
F/YR25/0526/F

Applicant: Mr S Rutterford

**Agent: Mr R Papworth
Morton & Hall Consulting Ltd**

49 Whittlesey Road, March, Cambridgeshire, PE15 0AG

Erect 12 x light industrial units and a link extension to existing units, involving the demolition of existing building

Officer recommendation: Refuse

Reason for Committee: Number of comments from members of the public contrary to Officer recommendation.

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This proposal seeks to erect 12 light industrial units, link two existing units, as well as demolish an existing single storey store / office at 49 Whittlesey Road, March.
- 1.2 The site is in a rural area, located just beyond the western edge of the town of March. The proposal, therefore, falls to be considered against the policies of restraint that apply to an elsewhere location – principally Fenland Local Plan Policy LP3 – to protect the attractive largely undeveloped rural character. The proposal would be a significant urbanisation of the countryside. The land whilst currently in light industrial use would be subject to a significant intensification of activity and development when compared to the present situation on site.
- 1.3 The development would also be contrary to settlement policy for the District more generally, as set out in Policy LP3, which together with other policies, steers most new development to those larger places that offer the best access to services and facilities (both now and for the foreseeable future). This can help reduce the need to travel, as well as making best use of existing infrastructure and previously developed land in built-up areas.
- 1.4 This is not a sustainable location. There would be a high reliance on the use of the private car by staff to get to and from the site because of its location on an unlit road with no footpaths.
- 1.5 The site is within Flood Zone 3 – in an area at the highest risk of flooding – in respect of which a sequential test is required to be passed (as per Local Plan Policy LP14 and the NPPF) to establish if there are alternative suitable sites at lesser flood risk that should be developed in preference to a site within Flood Zone 3. The purpose of the sequential test is to direct new development to sites at the least risk of flooding. In this instance, the sequential test is not considered to be passed. There has been no systemic assessment of allocated employment sites across the District to establish if suitable alternative sites, with lower flood risk, are available. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it has, therefore, to be concluded that the proposals will put people and property at an unnecessarily high risk of being affected by flooding.

2 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 This site currently contains three light industrial units and lies on the south side of Whittlesey Road, March, in the countryside outside of and functionally isolated from the town.
- 2.2 One of the existing units is proposed to be demolished located at the north of the site toward the site entrance. The site is largely hard surfaced with areas of open storage of materials associated with the existing businesses on site.
- 2.3 The site is bordered by 2-metre-high palisade fencing. A drainage ditch is located beyond the southern rear boundary with a grassed field and the marina beyond. To the east are two industrial buildings in use by D.R. Betts Carpentry, Fen View Motors, Anglian Mobility, Fenn Holidays, ABC Boat Hire and LA Motor Group, as well as a residential property at 2 Marina Drive. To the north beyond Whittlesey Road are 5 industrial units and a detached industrial shed currently under construction following approval of F/YR24/0270/F to replace an existing builder's yard. To the west of the site development has been approved for the erection of 1 x office, 1 x vehicle workshop and 1 x training centre after approval of F/YR21/0887/F following a committee overturn.
- 2.4 The overall character of the location is of a loose scattering of development within a predominately undeveloped rural environment.

3 PROPOSAL

- 3.1 This proposal seeks to erect 12 light industrial units, link two existing units, as well as demolish an existing single storey store / office at 49 Whittlesey Road, March.
- 3.2 10 new units will be located adjacent to the western boundary where the two existing units are to be retained. Units 1 to 5 will be located to the north of Unit A, with Units 6 to 10 located to the south of Unit B. 2 units will be located in the south-east corner of the site. To the frontage of each unit and along the eastern boundary 69 parking spaces will be provided. A bin store and cycle store will be located close to the site entrance with a further bin store located at the end of a turning head opposite existing Unit A. Solar panels are to be sited on the east facing roof slope on 11 of the 12 proposed units. A small amount of landscaping will be sited along the northern, eastern and southern boundaries.
- 3.3 The existing steel single storey store/office to the northern central area of the site is to be demolished. The steel framed industrial storage units located on the western boundary are to be retained with the construction of new units to the north and south. The submitted information states that the existing units to be retained are utilised for storage of buses.
- 3.4 Units 1 to 10 will be constructed from goosewing grey corrugated steel walls with a sapphire blue corrugated steel roof. Each unit will have roller shutter doors and pedestrian frontage doors with fire exit doors to the rear. Units 1 to 5 will be 18 metres in depth and Units 6 to 10 will be 18.7 metres in depth. The new units have an eaves height of 6.2 metres and a ridge height of 8.6 metres.
- 3.5 Units 11 and 12 are to measure 18 metres in depth, 15.5 metres in width, have an eaves height of 6.2 metres and a ridge height of 8.6 metres. The units will be

constructed from goosewing grey corrugated steel walls with a sapphire blue corrugated steel roof.

- 3.6 Full plans and associated documents for this application can be found at:
<https://www.publicaccess.fenland.gov.uk/publicaccess/>

4 SITE PLANNING HISTORY

Reference	Description	Decision
F/YR05/0317/F	Alterations to existing garage / workshop to form additional office accommodation.	Granted – 18/04/2005
F/YR08/0729/F	Erection of office building, four bay coach garage and 2 metre high palisade fencing to west and north boundaries with associated parking.	Granted – 19 December 2008
F/YR16/0648/F	Erection of a front extension to existing coach garage.	Granted – 19 September 2016.
F/YR18/0874/F	Erection of a 2-bay coach garage and concrete forecourt	Granted – 22 November 2018.

5 CONSULTATIONS

5.1 Fenland District Council – Trees Consultant – 25 September 2025

Having reviewed the plan and location of the fencing, I am happy with this.

5.2 Fenland District Council – Environmental Health – 24 August 2025

Requests conditions regarding unsuspected contamination, noise emissions, artificial lighting and the submission of a Construction Environmental Management Plan.

5.3 Cambridgeshire County Council – Highways Officer – 19 August 2025

No objection - The development benefits from an existing vehicle access with the highway which has good visibility in either direction. I would not at this point however that the highways authority considers this site to be only accessible by motorised access as no sustainable transport links exist in this area. Also that Fenland District Council as the planning and parking authority should be satisfied that there is sufficient room within the premises for the number of vehicles that will need to be accommodated.

5.4 LLFA – 07 August 2025

No objection – Surface water can be addressed via proposed permeable paving. They request conditions regarding submission of a detailed surface water drainage scheme and surface water management during construction works.

5.5 Fenland District Council – Business and Economy Team – 05 August 2025

Support - There is significant demand for light industrial space in Fenland. The Economic Growth Team have received a steady flow of enquires for businesses

seeking small industrial units in the district. There continues to be strong demand and weak supply of light industrial units in Fenland. The proposed development will lead to job creation for residents, create start-up and scale-up opportunities and generate additional business rates for the council.

5.6 Cambs Constabulary – Designing Out Crime Officer – 01 August 2025

I have viewed the Design and access statement and associated documents in relation to crime, disorder, the vulnerability to crime and fear of crime. I have searched the constabularies crime and incident systems covering this area for the previous 2 years, I consider this to be a ward area of low/medium risk to the vulnerability for crime. The Officer also provides guidance on external lighting, doors, CCTV, alarms, fencing, cycle storage and construction phase security.

5.7 Fenland District Council – Ecology – 25 July 2025

The site was cleared after 30 January 2020 therefore a biodiversity net gain minimum of 10% is required. BNG provision can only be achieved through an off-site habitat. Pre-commencement conditions are recommended to ensure BNG provision and ecology protection measures.

5.8 Environmental Services – 24 July 2025

No objections. New residents will require notification of collection and storage details by the developer before moving in and the first collection takes place. Refuse and recycling bins will be required to be provided as an integral part of the development.

5.9 March Town Council – 22 July 2025

Approval.

5.10 Cambridgeshire County Council – Archaeology – 21 July 2025

Due to the archaeological potential of the site a further programme of investigation and recording is required in order to provide more information regarding the presence or absence, and condition, of surviving archaeological remains within the development area, and to establish the need for archaeological mitigation of the development as necessary. The Officer recommends a Written Scheme of Investigation pre-commencement condition.

5.11 Environment Agency – 18 July 2025

No objections. IDB should be consulted due to adjacent watercourses. LPA need to determine if the sequential test should be applied.

5.12 Anglian Water – 18 July 2025

There is no connection to Anglian Water sewers, we therefore have no comments to make.

