



STAT Planning

Planning Statement

On behalf of Lodge Farm Education

Retrospective change of use and associated operational development at Lodge Farm Education, Broad Lane, Markfield, LE67 9TB

Date: August 2025





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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared on behalf of Lodge Farm Education in regard to a retrospective application for the change of use of agricultural land to an operational small alternative education provision on land at Broad Lane, Markfield.
- 1.2 The proposal seeks retrospective planning permission for '*An alternative education provision in the form of utilising the natural environment with associated infrastructure*'. The site forms part of Lodge Farm which is a larger school organisation, including Wolfdale School. The education provision has been running on the site for approximately 3 years.
- 1.3 Accordingly, this Planning Statement describes the site and its context including reference to the site's planning history, identifies national and local planning policy and other material considerations of the proposals, and provides a detailed assessment of the main planning considerations for the scheme. This Statement concludes that the proposals provide critical alternative education in the County and are in accordance with planning policy and represent sustainable development.

Lodge Farm Education

- 1.4 The school sits to the south of Markfield Lane, to the west of the M1, and forms part of the Lodge Farm Education to deliver a therapeutic, hands-on learning environment for students aged 11-17 with complex additional needs.

Educational Setting

- 1.5 The school ethos is to operate in traditional farm and woodland environments. A rich natural setting provides students with both therapeutic benefits and practical life-skills development, fostering an immersive learning space that promotes emotional growth, self-esteem, responsibility, and engagement.

Student profile

- 1.6 Lodge Farm caters to young people who have struggled to thrive in mainstream or specialist education environments. All enrolled students hold Education, Health & Care (EHC) Plans and commonly present with social, emotional, and mental health challenges, as well as neurodevelopmental needs such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).



Teaching Approach

- 1.7 The facility operates with a strongly therapeutic ethos, underpinned by a highly skilled multidisciplinary team. Leadership comprises a Governor, Proprietor, Headteacher, and Assistant Head for Therapy and Welfare. One-to-one support is provided which offers educational, emotional and development advantages including tailored instructions and increased attention.

Outcomes & Progression

- 1.8 Lodge Farm has an exemplary record of leading students toward post-16 opportunities. Since its independent operation began, 100 % of Year 11 leavers have successfully transitioned into mainstream further education or training placements.



2 THE SITE / THE PROPOSAL AND CONTEXT

- 2.1 The site comprises of a natural education facility within the setting of the woodland as part of Lodge Farm Education.
- 2.2 Lodge Farm Education are committed to continual improvement and ensuring provision for current and future pupils is the best it can possibly be. The location and extent of the school is shown in figure 1. The farm forms part of a wider agricultural holding with the applicant also owning the land denoted in blue and all of the woodland east of the track.

