

HOME FARM HUB

-A NEW WAY OF WORKING IN NATURE FOR A POST-COVID WORLD-



30 June, 2021 – The Aldenham Estate has submitted a planning application to Hertsmere Council to convert its Home Farm buildings into a beautifully designed flexible workspace that aims to meet the needs of individuals and small businesses in a post-Covid working world.

A new way of working for the local area

This new business hub, set within 150 acres of parkland on London’s doorstep, is destined to become the *go-to* destination for the local business community; offering a new way of working to those looking for an alternative to London commuting or working from home. New-build, high-spec office accommodation and meeting spaces will create a vibrant, collaborative atmosphere, with flexible memberships and longer-term tenancies available. Wellbeing will be boosted by walks or runs around the lake and gardens, yoga classes in the exercise studio, and tending to the kitchen garden during a work break.

Sympathetic design

Set in the historic park and garden surrounding Aldenham House (now Haberdashers Aske’s School), Home Farm was once a “model farm” and showpiece of the estate. With the farm unable to keep pace with the post-war growth of intensive agriculture and machinery, it has gradually moved into industrial use and many buildings have deteriorated.

Under plans submitted, the more modern and worn cattle sheds and barn will be rebuilt as modern yet sympathetic office space. In addition, the Grade II listed farm buildings and original layout will be reinstated – restoring Gothic revival architect William Butterfield’s vision.



As well as high-grade office accommodation, there will be indoor space for yoga and exercise classes, creative workshops, business lunches and meetings. The carefully planned deli-style café

will provide a buzzing, productive environment for team gatherings and informal meetings, fuelled by freshly cooked food and delicious coffee.

Working with nature

The light, ventilated indoor spaces, designed by Thomas Croft Architects, will be built into a thoughtfully designed landscaping scheme. By providing access to the Aldenham House's historic parkland with its acres of meadows, woodland and water features, the aim is to give busy working people the chance to increase their interaction with nature and enjoy the creativity, inspiration and mental resilience this connectedness provides – all while all on the day job. As Professor Miles Richardson set out in his recent paper about Nature Connectedness during the Pandemic, 'practical efforts should focus on creating a long-term habit of being out in and connecting with nature, and an everyday habit of noticing nature.'¹

Supporting this belief that we all work more constructively and creatively when inspired by nature, the scheme's landscape, designed by the **internationally renowned Tom Stuart-Smith**, offers a range of contemplative outdoor spaces and "meeting rooms" as well as a community garden where members can plant their own vegetables and tend to them during their lunch break (or the less green-fingered can simply enjoy home-grown produce in the café/deli).

Home Farm Hub's Garden Designer Tom Stuart-Smith explains: "The Home Farm proposals present a fantastic opportunity for people to discover a new type of workspace, within a project that breathes new life into the historic farm buildings and yard, that is intimately interconnected with a variety of gardened spaces to make a close-textured and welcoming environment for working and quiet recreation. The proposal to create a new working garden at the heart of the development is particularly exciting and sets the tone for the whole development, the core of which connects out to the surrounding historic Aldenham parkland, creating an astounding environment that can be more widely shared with the local community."

Estate Director Jessica Allen-Back, who is leading her family's efforts to regenerate and diversify the farm, is also passionate about the scheme's green credentials:

"There is also a strong emphasis on providing for a sustainable future, including renovating our historic buildings to meet modern sustainability targets, designing new buildings to meet the highest possible sustainability criteria, and ensuring greater biodiversity on our land. The Estate is committed to supporting green belt policy, rejuvenating it to meet the requirements of local people, and providing access to these historic parklands and gardens."

Home Farm Hub's Architect Tom Croft adds: "We are proud to be part of the team here renovating the Home Farm back to its former glory so it can be the home of a more flexible way of working in Hertsmere, still within high specification office buildings but surrounded by all the amenities workers expect but set in idyllic natural surroundings"

For more information and to sign up for updates on the project, visit www.homefarmhub.co.uk

¹ Research on Nature Engagement for Human and Nature's Wellbeing during the Corona Pandemic. <<https://derby.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10545/625792/JPMH%20Accepted.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1>>



ENDS

Notes for Editors;

This is a full planning application submitted to Hertsmere for;

Redevelopment, refurbishment and extension of existing buildings to form a new office hub to include a deli-style café and multi-purpose function room with an extensive new landscaping scheme and associated car parking.