5.13 Local Residents/Interested Parties

Eleven supporting comments received from residents of March (10) and Wimblington raising the following summarised issues:

Supporting Comments	Officer Response
Site is brownfield where use has ceased.	This will be addressed in the Principle of Development section.
There are already commercial and industrial uses adjacent to the site.	This will be addressed in the Principle of Development section.
Light industrial use already exists on site.	This will be addressed in the Principle of Development section.
The buildings look very modern.	This will be assessed in the Layout and Design section.
The site is in Flood Zone 3 and has been used by Fenns Buses for 30+ years.	This will be addressed in the Flood Risk and Drainage section.
Will save on travel to other locations.	This will be addressed in the Sustainability section.
Location is perfect for growth.	This will be addressed in the Sustainability section.
There is a need for new units.	This will be addressed in the Economic Growth section.
Will create jobs.	This will be addressed in the Economic Growth section.
Will encourage new businesses.	This will be addressed in the Economic Growth section.

6 STATUTORY DUTY

- 6.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires a planning application to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. The Development Plan for the purposes of this application comprises the adopted Fenland Local Plan (2014) the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2021) and the March Neighbourhood Plan (2017).

7 POLICY FRAMEWORK

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024

Chapter 2 - Achieving sustainable development
Chapter 6 – Building a strong, competitive economy
Chapter 8 – Promoting healthy and safe communities
Chapter 9 – Promoting sustainable transport
Chapter 11 – Making effective use of land
Chapter 12 – Achieving well-designed places
Chapter 14 – Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
Chapter 17 – Facilitating the sustainable use of minerals

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Determining a Planning Application

National Design Guide 2021

Context
Identity
Built Form
Movement

Nature
Uses
Resources

Fenland Local Plan 2014

- LP1 – A Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- LP2 – Facilitating Health and Wellbeing of Fenland Residents
- LP3 – Spatial Strategy, the Settlement Hierarchy and the Countryside
- LP6 – Employment, Tourism, Community Facilities and Retail
- LP9 – March
- LP12 – Rural Areas Development Policy
- LP13 – Supporting and Managing the Impact of a Growing District
- LP14 – Responding to Climate Change and Managing the Risk of Flooding in Fenland
- LP15 – Facilitating the Creation of a More Sustainable Transport Network in Fenland
- LP16 – Delivering and Protecting High Quality Environments across the District
- LP17 – Community Safety
- LP19 – The Natural Environment

March Neighbourhood Plan 2017

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2021

- Policy 5 - Mineral Safeguarding Areas
- Policy 10 - Waste Management Areas (WMAs)
- Policy 14 - Waste management needs arising from residential and commercial Development
- Policy 16 - Consultation Areas (CAS)

Delivering and Protecting High Quality Environments in Fenland SPD 2014

- DM3 – Making a Positive Contribution to Local Distinctiveness and character of the Area
- DM4 – Waste and Recycling Facilities
- DM6 – Mitigating Against Harmful Effects

Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD 2016

Emerging Local Plan

The Draft Fenland Local Plan (2022) was published for consultation between 25th August 2022 and 19 October 2022, all comments received will be reviewed and any changes arising from the consultation will be made to the draft Local Plan. Given the very early stage which the Plan is therefore at, it is considered, in accordance with Paragraph 49 of the NPPF, that the policies of this should carry extremely limited weight in decision making. Of relevance to this application are policies:

- LP1: Settlement Hierarchy
- LP3: Spatial Strategy for Employment Development
- LP4: Securing Fenland's Future
- LP5: Health and Wellbeing
- LP7: Design
- LP8: Amenity Provision
- LP11: Community Safety
- LP15: Employment
- LP18: Development in the Countryside

LP20: Accessibility and Transport
LP22: Parking Provision
LP24: Natural Environment
LP25: Biodiversity Net Gain
LP27: Trees and Planting
LP28: Landscape
LP32: Flood and Water Management
LP33: Development on Land Affected by Contamination
LP34: Air Quality
LP40: Site allocations for non-residential development in March

8 KEY ISSUES

- **Principle of Development**
- **Sustainability**
- **Economic Growth**
- **Layout**
- **Impact on Land Users**
- **Highway Safety and Parking**
- **Flood Risk and Drainage**
- **Other Matters from Representation**
- **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)**

9 BACKGROUND

- 9.1 The two existing light industrial sheds were constructed following approval under reference F/YR08/0729/F for a four bay coach garage and F/YR18/0874/F for a proposed garage. Having conducted a site visit it would appear the northernmost of these two buildings have not been constructed in accordance with the previously approved plans under F/YR08/0729/F. Two of the garage bays are in office use for which no approval has been given.
- 9.2 To the north beyond Whittlesey Road are 5 industrial units and a detached industrial shed currently under construction following approval of F/YR24/0270/F to replace an existing builder's yard. To the west of the site development has been approved for the erection of 1 x office, 1 x vehicle workshop and 1 x training centre after approval of F/YR21/0887/F following a committee overturn.

10 ASSESSMENT

Principle of Development

- 10.1 The site is in the countryside outside of any settlement and is physically and functionally detached from the nearest settlement, which is the town of March. The policies of restraint that apply to the rural area, therefore, apply (FLP LP3) and seek to protect the undeveloped nature of the countryside and to resist isolated development on grounds of sustainability (FLP LP15). More specifically, Policy LP3 restricts development in the countryside to that required to support rural-based enterprise, principally agriculture, horticulture and forestry. The proposal does not meet these criteria and is therefore contrary to the spatial strategy of the Development Plan.

- 10.2 Policy LP6 aims to support employment growth across all sectors but directs such development to sustainable and accessible locations that can meet the needs of businesses while minimising environmental and social impacts. This approach aligns with the Government's wider objectives, as articulated in Chapters 2 and 6 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which promote sustainable patterns of growth by focusing employment uses in areas with good connectivity. The proposed intensification of a light industrial use in an isolated rural location raises significant concerns in terms of sustainability and the resulting impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside.
- 10.3 It is, however, acknowledged that the site constitutes previously developed land (brownfield land), which national planning policy encourages to be reused before considering greenfield sites. Paragraph 125(c) of the NPPF recognises the value of such land in supporting sustainable development, including opportunities to remediate degraded or derelict sites. This material consideration weighs positively in favour of the proposal and reflects the Government's commitment to making efficient use of land resources.
- 10.4 Despite this, the brownfield status of the site alone does not override the other significant policy considerations. The scale and nature of the proposed development would lead to a substantial intensification of use in an unsustainable location, resulting in material harm to the rural character and visual amenity of the area. On balance, the benefits of redeveloping brownfield land are therefore outweighed by the conflict with the Development Plan's spatial strategy and the adverse impacts on the countryside, which weigh heavily against the scheme.
- 10.5 Retention of light industrial businesses in the District maximises the employment benefit to the local area, but this cannot be at the cost of the overdevelopment of a site in the rural area that would be a harmful erosion and urbanisation of the countryside, contrary to the detriment of its essential open character or through the intensification and exacerbation of an unsustainable development.
- 10.6 Refusal of planning permission is considered to be justified, on grounds that the proposal would be contrary to settlement policy for the District, and harmful to the open rural character, as set out in Policies LP3 and LP6 of the Local Plan.

Sustainability

- 10.7 Policy LP6 sets a target for 30ha of new employment floor space in March between 2011-2031. The Employment Evidence Report (2013) which supports the adopted Local Plan states that 1ha would be needed to accommodate 3,500sqm of employment floorspace. Based on this, the floor space target for March is 105,000sqm. As it stands, between 2012-25, the completed and committed employment floor space for March is around half this target at 51,487 sqm. Therefore, there is still a need in March for a significant amount of employment floorspace. It is important to note that this target is solely for inside the settlement of March, and no target has been given for employment floorspace in elsewhere locations.
- 10.8 The site next to established business uses to the east. These are longstanding uses and it would be wrong to regard their existence as justification for a development that would be functionally isolated from March insofar as there are no footpaths or street-lighting on Whittlesey Road leading back into the town. Most attending the site can, therefore, be expected to rely heavily on the use of a private car or motorbike to travel to and from their place of work.