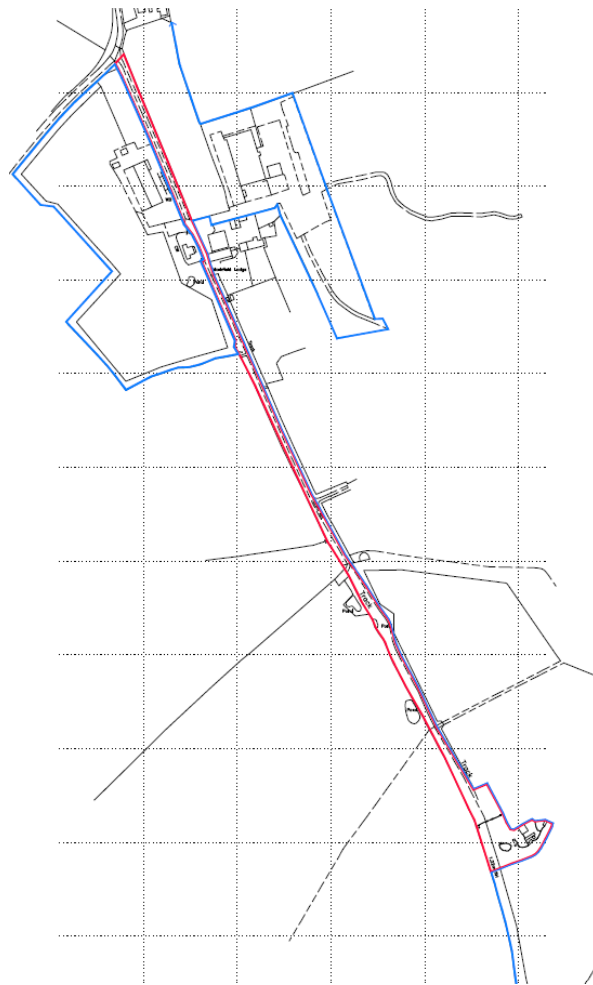


Figure 1: Location Plan

- 2.3 The site comprises of various portacabins, portable toilets and wooden structures for sheds, storage, livestock and a generator. The site is encompassed by mature woodland to the east and open pastureland to the west. There is a central courtyard surrounding the facilities and areas for growing fruit and vegetables and a greenhouse. Ultimately, the existing facilities are basic which is reflected in Lodge Farms curriculum to bring students back to nature within a comfortable learning



environment. The extent of structures on the site is illustrated in the below existing site plan. To accommodate the built form no woodland or trees have been removed and the natural open space has been utilised. Gravel has been used rather than hardstanding.

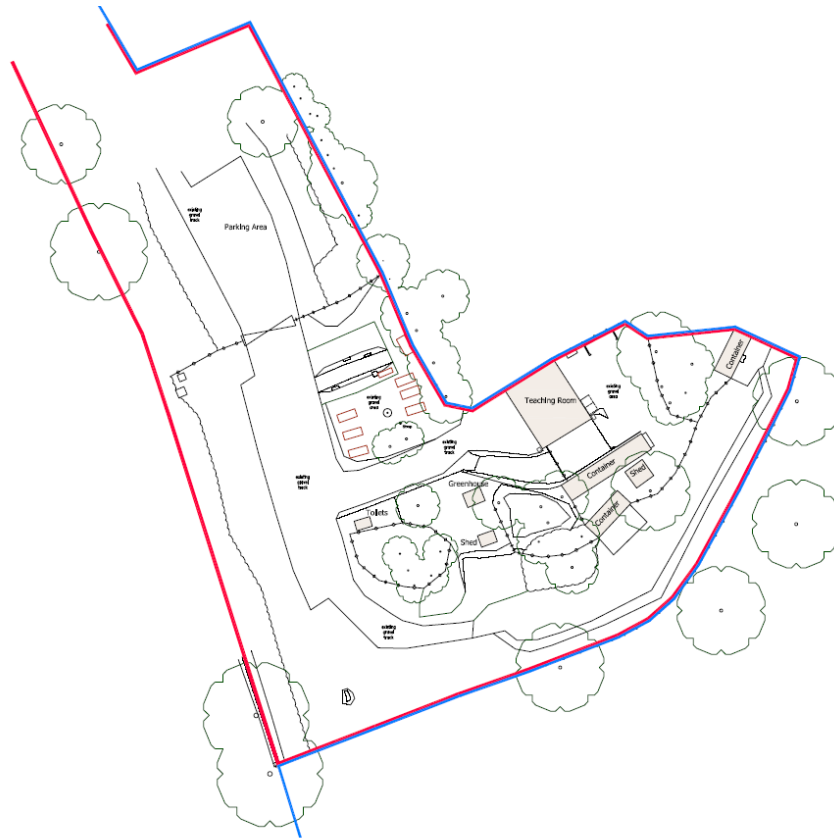


Figure 2: Site Plan





Figure 3: Site Photographs

- 2.4 Access is from the main road, Broad Lane, down a private road where no parking or pedestrians are allowed, as illustrated in the below photograph. The road then leads into a formal access track straight down to the education facility with suitable parking before entering the main education space.



Figure 4: Access from Broad Lane (private road)