The Aldenham Estate

Home Farm is being promoted by the Gibbs family, the owners of the Aldenham Estate, and the site forms part of the Grade II registered park that surrounds Aldenham House, which is now part of Haberdashers Aske's School. At the turn of the 19th century Henry Hucks Gibbs, together with his son Vicary, created the famous park and gardens at Aldenham House and the Aldenham Estate became renowned for its botanical and rare tree collections, as well as for its water gardens, with its sequence of small lakes and characterful bridges.

The current generation of the Gibbs family is committed to reviving the Aldenham Estate's history of sustainable stewardship responsibilities. This project represents the family's drive to upgrade and revive its assets so that they are more responsive to the needs of local people and modern lifestyles, whilst promoting the importance of nature for people's mental and physical health.

The Covid-19 pandemic has provided employers with a greater understanding of their workforce's need to work locally and many reports have highlighted the beneficial impact on wellbeing and productivity that comes from shortening commutes and providing employees with access to nature and outdoor space. Here there is an unique opportunity for Hertsmere to reverse the trend of local residents commuting into London and to create a new type of local workspace for its residents, which will increase choice and provide an economic stimulus to the local area.

The Home Farm proposal includes the high quality workspace that will attract the creative and knowledge-based industries that the Borough needs to support the growing film and television industry.

The proposed development strongly emphasises the need to build for a sustainable future, including carbon zero buildings, maintenance and improved use of historic buildings, and greater habitat

biodiversity within the landscape setting. The Aldenham Estate sits entirely within the Green Belt area and this proposal reflects Green Belt policy by enhancing a previously developed site to create spaces that support local residents and businesses.

Heritage

The Home Farm at Aldenham was largely built between 1880 to 1895 as part of Henry Hucks Gibbs' plans for the park, gardens and wider estate. Conceived as a "model farm", the only original buildings that remain are the decorative farmhouse and attached dairy, now Grade II listed. They were designed by William Butterfield, a revered gothic revival architect.

Whilst the house and dairy were originally part of Home Farm, they sit outside the application boundary of this scheme. The associated historic brick outbuildings have been much altered over the last century, but for the purposes of this scheme are treated as Grade II listed by virtue of their being within the curtilage of the original farmhouse. The emphasis of the scheme is therefore to improve the overall setting of these historic buildings.

Like so many farms in this area, Home Farm suffered in the post-war years from attempts to adapt it to intensive farming and many of the historic buildings were replaced by modern farming structures. Despite this, the farm was unable to support the demands of modern food production and the former agricultural buildings were replaced with commercial uses over many decades. Now used for car sales, coach parking and a range of storage and workshops, these buildings are now largely obsolete and their dilapidated appearance detracts from the setting of the listed farmhouse, the historic park and the glamping site also adjacent to this complex. The historic outbuildings themselves are much altered and in desperate need of investment.

The Home Farm Hub

The proposals, subject to this application, herald an exciting new future for Home Farm.

They will provide workspace for a number of local small businesses and individuals, meeting modern office requirements in well designed units, benefitting from a high specification of services. The office hub will be complemented by other amenities including a deli-style café and a multi-purpose function room / studio. The latter will be available for public hire and, being an adaptable space, will be suited to a wide range of uses from business conferences to yoga, exhibitions or private dining, also supporting the operations of Home Farm Glamping.

The scheme reimagines the original concept and layout of the model farm and has been designed to complement what survives of Butterfield's charming but largely lost composition.

The Gibbs Family intends to manage the new development themselves to ensure the office hub, deli-style café and multi-purpose function room are run sustainably and to a high standard. Whilst the aim is for commercial success, the emphasis is to create an asset that is of a high quality, in keeping with the surrounding area and able to sustain itself for generations to come.