- 10.9 In turn, the site cannot be regarded as being a sustainable location, which is contrary to Policy LP15 which, firstly, seeks to reduce the need to travel and then seeks to reduce the use of the car. This is also contrary to national policy as set out in Paragraph 8 of the NPPF. Whilst Policy LP6 supports the development of employment sites, this is subject to its location according with the spatial strategy under Policy LP3.
- 10.10 This is not, therefore, considered to be an appropriate location to increase employment provision - due to the site's physical separation from March, combined with an absence of sustainable transport links to the town, which renders the site unsustainable for such growth.
- 10.11 To justify such a development a detailed site availability search is required. A search has been submitted, however, it is not considered the search has been sufficiently comprehensive, exhaustive and wide-ranging geographically, to demonstrate convincingly that there is no suitable allocated land available to justify the development of an unsustainable site in the rural area.
- 10.12 It is considered important to clarify that this application does not seek to expand an existing business but provide new business units. These units could be located elsewhere in the district in designated, sustainable industrial estates.
- 10.13 The application is supported by a Design and Access Statement which summarises the range of the site-search undertaken, including the following:
- Martin Avenue - There is no land for sale both at Martin Avenue on Rightmove or commercial websites. On visiting Martin Avenue, there is no room for an access way or further expansion.*
- Thorby Avenue - On undertaking a site visit along Thorby Avenue, there are no sites for sales and also on viewing Rightmove as well as further commercial land websites, there is no further land for sale down Thorby Avenue.*
- Hostmoor Avenue - On undertaking a site visit along Hostmoor Avenue, there is no land for sale. Rightmove had also indicated that there is no land for sale at Hostmoor Avenue.*
- Melbourne Avenue - There appears to be no scope for further industrial buildings together with offices to house this development. At the time of the looking there was no land for sale in this area on Rightmove or other commercial land websites.*
- Creek Fen Business Park - On undertaking a site visit, there is not sufficient space within the confines of this site for the existing business use due to the size of the vehicles and offices required, in association with this.*
- Longhill Road / Foundry Way - On undertaking a site visit to this area, there is no further room for expansion within the confines of the industrial site usage.*
- 10.14 Clearly, some attempt has been made to undertake a search for suitable alternative sites in one of the four growth centre centres in the District. However, the search undertaken is considered to be insufficiently comprehensive and exhaustive. There is also a reliance on the Rightmove website or other websites to ascertain what is currently being offered for sale. As has been found at appeal, Rightmove and other such websites cannot be

relied upon to be an accurate representation of what is potentially available. For example, land may be available that is not being sold on these websites and there has apparently been no direct approach to landowners to find potentially suitable land in one of the four growth centres to determine if they wish to sell.

- 10.15 Refusal of planning permission is, therefore, considered to be justified on grounds that the development would not be sustainable; moreover, it has not been shown that a site in the rural area needs to be released for development because there is no other suitable land in one of the four growth centres in the District.

Economic Growth

- 10.16 Several of the representations in support of the application cite the economic benefits of the development and it is recognised that the Council's Business and Economy Team are also generally supportive of the proposal on similar grounds. However, while there is the potential for economic benefits to arise, no information or evidence to support the assertion regarding the demand for such units within the district or assessing the current provision or occupation of such units has been provided.
- 10.17 The information submitted with the application itself is quite limited in terms of assessing the economic benefits which would arise and it is apparent that this is a speculative development rather than one which has identified 'end users'. As such it is not possible to fully quantify or assess the economic benefits or to give such significant weight to these which may outweigh the clear policy conflicts identified elsewhere within this report.

Layout

- 10.18 The site is fairly open, in light industrial use and lies within a loose scattering of development in the rural area. It is not an infill site within a built-up location and presently looks out onto open agricultural land to the west. The overall character of the location is of sparsely dispersed development that gives a sense of openness, travelling east to west along Whittlesey Road. The introduction of substantial building works in a location that contributes significantly to the open character of what is a rural area would be visually intrusive and would amount to a significant urbanisation of the countryside of the edge of this western side of March.
- 10.19 Comments have been received from a member of the public that the builds look modern in design. The buildings are considered to be of a height, design and materials of construction that are in keeping with the two units on site that are to be retained as part of the proposal and appear as typical of the nature of the development proposed.
- 10.20 It is precisely on the edge of settlements where they adjoin the countryside that is important to apply strict control over new development to prevent urban sprawl and erosion of the open character of the countryside. This alone justifies refusal of planning permission.

Impact on Adjacent Land Users

- 10.21 There is not considered to be a material amenity impact arising from the proposed development.

- 10.22 There is no additional lighting proposed on any of the new units or elsewhere on site. It is anticipated that if approved, lighting will be required for the site. It is considered that new lighting could be addressed by condition.
- 10.23 The proposed ridge height of all of the new units is 8.6 metres. The separation distances to buildings beyond the site boundaries are such that there will not be a material loss of light as a result of the proposed buildings. The neighbouring industrial buildings to the east of the site have a blank rear elevation and are 6.56 metres away at the nearest point. To the west is a parcel of land that has been commenced for an office, vehicle shed and training centre under F/YR21/0887/F. This adjacent parcel of land is currently subject to a variation of condition application under F/YR25/0466/VOC. The proposed training centre is 15.6 metres from the rear elevations of the new units on the application site. Based on these heights and separation distances there is not considered to be an overbearing or overshadowing impact on adjacent existing and proposed units.
- 10.24 There is not considered to be an overlooking impact from the proposed units. None of the proposed units or units on adjacent sites are for habitable use and there are no windows on the proposed units in close proximity to the boundaries.
- 10.25 There is not considered to be a material noise impact from the proposed light industrial units. The nearest dwelling to the site is located at 2 Marina Drive which is located 10.7 metres away from the site boundary, however, this is separated from the site by the vehicular access to existing light industrial units to the east. Should excessive levels of noise occur this is a matter that could be addressed by Environmental Health, who have requested a noise emission condition should the application be granted.

Highway Safety and Parking

- 10.26 Access to the site is via Whittlesey Road which is a Cambridgeshire County Council adoptable road. This is an existing access which has been utilised by the depot for nearly 40 years, which was for heavy goods and long base vehicles.
- 10.27 The access is located adjacent to a bend on Whittlesey Road however this gives good visibility in both directions, and ensures that vehicles enter and exit the site in a forward gear. There would be no requirement for parking along Whittlesey Road, as the site has an adequate area for on site parking particularly in the proposed parking area which provides 69 parking spaces. This amount of parking provision meets the relevant criteria for parking provision under Appendix A of the Fenland Local Plan.
- 10.28 All temporary facilities during the construction period would need to be set within the site and a relevant condition can be imposed if granted.
- 10.29 No footpaths to serve the site are proposed. There are drains to the north and south of Whittlesey Road, so if there was a desire to provide footpaths it would not be possible to do so.

Flood Risk and Drainage

- 10.30 The site lies in Flood Zone 3 and is, therefore, at a high risk of flooding. Policy LP14 (Part B) requires development proposed in high (Zone 3) to medium (Zone 2) areas of flood risk to pass a sequential test. This is in-line with national

policy, which seeks to locate proposals in areas of lowest flood-risk in the first instance, unless it can be shown that there are no reasonably available sites in areas of lower flood risk where it could be located.

- 10.31 In view of the fact the site lies in the countryside outside of any settlement it is considered the search area for sequential test purposes should be the entire District and should focus on the four market towns of March, Chatteris, Wisbech, and Whittlesey, which are all identified for employment growth. It would be expected that the application would thoroughly assess each of these allocated employment growth areas in terms of their suitability to provide a site for the development sought and in terms of the sequential test required to be passed in terms of flood risk - as part of developing an argument that the development sought does need to be located on an unsustainable site at high risk of flood within the rural area. That has not been done.
- 10.32 The Council does not, therefore, have complete information from the applicant on this important issue. In the absence of such information from the applicant it is, therefore, obliged to take a precautionary approach, based on its own assessment of the likely position.
- 10.33 The applicant has failed to provide sufficient evidence to show that there is no capacity within the employment land allocated in all four towns to accommodate further employment-related development. That being the case, based on the information available, it is not considered that it has been shown that there are no suitable sites available in areas of lower flood risk, in turn, the sequential test is not passed. The proposal is, therefore, in conflict with Policy LP14 and national policy as set out in the NPPF.
- 10.34 Whilst neither the LLFA or the Environment Agency raise objections to the development in terms of the engineered flood-minimisation/drainage proposals that might be achievable on the site, there is still a requirement under the NPPF for development on sites in Flood Zones 2 and 3 to pass a sequential test assessment to establish if there are other suitable sites in areas of lesser flood risk where development could take place in preference to the development of a site in Flood Zone 3, as sought.
- 10.35 Although the site is currently used for light industrial purposes, the Sequential Test remains a necessary and relevant for the proposed intensification of development. The applicant has not demonstrated that alternative sites with a lower risk of flooding across the District have been adequately assessed or discounted in a systematic and robust manner. National planning guidance requires that, even where some existing uses are established, new development proposals must still comply with the Sequential Test to ensure that development is directed to the areas at lowest risk of flooding wherever possible. Without a thorough and comprehensive assessment of reasonable alternative locations, the Sequential Test has not been satisfactorily passed in this instance.
- 10.36 The Sequential Test section of the Design and Access Statement is minimal and states: *The site is located within flood zone 3 and normally a Sequential Test would be required. However, given the site is for redevelopment of a commercial usage which has only recently ceased and would not increase vulnerability, the scope of the test should be agreed to be restricted to the site only, on the basis given that the site is within flood zone 3. The Sequential Test should be considered to be passed.* There are further material planning concerns generated by the proposal other than flood risk generated by further development of this

unsustainable site. Refusal of planning permission on flood-risk grounds is considered justified.

10.37 The Local Lead Flood Authority has responded that it has no objections to the development in this regard, subject to any planning permission being granted with conditions relating to the provision of (A) the submission to, and agreement by the LPA, of the detailed design of the surface water drainage proposals for the site and (B) details being submitted to and agreed by the LPA relating to how any additional surface-water run-off from the site during the construction phase will be handled. No drainage comments have been made from any other consultees.