- 2.5 In terms of numbers on site at one time, there are 15 students and 7 staff in total who access the facilities. Due to the nature of the school and the multi-site approach there would be a maximum of 10 staff and students on site per day. Students are transported to the site by shared taxi facilities or minibus to limit the number of cars on site. Staff are also encouraged to car share, bike or join the students on the minibus from other sites. Vehicles are therefore kept to a minimum.
- 2.6 Students main base site will either be Anstey or Ratby depending on their age and ability.
- 2.7 The site is used as therapeutic learning for students with special needs and trauma backgrounds. The calming woods, trees and nature support the students to get the best environment to learn in, removing all barriers of traditional school settings that have caused pupil's previous distress. The students learn on the site environmental studies, gardening, science and vocational studies as well as maths and English being embedded into the curriculum.
- 2.8 Operationally, the school opens from 9am until 3pm during term time, the same dates as Leicester County and staff arrive at 8:30am until 4pm. The site only operates during term time. Toilets are available on site and the septic tank is emptied once every other month. Currently, the electric (heating and lighting) is supplied via a portable generator, in the future the school are planning to look into more environmentally friendly forms of energy such as solar panels.
- 2.9 The site lies within natural and semi-natural open space. The site is within Flood Zone 1 so is at the lowest risk of flooding. The site is not subject to any other planning designations. Detailed consideration and assessment of existing site constraints has informed the subject proposals, including retention of the open space.

Planning History

- 2.10 Following a review of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council's planning records available online, there is no relevant planning history for the application site.



3 PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

- 3.1 This section identifies national and local policy and guidance relevant to the proposal.

The Development Plan

- 3.2 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires applications for planning permission to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In addition, Government policy, principally the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') 2024 is of relevance.
- 3.3 The statutory Development Plan, against which this application should be determined, comprises of the Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council Core Strategy (2009) and the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies (2016). The Hinckley and Bosworth Local Plan 2020-41 has required further Regulation 18 consultation following the emergence of evidence suggesting that the spatial strategy that was consulted on was no longer deliverable, alongside significant updates to the NPPF which have not been fully considered. Therefore, the emerging Local Plan is given no weight at present.
- 3.4 The weight that can be placed on these policies is determined by the degrees to which they are in conformity with the NPPF, along with their adopting status. The most relevant policies to determine a formal submission would be:

Hinckley and Bosworth Core Strategy 2006 – 2026 (Adopted 2009)

- 3.5 Policy 7: Key Rural Centres, Markfield is identified as a key rural centre which is approximately 1.7 miles east of the application site. The centres provide key services to their rural hinterland.

Hinckley and Bosworth Local Plan 2006 –2026 Site Allocations and Development Management Policies DPD, 2016

- 3.6 The application site is identified as natural and semi-natural open space on the adopted Policies Map.