The Landscape scheme

An important aspect of this proposal is the new landscaping scheme. The proposal seeks to revive some of the horticultural vibrancy lost in this area since the majority of the historic park and garden became incorporated into the adjacent school grounds. It is proposed that this will be achieved by the extensive and imaginative plan designed by the famous landscape architect and local garden designer Tom Stuart-Smith (creator of three Best in Show and eight Gold Medal winning gardens at Chelsea Flower Show).

The essence of the proposals is to create a blend of soft and hard landscaped courtyards around the existing and new buildings within Home Farm, with each courtyard being distinct from the others. Each of these spaces will have a different purpose for varying activities based around gardening, health and wellbeing. This means that those working in or visiting Home Farm, as well as the glamping visitors next door, will be able to enjoy the unique benefits that the landscaping scheme offers. These will range from outdoor working areas and more contemplative spaces to intimate private event space and productive food gardens.

The scheme will also invite members and guests to explore the more historic parts of the protected park, such as the bridge over Tykes Water, a popular film location, which is currently not open to the public.

Access

The access into the site is to be improved and the gardens will provide a welcoming sense of arrival as well as screening vehicles, which are to be parked away from the courtyards, on the northern edge of the site. The Estate has commissioned its consultants to prepare a green transport plan to reduce the use of private cars and help encourage access to the site by more sustainable means such as walking, cycling and public transport.

Benefits

This scheme offers a large number of planning benefits which have been identified by the project's consultant team. These are set out below, with reference to the appropriate document submitted with the application (a list of supporting documents is attached).

The benefits include:

- Jobs for local people; there is a significant shortage of office accommodation in Hertsmere, particularly for SME's and start-up sectors critical to employment growth. (See marketing report by Hedge, workspace advisers/agents).
- This proposal is for a unique office hub, which offers high quality accommodation supported by a range of amenities designed to meet the demand from a post-Covid workforce who wish to work closer to home in a rural setting (See Design & Access Statement (DAS) and Hedge report).
- The scheme also offers facilities for other local businesses, particularly those who want a stimulating meeting location away from their normal base or those who need a close connection to the aerodrome. (Hedge report)
- The business facilities here are designed to appeal to the creative business sector and will complement the new Sky Studios development in Borehamwood, as well as the existing film and media businesses in Hertsmere. (DAS and Hedge report)
- The diverse range of outdoor spaces created by the innovative garden design will be a truly unique asset, not only for those who will work in the business hub but also for the public wishing to use the deli-style café, multi-use function room or enjoying a stay at the Home Farm Glamping site next door.
- It is intended that there will be a programme of events helping schools and local bodies to learn more about matters like horticulture, growing food and understanding the local wildlife (see Landscape Strategy, Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Planning Statement).
- The proposals will also complement the glamping site adjacent and providing much needed "wet weather" activities as well the benefits that the garden will provide.
- The scheme will recreate the historic layout of the model farm, significantly improving the setting of the listed farmhouse and dairy as well as this part of the Registered Park and Garden. (see Heritage Report).

- Re-configuring the buildings into a more compact layout will reduce the intrusion into the green belt and improve the feeling of openness in the surrounding area (see Planning Statement).
- The proposals will encourage accessibility into and public knowledge of the once-famous park and gardens of Aldenham House. Visitors will be encouraged to appreciate local history as well as enjoy the spaces, footpaths and water features, including the bridge over Tykes Water. (see Heritage and Planning Statements)
- The landscape scheme will also increase the range of wildlife habitats to significantly improve the level of biodiversity on site. (see Ecological Impact Assessment).
- The office hub is aiming to achieve a BREEAM rating of Excellent. In addition, the refurbished buildings will achieve an on-site CO2 reduction of 80% when compared to the existing structures, and the new buildings will achieve a reduction of 62% when compared with a contemporary standard, both contributing to Hertsmere's efforts to address the declared Climate Emergency. (see DAS and Climate Change & Energy Strategy).
- The scheme is in full accordance with the statutory Development Plan including related policies on sustainable transport and the green belt (see Transport and Planning Statements)

We look forward to progressing this application positively with the Council. Please contact David Sowerby in the first instance (at David@aldenhamestate.co.uk) with any comments or queries.