10.38 No buildings are proposed within the 9m maintenance strip of the board-maintained drain to the north of the site.

Other Matters for Consideration

10.39 The proposal at this site is to set solar panels to the roof pitches to aid in the provision of sustainable renewable energy. The efficacy of these solar panels would need to be secured via condition for the submission of further details.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

10.40 The Environment Act 2021 requires development proposals to deliver a net gain in biodiversity following a mitigation hierarchy which is focused on avoiding ecological harm over minimising, rectifying, reducing and then off-setting. This approach accords with Local Plan policies LP16 and LP19 which outlines a primary objective for biodiversity to be conserved or enhanced and provides for the protection of Protected Species, Priority Species and Priority Habitat.

10.41 In this instance a Biodiversity Gain Condition is required to be approved before development is begun.

11 CONCLUSIONS

11.1 This is an unacceptable proposal on a site in a sensitive location in the rural area, beyond the western edge of the town of March.

11.2 The proposal, therefore, falls to be considered against the policies of restraint that apply to the rural area - principally FLP Policy LP3 - to protect the attractive undeveloped rural character. The proposal would be a significant urbanisation of the countryside.

11.3 The development would also be contrary to settlement policy for the District more generally, as set out in FLP LP3, which seeks to direct new development to the most accessible and sustainable locations - generally within the four market towns in the District and certain other identified villages.

11.4 This is not a sustainable location. There would be a high reliance on use of the private car by staff to get to and from the site because of its location on an unlit road with no footpaths.

11.5 It is acknowledged that the site is classified as previously developed (brownfield) land, which is a material consideration in favour of redevelopment in accordance

with national planning policy. However, this positive attribute does not outweigh the substantial harm arising from the significant intensification of the existing use and the resultant increase in built form. The proposal would lead to an exacerbation of the harm from the development already being located in an unsustainable location, inappropriate for such scale and intensity. The development would also result in a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside. Therefore, while the reuse of previously developed land is encouraged, it must be balanced against the adverse effects the development would cause to the local environment and the overarching objectives of the Development Plan.

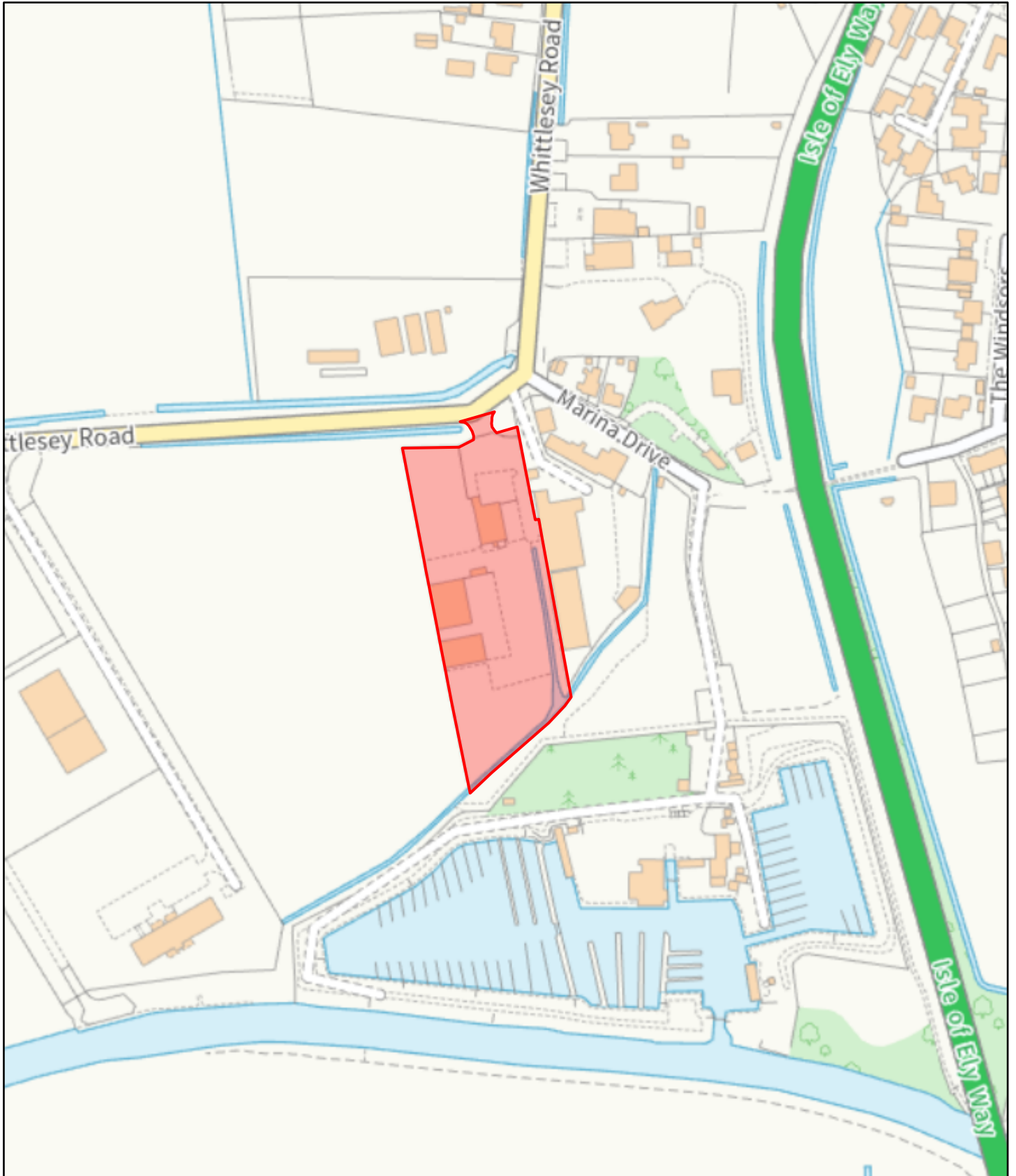
- 11.6 The site is also within Flood Zone 3 - that is, is in an area at the highest risk of flooding - in respect of which a sequential test is required to be passed (as per FLP Policy LP14 and the NPPF) to establish if there are alternative suitable sites at lesser flood risk that should be developed in preference to a site within Flood Zone 3. The purpose of the sequential test is to direct new development to sites at the least risk of flooding. In this instance, the sequential test is not considered to be passed. There has been no systemic assessment of allocated employment sites across the district to establish if suitable alternative sites, with lower flood risk, are available. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it has, therefore, to be concluded that the proposals will put people and property at an unnecessarily high risk of being affected by flooding.
- 11.7 It is acknowledged that the proposed development would deliver certain benefits, including the provision of industrial units and the creation of local employment opportunities. However, these benefits are considered limited and do not outweigh the significant harm to the character and appearance of the area, nor do they address broader sustainability objectives. Additionally, the site is located within Flood Zone 3, where Government guidance is clear that new development should be avoided unless the public benefits clearly outweigh the risks and harm. In this case, such overriding public benefits have not been demonstrated. Accordingly, when assessed in the planning balance, the adverse impacts of the proposal weigh heavily against the application for the reasons set out above.

12 RECOMMENDATION


Refuse; for the following reasons:

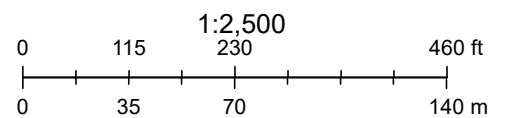
1	The application site lies in the rural area outside of the town of March and would introduce substantial buildings and other building works onto a sparsely developed light industrial site. This would be an unacceptable urbanisation of the countryside, to the detriment of its attractive open character and appearance, without special circumstances to justify this. The proposal would, therefore, be contrary to Policy LP3 of the Fenland Local Plan (2014), a key purpose of which is the protection of the rural character of the countryside by limiting new development within it to that which requires a rural location, such as agriculture, horticulture and forestry.
2	The application site is not in a sustainable location in that it lies outside of the nearest settlement (March) on a road without public footpaths and street-lighting, which means that staff travelling to and from the site will have a heavy reliance on the use of a private motorcar, which is at

	<p>variance with the principles of sustainability generally, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, and to Policies LP1 and LP3 of the Fenland Local Plan (2014), which seek to direct development into the four main growth centres across the District because of their accessibility and sustainability to accommodate new development.</p>
3	<p>The application site lies within Flood Zone 3, which means the land is at the highest risk of flooding. In line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Policy LP14 (Part B) of the Fenland Local Plan (2014) requires the development of such sites to be subject to a Sequential Test which shows that there are no other suitable sites of lesser flood-risk which could accommodate a proposal and are available for development. This requires the applicant to undertake a comprehensive assessment of employment land across the District to determine the availability (or not) of potentially suitable sites with lesser flood-risk. The purpose of the Sequential Test is to direct development to sites with the least flood risk. Only limited information on this matter is provided. The Sequential Test is not, therefore, passed and it has to be concluded that, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, the development of the application site would potentially put people and property to unwarranted risk from flooding, contrary to the NPPF and Policy LP14 (Part B) of the Fenland Local Plan.</p>