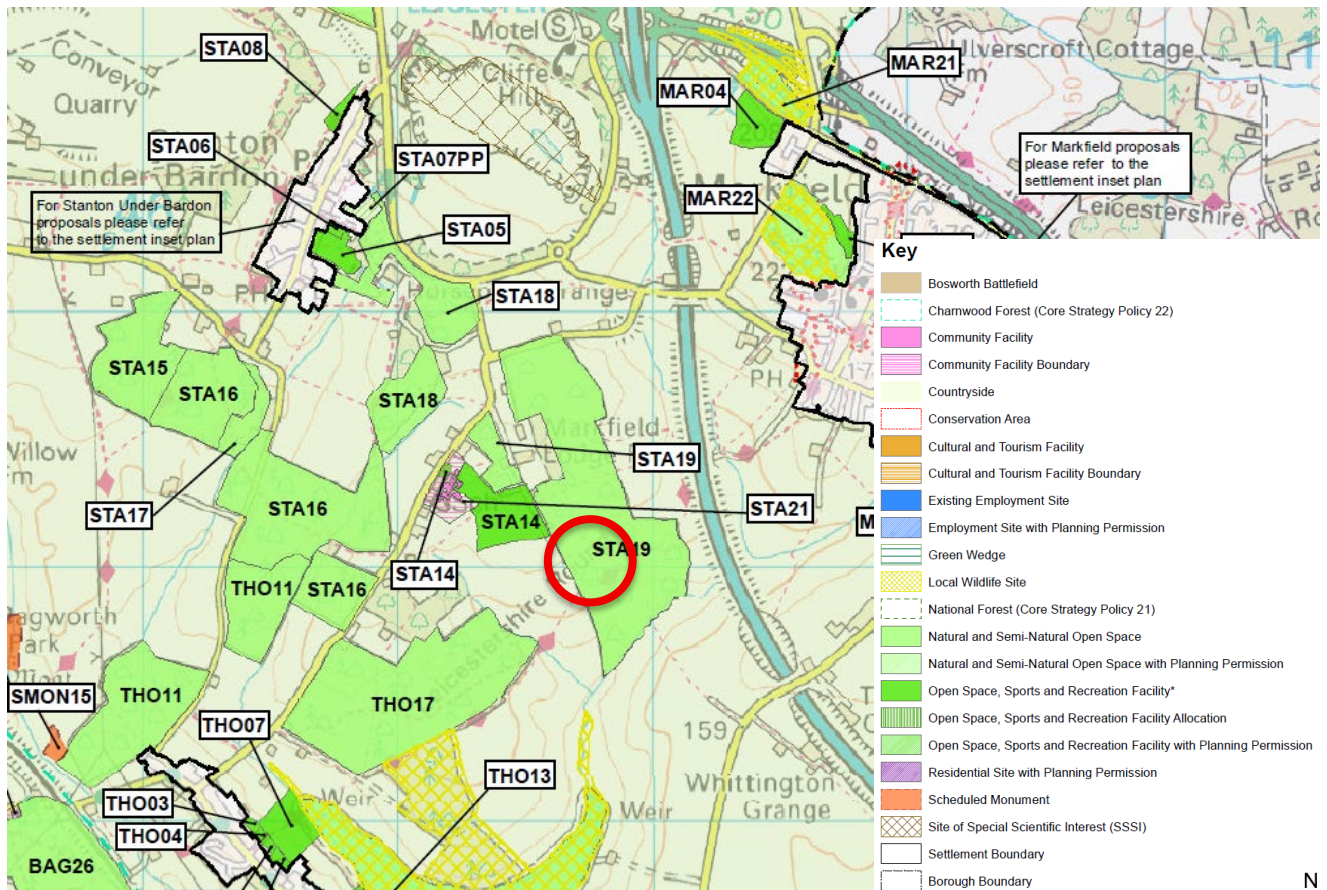


Figure 5: Proposal Map

- 3.7 Policy DM1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Local Plan will be approved without delay, and where there are no policies relevant to the application or the relevant policies are out of date at the time of making a decision, then the Borough will grant permission.
- 3.8 Policy DM4: Safeguarding the Countryside and Settlement Separation aims to protect the intrinsic value, beauty, open character and landscape character through safeguarding the countryside from unsustainable development.
- 3.9 Policy DM6: Enhancement of Biodiversity and Geological Interest states that development should conserve and enhance features of nature conservation and geological value with on site features being retained, buffered and managed favourably to maintain their ecological value.
- 3.10 Policy DM9: Safeguarding Natural and Semi-Natural Open Spaces states all developments within these spaces should seek to retain and enhance the accessibility of the space and its recreational value whilst ensuring the biodiversity and conservation value is also enhanced. Development is only considered appropriate where:



- A) *The proposal relates to the enhancement of the area for recreational purposes and only where this does not lead to the loss of damage of the areas biodiversity value;*
- B) *It relates to the enhancement of the area's biodiversity or conservation value;*
- C) *It would promote the establishment and enhancement of pedestrian footpaths and cycle ways;*

3.11 Policy DM10: Development and Design provides criterion which proposals are assessed against with development being permitted provided that the requirements of the policy are met including not having a significant adverse impact on neighbouring amenity, complements or enhances character of the surrounding area, use of materials and high standard of landscaping.

3.12 Policy DM18: Vehicle Parking Standards clarifies that all proposals for new development will be required to have an appropriate level of parking justified by the location, type of housing and other modes of transport available.

National Planning Policy Framework 2024

3.13 The NPPF provides a statement of planning policy at a national level and is a significant material consideration in the determination of planning applications. At its heart is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Among other things, it provides for several objectives relevant to the proposal, including:

- The achievement of sustainable development (para 7)
- A presumption in favour of sustainable development in planning related decisions (para 11)
- The need for a plan-led planning system, with plans providing a positive vision for the future of an area and a framework for addressing economic, social and environmental priorities (para 15)
- Plan policies to set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development, and make sufficient provision for development including housing and transport infrastructure (para 20)
- The avoidance of significant adverse impacts on the plan's economic, social and environmental objectives (para 33)
- The need to recognise and address specific locational requirements of different sectors (para 87)
- Enabling retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities (para 88)
- Achieving healthy, inclusive and safe places (para 96)



- **Great weight** to be given to the need to create, expand or alter schools (para 100)
- Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land should not be built on unless the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision (Para 104)
- Promoting sustainable transport (paras 109 – 114)
- Making more effective use of sites that provide community services (para 128)
- Achieving well designed places (para 131)
- Mitigating and adapting to climate change (para 162)

