the Highways Agency the opportunity to occupy the existing depot and provide complete coverage of the M25 and A1(M) Motorway networks.
- 3.23 It is considered that, indirectly, the application allows for an improvement in motorway services as it releases a site that is ideal for the Highways Agency and police authorities to share to improve coverage of gritting and traffic control respectively of both the M25 and A1(M).

#### Impact on Clare Hall Brook

- 3.24 The consultation process has raised concern that the proposed development could adversely affect the character of the Clare Hall Brook and as such be contrary to Policy D1 of the Hertsmere Local Plan Post Inquiry Modifications 2000.
- 3.25 The Environment Agency has been consulted on this application, and their views will be reported orally to the Committee. It should be noted that the Drainage Services Manager at Hertsmere Borough Council raises no objection subject to the views of the Environment Agency.
- 3.26 The application as a whole has been designed so that its impact on the environment is minimised. Specifically, the salt barn building is designed so that all salt storage is under cover and loading and unloading of salt can also take place under cover, thereby minimising the risk of any rainwater coming into contact with the salt. Additionally the carriageway, permanent car parking areas and salt barn roof have all been designed to current standards, taking into account the Environment Agency's requirements for the Hoe Lane, Kings Langley and Corey's Mill depots. The application has included details for all three aspects of drainage, namely for stormwater, contaminated water and foul water, however it will require the technical input of the Environment Agency to consider if the proposals are acceptable.

#### Environmental Issues

- 3.27 Local residents have expressed concern about the loss of an area of countryside and about the operation of the depot and potential loss of amenity.

### Ecology

- 3.28 Whilst the application will inevitably result in the development of a currently green area of land, it should be noted that the Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre do not object to the application on ecological grounds.
- 3.29 The application has also made provision for significant landscaping of the site. The application proposes new planting on the southern boundary of the site and planting of the earth bund on the eastern boundary, and whilst this is considered to be appropriate to further screen the site, should Members decide to approve the application, a more detailed landscaping scheme should be required to take into account the detailed advice of the Biological Records Centre. Additionally, hedgerows are present on all sides of the existing paddock and as the Biological Records Centre have indicated that these act as valuable wildlife corridors linking adjacent fields and habitats, the retention of the existing hedgerows should also be required by condition.

### Noise and Disturbance

- 3.30 Local residents have also expressed concern about the potential loss of amenity resulting from the operation of the depot, particularly at night time when gritting lorries would be entering and leaving the site.
- 3.31 It is considered that because of the location of the site which is adjacent to the M25 and adjacent to the existing highways depot, that the impact on residential amenity would be minimal during the daytime. The site access is to the north of the properties and so should not be affected by passing vehicles. The erection of the earth bund adjacent to the old St. Albans Road and the screening of the site through additional planting would also assist in mitigating the impact of the development. However on similar sites that have a number of HGV movements, the issue of reversing warning indicators has caused a problem. This issue would also be exacerbated by any movements necessary at night time. As such it is considered prudent that a code of practice be submitted and approved prior to the site coming into operation, that will detail how this issue will be addressed.

### Other Issues

- 3.32 Footpath No. 56 runs parallel and inside the site along the south western boundary with the M25. It presently enters the site at the St. Albans Road end by use of a two step stile where the route then crosses the old road to join Footpath No.57 behind Charleston Paddocks. At the western end of the site it crosses Clare Hall Brook over an extension of the 2 metre diameter culvert that passes under the M25.
- 3.33 To protect this footpath the application proposes that a 2 metre wide strip of land will be set aside and suitable material will be used to remove any irregularities and provide a free draining and easy to maintain route. The existing post and five rail fence to the M25 will remain in place but on the

boundary to the new depot a new 2 metre high plastic coated chain link fence will be erected to maintain the security of the depot. This is considered acceptable to maintain the integrity of Footpath No. 56.

- 3.34 The Highway Authority considers that the access to the site is acceptable and does not propose any restrictions on either access arrangements or vehicle movements.

#### **4. Conclusions**

- 4.1 The application is seeking planning permission for a highways depot, incorporating a salt barn, to serve the southern central area of Hertfordshire.
- 4.2 The report concludes that the development as proposed constitutes inappropriate development within the Green Belt, however special circumstances have been shown that warrant the setting aside of Green Belt policy in this instance. The special circumstances relate to the need for the County Council as Highway Authority to relocate to a large enough and strategically located highways depot, the lack of suitable and viable alternative sites and the fact that this application would allow the Highways Agency to utilise the existing depot to provide full coverage of the Motorway and Trunk Road network.
- 4.3 It is accepted that the depot and particularly the salt barn would have a visual impact, however it is considered that by the use of sympathetic materials and the provision of suitable and effective landscaping, this visual impact can be minimised. The report has also assessed the proposal against emerging local plan policy for the Motorway Service Area, the impact on Clare Hall Brook, the ecological impact and the effect on residential amenity and has concluded that the proposal is acceptable.
- 4.4 The report therefore concludes that, subject to the views of the Environment Agency and to no intervention from the First Secretary of State, the Director of Environment should be authorised to grant planning permission subject to appropriate conditions to include the submission of a code of practice to minimise the impact of reversing vehicle warning indicators, a detailed landscaping scheme to incorporate comments from the Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre, the retention of existing hedgerows, suitable materials to be used in construction, details of all fencing to be submitted and the protection of Footpath No. 56.

#### **5. Financial implications**

- 5.1 There are none for this Committee.

#### **Background information used by the author in compiling this report**

Planning application reference 0/1050-02.

Consultation responses and representations received in response to planning application ref. 0/1050-02.

Hertfordshire County Structure Plan Review 1991-2011, adopted 1998.

Hertsmere District Plan, adopted 1991.

Hertsmere Local Plan Post Inquiry Modifications Version 2000.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 – Green Belt