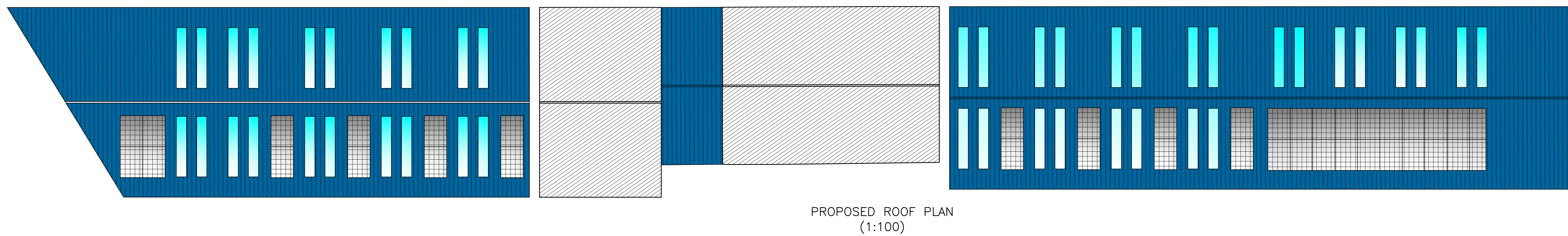
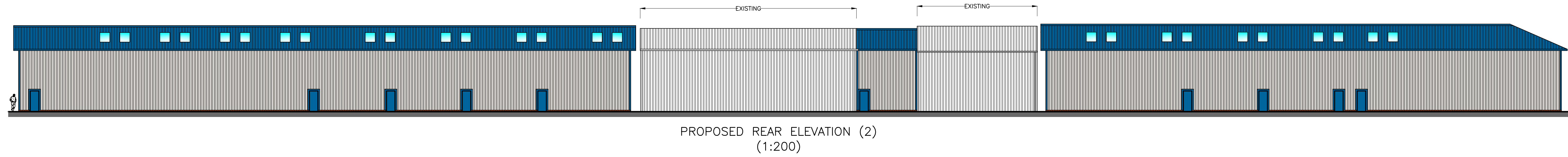
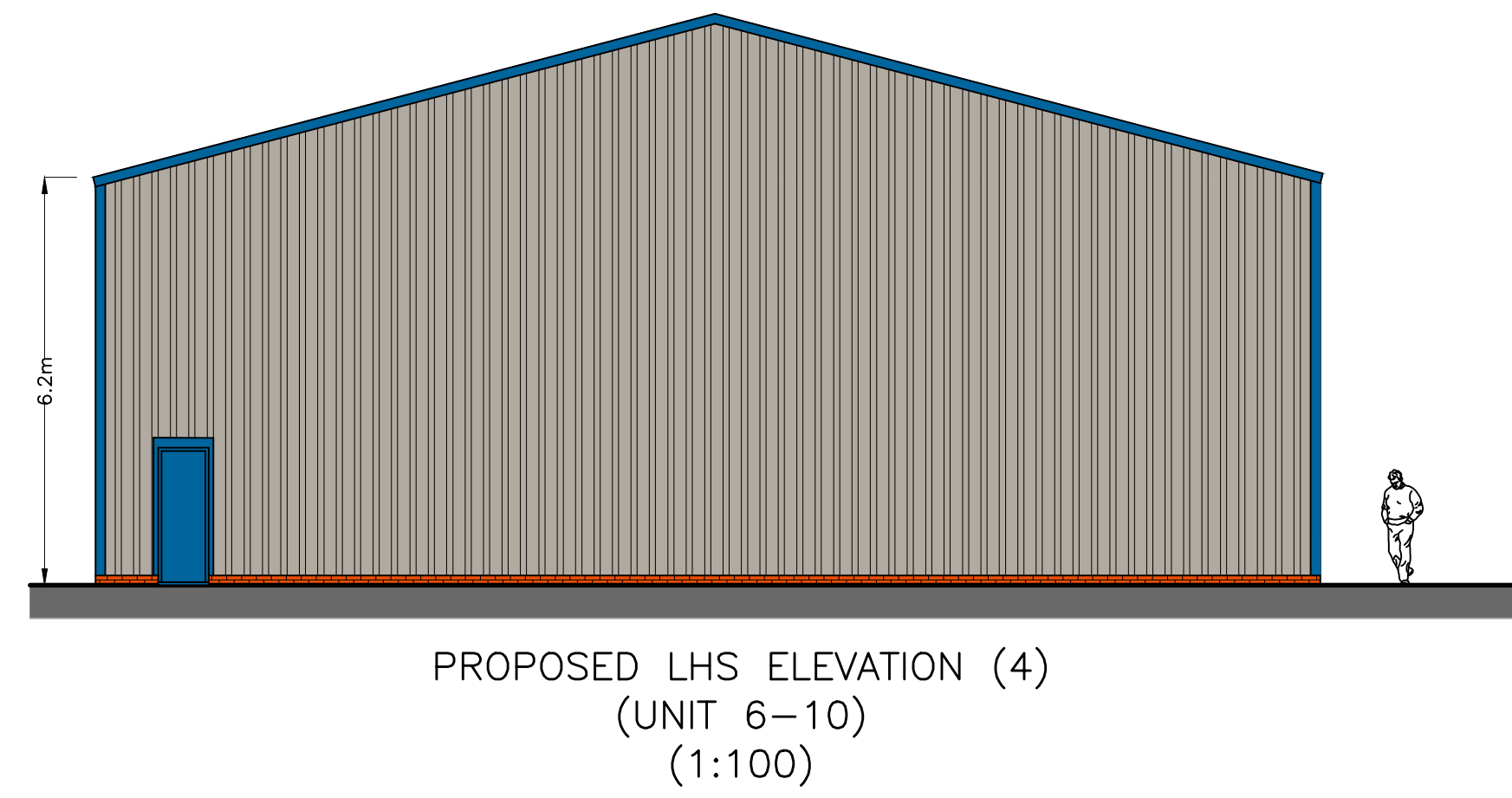