3.14 It is worth emphasising Paragraph 100 of the Framework states:

'It is important that a sufficient choice of school and post-16 places are available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. They should:

- A) Give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools and post-16 facilities through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications; and*
- B) Work with school and post-16 promoters, delivery partners and statutory bodies to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted.*



4 PLANNING ASSESSMENT

Principle of Development

- 4.1 The principle of development is primarily assessed against the statutory Development Plan for the area, comprising the Hinckley and Bosworth Core Strategy (2009) and the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies DPD (2016), alongside the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024. Collectively, these documents promote sustainable development, seek to protect the intrinsic character of the countryside, and support the delivery of essential community infrastructure, including education facilities.
- 4.2 The retrospective application proposes the change of use of woodland land to an operational small-scale, alternative education provision within a natural woodland setting. The proposed use aligns closely with the aims of the NPPF (2024), particularly paragraph 100, which gives *great weight* to the need to create, expand or alter schools. The development supports the delivery of a specialist education facility for young people with complex additional needs — a key societal objective — and thereby directly contributes to the creation of inclusive, safe, and healthy places as outlined in paragraph 96 of the NPPF.
- 4.3 The site is located within an area designated as natural and semi-natural open space on the adopted Policies Map. Policy DM9 (Safeguarding Natural and Semi-Natural Open Spaces) is therefore relevant. The proposed use is considered compatible with this designation, as it enhances the area's recreational and educational value without resulting in significant harm to its biodiversity or landscape character. The development is low impact, utilising temporary and lightweight structures, avoiding hardstanding, and retaining the natural features of the woodland. No trees have been removed, and the character of the site remains substantially unaltered.
- 4.4 Policy DM4 (Safeguarding the Countryside and Settlement Separation) seeks to protect the open and rural character of the countryside from unsustainable development. The proposed use is intrinsically tied to the natural and rural character of the site and does not constitute intrusive or urbanising development. The use of the land for outdoor therapeutic education aligns with both the physical context and landscape sensitivity and therefore does not conflict with Policy DM4.
- 4.5 Leicestershire County Council have identified that the number of children attending specialist provision is 'significantly above the national average'. It is identified across the whole of Leicester/Leicestershire that there is an increase of young people being issued with an EHCP and a risk of greater gaps of achievement.



(Information taken from the *Leicestershire Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2017 – 2020*, and *Leicester's strategy for supporting children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) 2019–2022*).

- 4.6 Lodge Farm Education opens itself to working alongside authorities to achieve aims set out in the SEND strategies; working towards maximum achievement for the young person promoting and gaining access to vocational and work placement experiences. Along with this, their aim is to develop independence through life skills, community access and self-esteem. Lodge Farm's vision is to allow each young person with an EHCP to achieve their aspirations, allowing them to be a valued and contributing member to their community and in turn to the whole of Leicestershire.
- 4.7 Paragraph 100 of the NPPF is unequivocal in its support for schemes of this nature, which directly deliver necessary school capacity (to put this in context, 'great weight' is also the weight to be given to the protection of National Parks, AONB and heritage assets). It is clear, that harms arising would need to be very significant in order to outweigh the clear and deliverable public benefit.
- 4.8 In policy terms, the proposed development represents a sensitive and necessary diversification of land use that brings direct educational and social benefits. It is appropriately located, proportionate in scale, and maintains the natural character and ecological value of the site. As such, it is considered to represent sustainable development in accordance with the Local Plan and the NPPF, and the principle of the proposed use is acceptable.

Natural and Semi-Natural Open Space

- 4.9 The application site lies within natural and semi-natural open space. Paragraph 104 of the NPPF is clear that development of existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be permitted unless one of three exceptions applies. The proposed use meets exception (c), as the development is for *alternative recreational and educational provision* where the benefits clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.
- 4.10 The site was previously under agricultural use and did not provide any formal recreational or sports function for the public. Its current use as an alternative educational setting has introduced a recreational, health and wellbeing function of significantly greater social value. The natural woodland, gardens, and farm structures now form the basis of a therapeutic curriculum, giving young people the opportunity to learn outdoors, undertake horticulture, environmental studies, and physical activities within a natural setting. This is entirely consistent with the



NPPF's definition of alternative recreational provision and delivers community benefits that outweigh any perceived loss of agricultural open space.