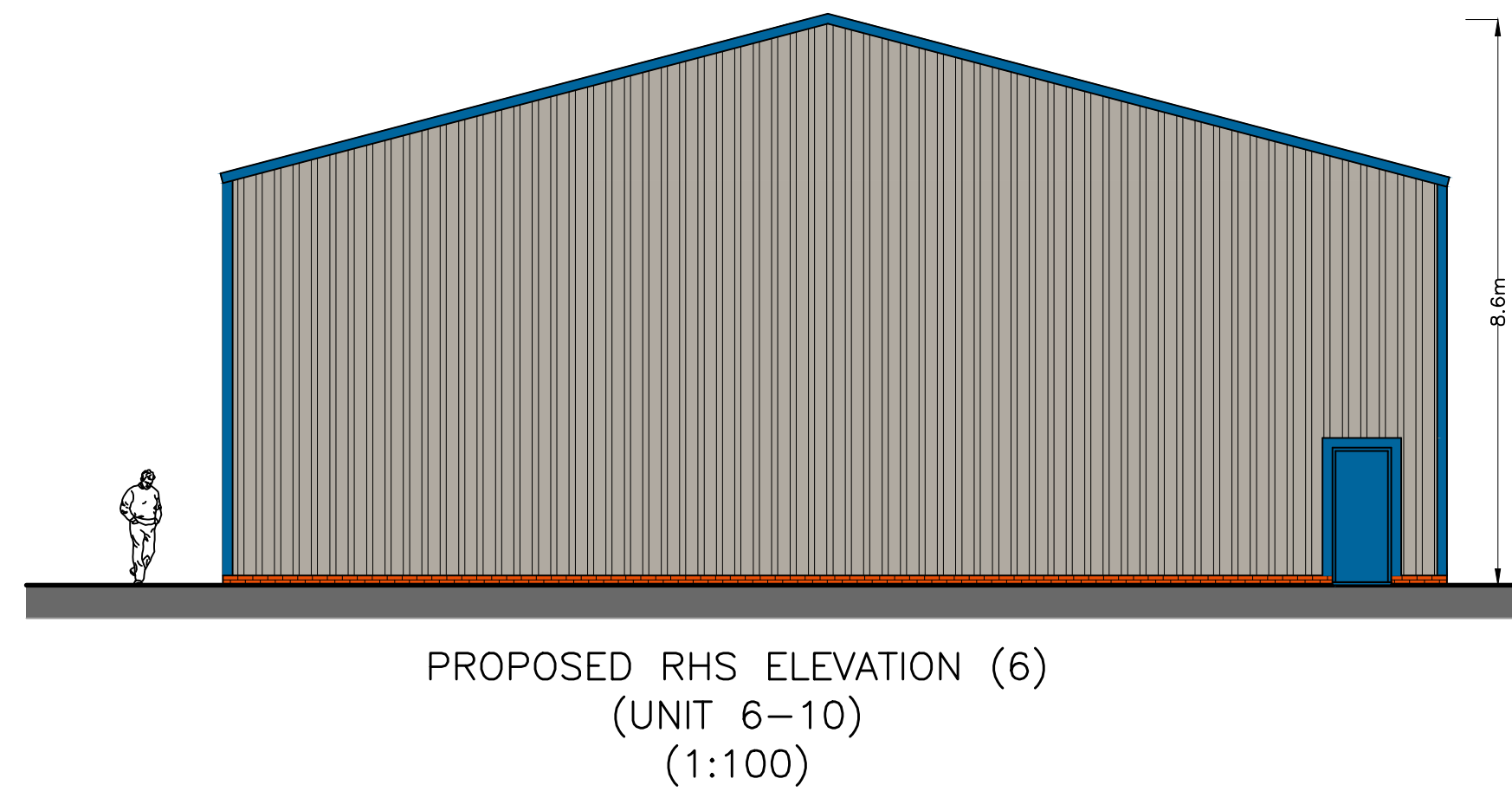
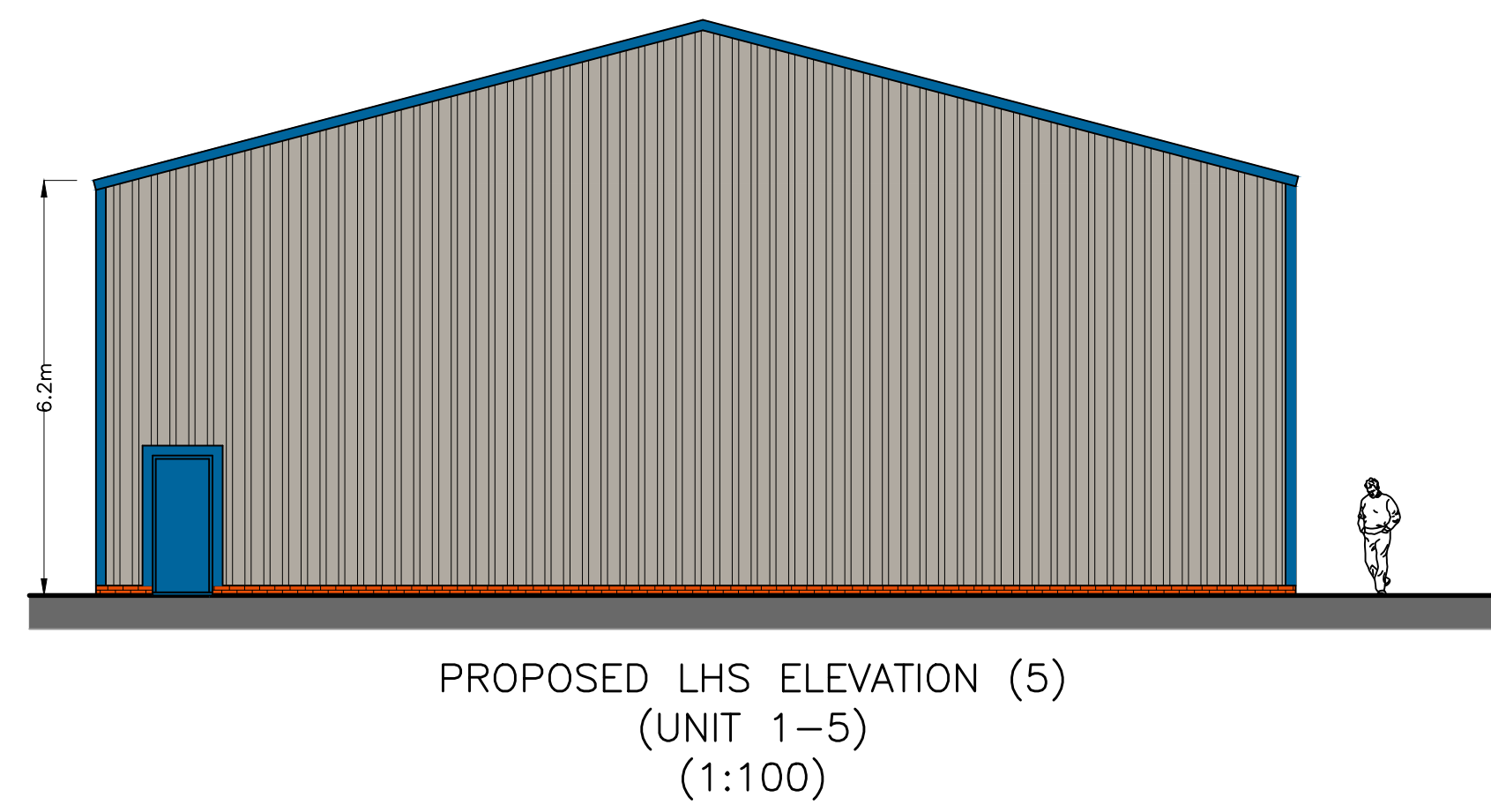
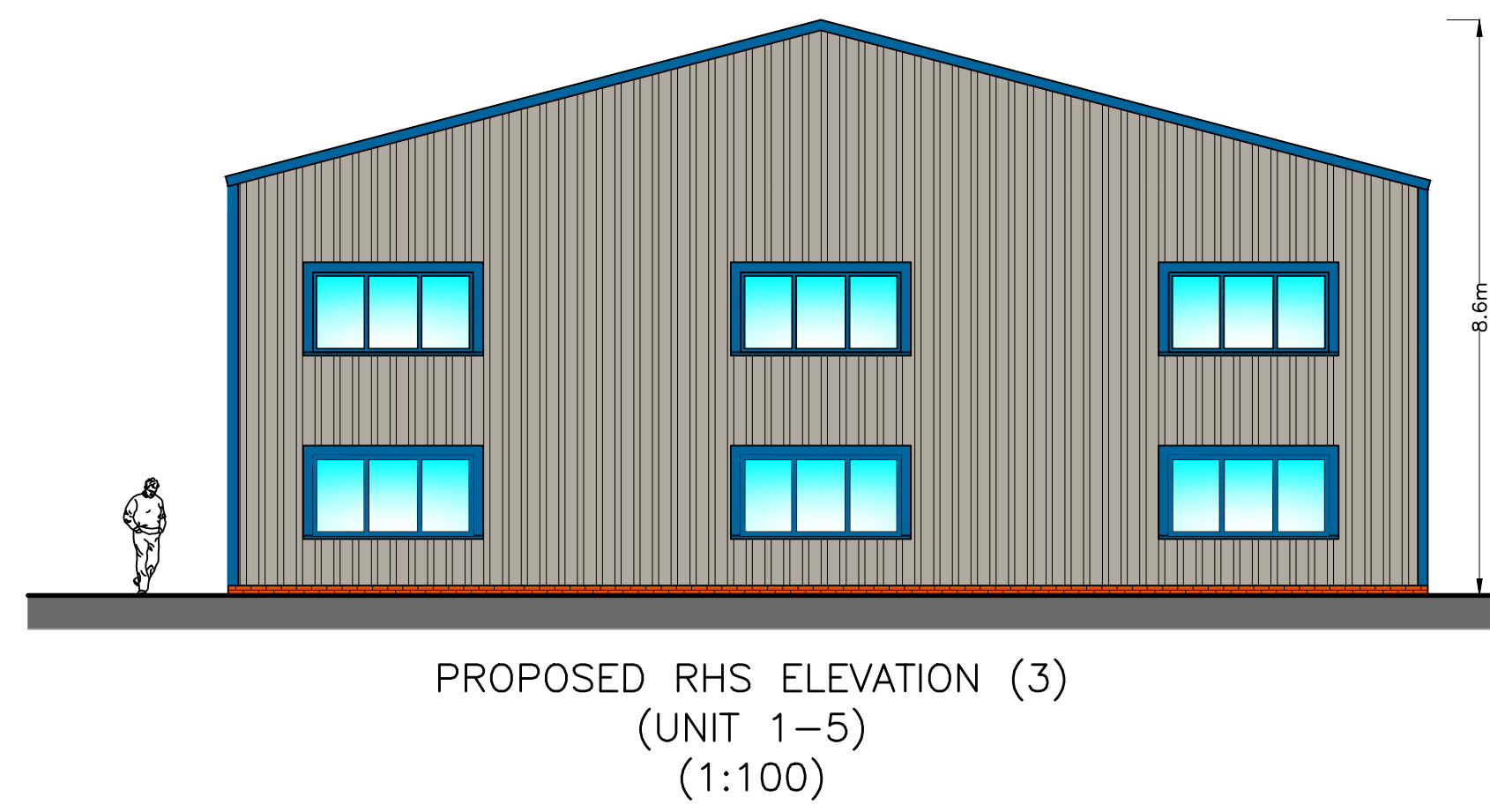
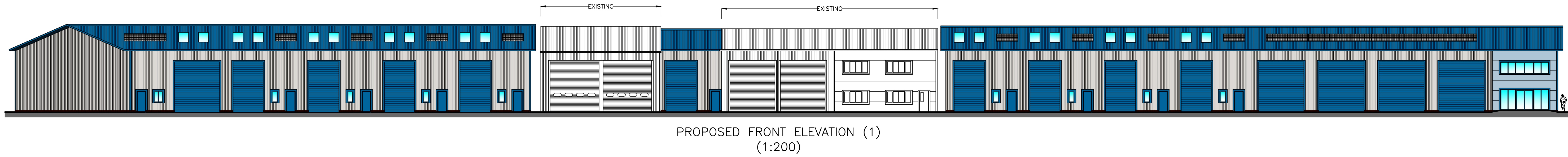
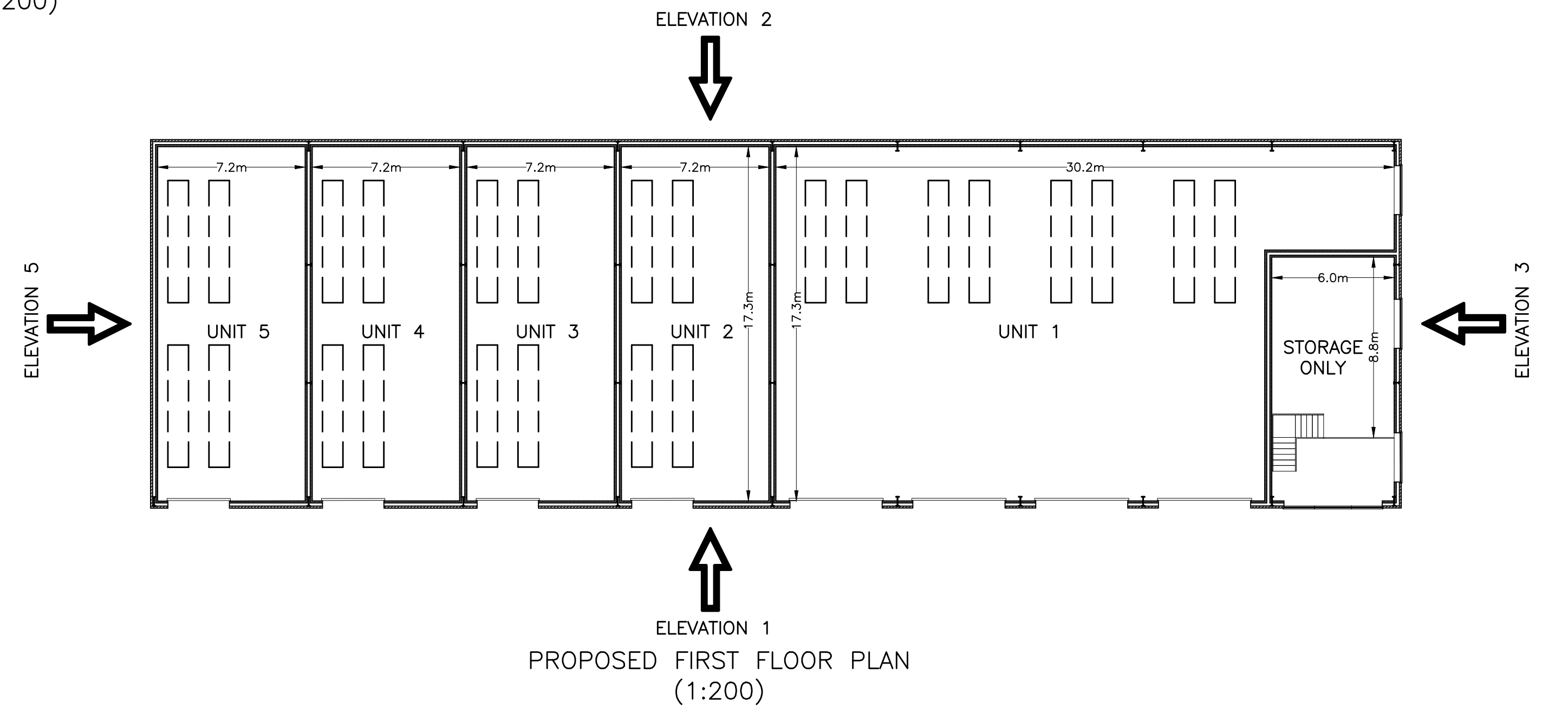
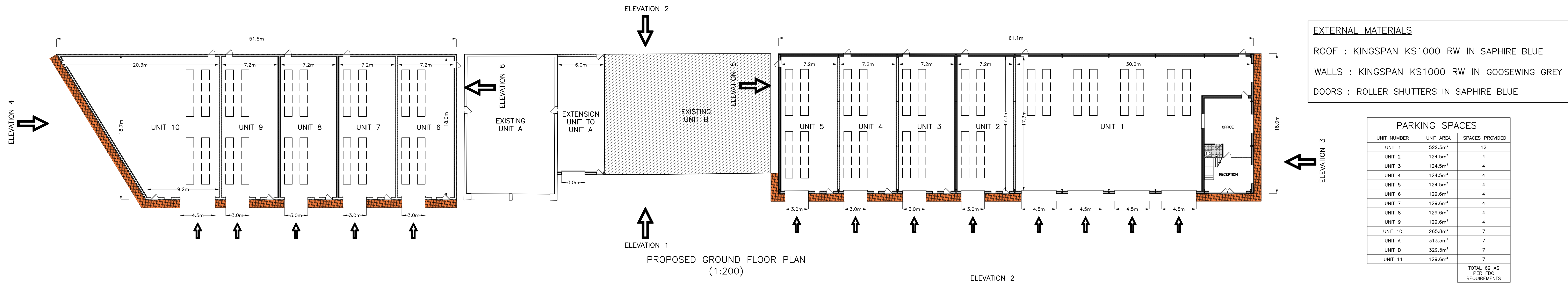