- 4.11 Moreover, the educational use maintains the openness and character of the land and safeguards it from intensive built development. The open space is therefore not "lost" in physical terms; rather, its value has been enhanced through a new function which integrates educational, recreational and therapeutic outcomes in a natural environment. The proposal does not intrude or impact the public rights of ways within the open space which are accessible.
- 4.12 Policy DM9 requires that development within natural and semi-natural open spaces should retain and enhance accessibility, recreational value, and biodiversity. The proposed use fully aligns with these requirements:
- **Recreational and Educational Value** – The proposal introduces structured recreational use of the woodland and open land in the form of outdoor learning, gardening, and nature-based activities. These uses enhance the accessibility and enjoyment of the land for an important and under-served section of the community, namely children and young people with complex needs.
 - **Biodiversity and Conservation** – No trees have been removed, no significant hardstanding introduced, and ecological surveys confirm the site has only low ecological interest. The school actively manages the site through gardening, planting and habitat creation, which enhances biodiversity and accords with the principle of net gain. Future opportunities, such as scrub establishment and sustainable energy initiatives, will further strengthen this compliance.
 - **Sustainable Access** – While not a public recreational site, the proposal reduces car dependency through shared transport, car sharing and minibus provision, thereby limiting transport impacts and aligning with Policy DM9(c) by maintaining accessibility through safe and sustainable modes.
- 4.13 Overall, the proposal transforms a previously under-utilised area of agricultural land into a multifunctional space that delivers therapeutic, recreational and biodiversity benefits in harmony with the aims of Policy DM9.
- 4.14 In terms of compliance with **Paragraph 104 of the NPPF** and **Policy DM9 of the Development Management Policies DPD**, the development represents a form of alternative recreational and educational provision where the benefits demonstrably outweigh any limited loss of the site's former agricultural function. The proposal retains the openness and biodiversity of the land, introduces new recreational and therapeutic uses, and ensures that accessibility and ecological value are not only safeguarded but actively enhanced. Accordingly, the



development is in full accordance with both national and local policy safeguards relating to open space.

Design and Amenity

- 4.15 The design concept behind the school is fit-for-purpose within a natural environment which is not a typical school building and offers an alternative education setting for pupils.
- 4.16 The proposed development comprises a modest and functional layout consistent with the operational needs of a small-scale alternative education setting. The layout fosters a safe and contained learning environment while maintaining clear visual cohesion with the site's rural and woodland character.
- 4.17 The built form is intentionally low in scale and lightweight in appearance, employing timber materials and gravel surfacing to minimise visual impact and avoid permanent alteration to the landscape. The retention of existing trees and woodland, alongside the absence of any significant hardstanding or formal boundary treatments other than heras temporary fencing required to meet Ofsted requirements, ensures that the design integrates sensitively within its natural surroundings. As a result, the scheme enhances rather than detracts from the site's ecological and aesthetic value.
- 4.18 Lodge Farm Education, which the subject site is identified as, are committed to delivering natural educational buildings in natural settings. It would run completely contrary to the intentions, aspirations and requirements of all parties to apply a development that would lower the quality of the local environment. The school is an extension / satellite of Wolfdale and Ratby School.
- 4.19 In terms of residential amenity, the site is well separated from nearby dwellings, accessed via a private road, and benefits from mature tree screening on all boundaries. The limited number of students and staff on-site at any one time, coupled with the use of shared transport arrangements, ensures that any impacts from noise, activity, or vehicle movements are minimal. Accordingly, the proposal has no adverse effect on neighbouring amenity and represents an appropriate and sensitive form of development in both visual and operational terms.

Transport, Access and Parking

- 4.20 The site is accessed via a private road off Broad Lane, which leads to a formal access track terminating at a dedicated parking and drop-off area within the education facility. As illustrated in the accompanying Site Plan, this arrangement provides a controlled and safe access point for vehicles and pedestrians,



minimising disruption to the local highway network and ensuring secure movement to and from the site.

- 4.21 In terms of operations, the facility accommodates a very limited number of students and staff on-site at any one time. While a total of 15 students and 7 staff are associated with the provision, the nature of the multi-site operation ensures a maximum of 10 people are present on-site during any typical day. This significantly reduces transport demands. Student transport is managed through shared taxi services and minibuses, coordinated to ensure minimal vehicular trips to the site. Staff are actively encouraged to either car share, cycle, or travel with students via the minibus. These arrangements significantly reduce car dependency and support the principles of sustainable transport in line with Paragraphs 109–114 of the NPPF.
- 4.22 Overall, the development does not give rise to any transport, access, or parking concerns. The proposed use generates minimal traffic, is supported by sustainable transport practices, and benefits from safe and suitable access. The proposal therefore complies with Policy DM18 of the Hinckley and Bosworth Local Plan and the sustainable transport objectives set out in the NPPF.

Ecology

- 4.23 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been carried out by Rachel Hacking Ecology. The assessment concludes that no further survey work is required and the site has a low level of ecological interest with features including immature mixed woodland, modified grassland and a vegetated garden.
- 4.24 In terms of BNG, establishing scrub habitat on modified grassland will provide a net gain for biodiversity and comply with legislation and policy.

Benefits

- 4.25 When policies of the Framework are taken as a whole, there is no doubt that the benefits of the proposed development must be given significant weight. The key benefits of the proposal would, therefore, include:
- **Provision of Alternative Education:** Delivers a much-needed specialist education facility for students with complex needs, all of whom hold Education, Health & Care (EHC) Plans.
 - **Inclusive and Therapeutic Learning Environment:** Offers a nature-based, trauma-informed setting that promotes emotional wellbeing, life skills, and re-engagement with learning.



- **Supports Educational Outcomes:** Demonstrates 100% successful transitions of Year 11 students into post-16 education or training since becoming independent in 2020.
- **Sustainable and Low-Impact Development:** Utilises temporary, low-scale structures with minimal hardstanding, retaining the site's natural features and ecological value.
- **No Adverse Landscape or Biodiversity Impact:** No trees have been removed; site integrates into its woodland context and enhances outdoor recreational value in line with Policy DM9.
- **Sustainable Travel Measures:** Promotes shared transport and car-sharing for students and staff, reducing vehicle movements and aligning with NPPF objectives on sustainable transport.
- **Positive Social Value:** Provides vital educational support to young people who are unable to access mainstream or traditional special education settings.
- **Efficient Use of Land:** Makes productive use of previously agricultural land without compromising its rural character or function.

4.26 Overall, the public benefits derived from the development proposals are extensive and positively contribute socially, economically and environmentally to the extent that the balance substantially and significantly weighs in favour of granting planning permission for the development as proposed.

4.27 As with any planning application and development proposal it is a requirement to rationally weigh the public benefits of the proposals against any harms arising, taking into account potential mitigation. In this case the public benefits of school improvements and the indirect benefits to health and welfare outcomes, overwhelmingly support the proposals. With mitigation, the environmental and off-site impacts of the development (inevitable in any infrastructure project) can be fully contained and managed to acceptable level, as demonstrated by the supporting evidence provided. Any residual impacts identified are massively outweighed by the social, environmental and economic benefits of the proposals as a whole and either individually or collectively are not significant, demonstrable and are clearly not determinative.



5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Lodge Farm Education are seeking retrospective planning permission for the change of use of agricultural land to an operational small alternative education provision on land at Broad Lane, Markfield.
- 5.2 At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. It directs that sustainable development should be approved without delay. An assessment of the proposals against national and local planning frameworks has demonstrated that the identified options would accord with the principles and objectives of relevant policy and guidance, in particular, NPPF Paragraph 100 which gives great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools to make available a sufficient choice of school places.
- 5.3 The use of the site is low impact, sensitively designed, and operationally discreet. It preserves the intrinsic value and character of the surrounding countryside, enhances the natural and semi-natural open space designation through therapeutic outdoor learning, and avoids any adverse impact on neighbouring amenity, landscape, or biodiversity. Access and transport arrangements are well-managed and sustainable, with minimal vehicle movements and no associated harm to highway safety.
- 5.4 The retrospective application has been positively prepared and sought to understand and respond to site constraints, in turn minimising and mitigating any potential adverse impacts.
- 5.5 For the reasons set out in this Statement, the overall planning balance overwhelmingly weighs in favour of the application and should be supported by the Council, as the local planning authority.

**Working together to deliver positive
planning solutions.**

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