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 Fenland District Boundary



Fenland District Council



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Where materials, products and workmanship are not fully specified they are to be of the standard appropriate to the works and suitable for the purpose stated in or reasonably to be inferred from the drawings and specification. All work to be in accordance with good building practice and BS 8000 to the extent that the recommendations define the quality of the finished work. Materials products and workmanship to comply with all British Standards and COTD standards with, where appropriate, BS or EC marks.
All products and materials to be handled, stored, prepared and used or fixed in accordance with the manufacturers current recommendations.
The contractor is to arrange inspections of the works by the BCU (or NIRC) as required by the Building Regulations and is to obtain completion certificate and forward to the Engineer.

B PLANNERS COMMENTS
A DRAWING UPDATED
REVISIONS
DATE

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CONSULTING LIMITED
CONSULTING STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS
1 Gordon Avenue,
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Tel: 01354 655454
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Website: www.mortonandhall.co.uk

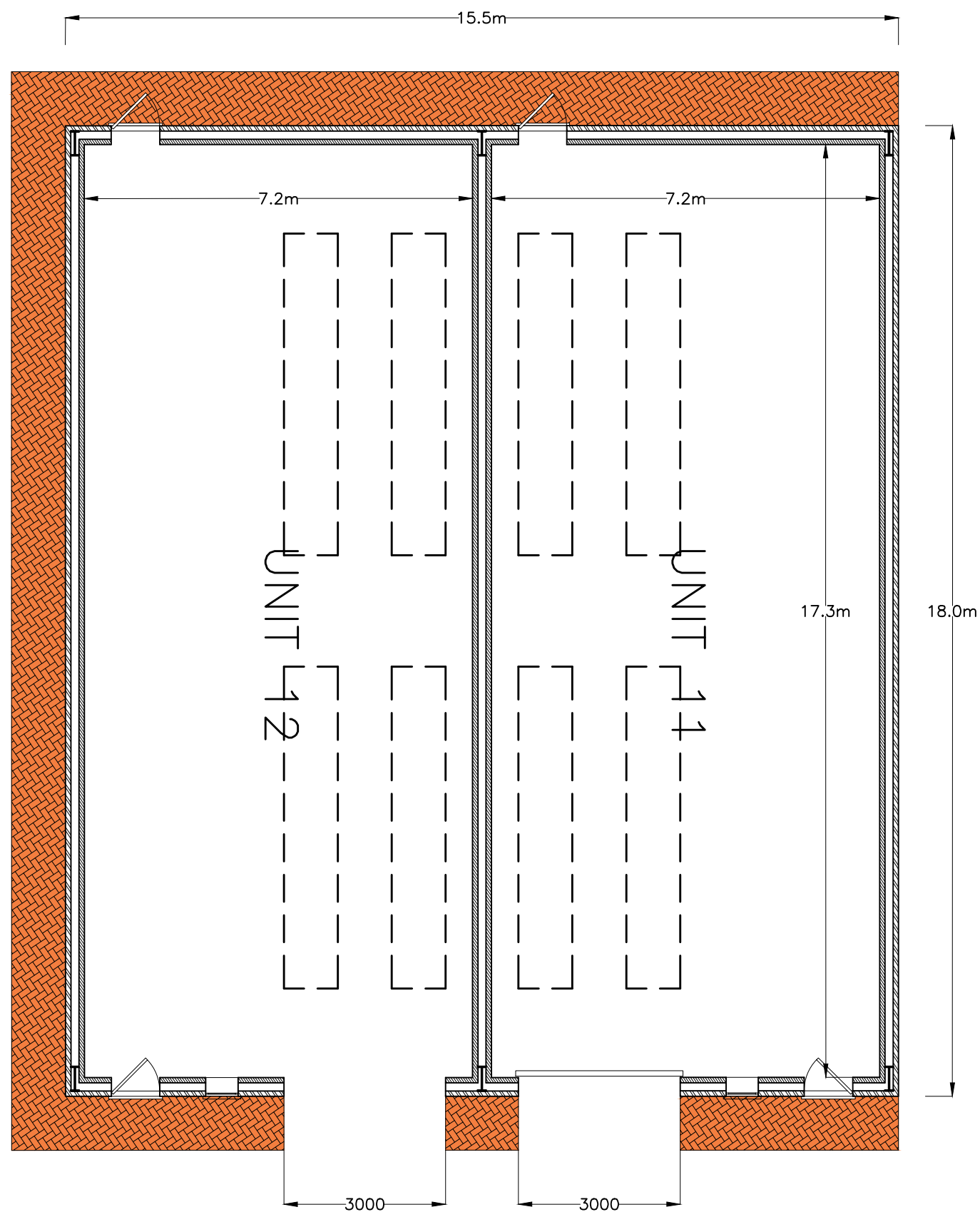
Fenland District Council
Building Design Awards
Building Excellence in Fenland

Mr S Rutterford

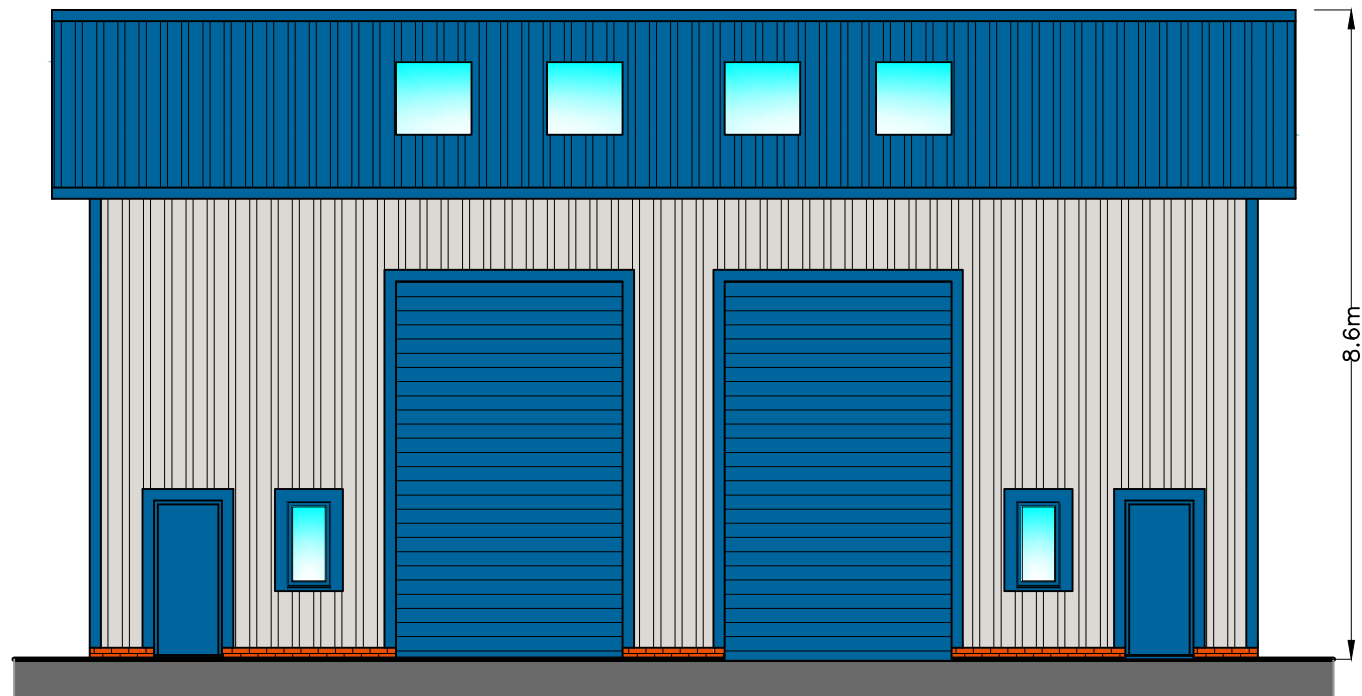
49 Whittlesey Road
March
Cambridgeshire
PE15 0AG

Proposed Ground
Floor Plan & Elevations
(UNITS 1 - 10)

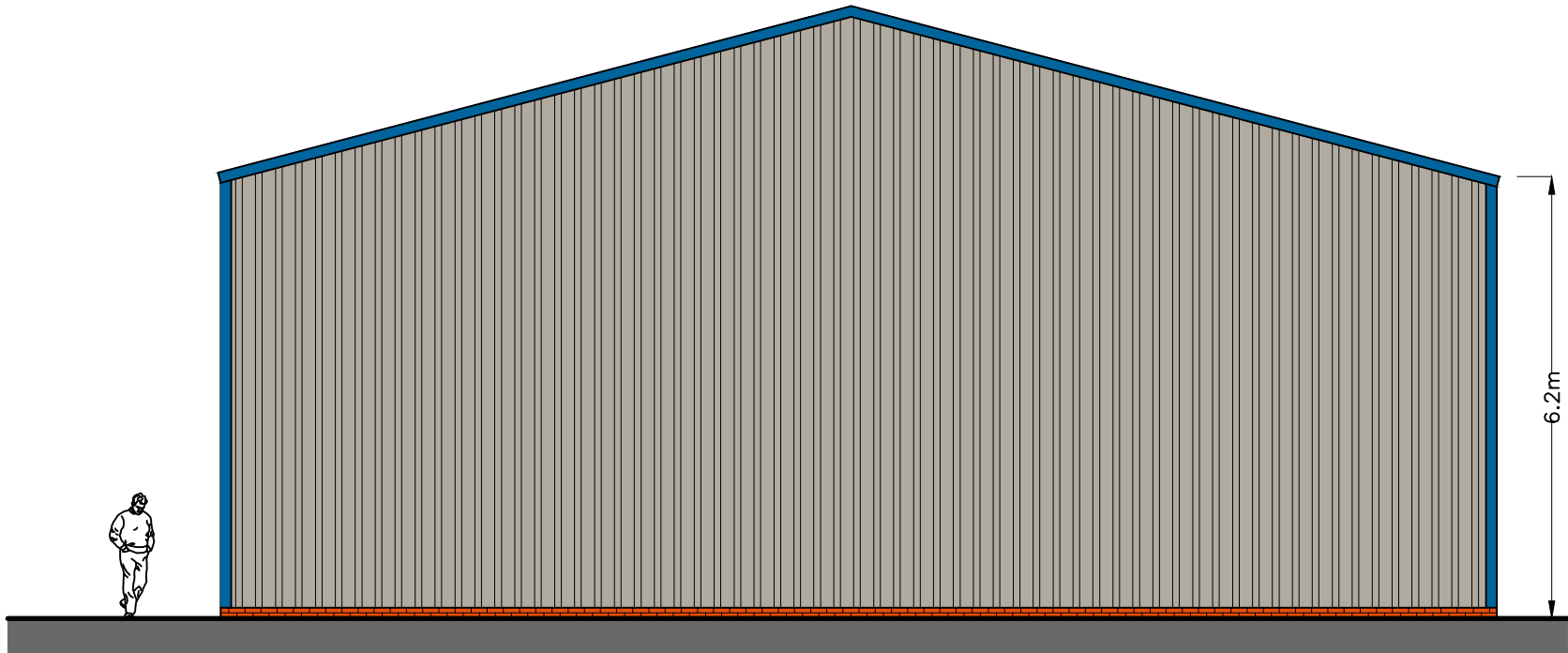
DATE OF ISSUE
R.Popworth
DATE
Mar 2025
As Shown
H10280/06s



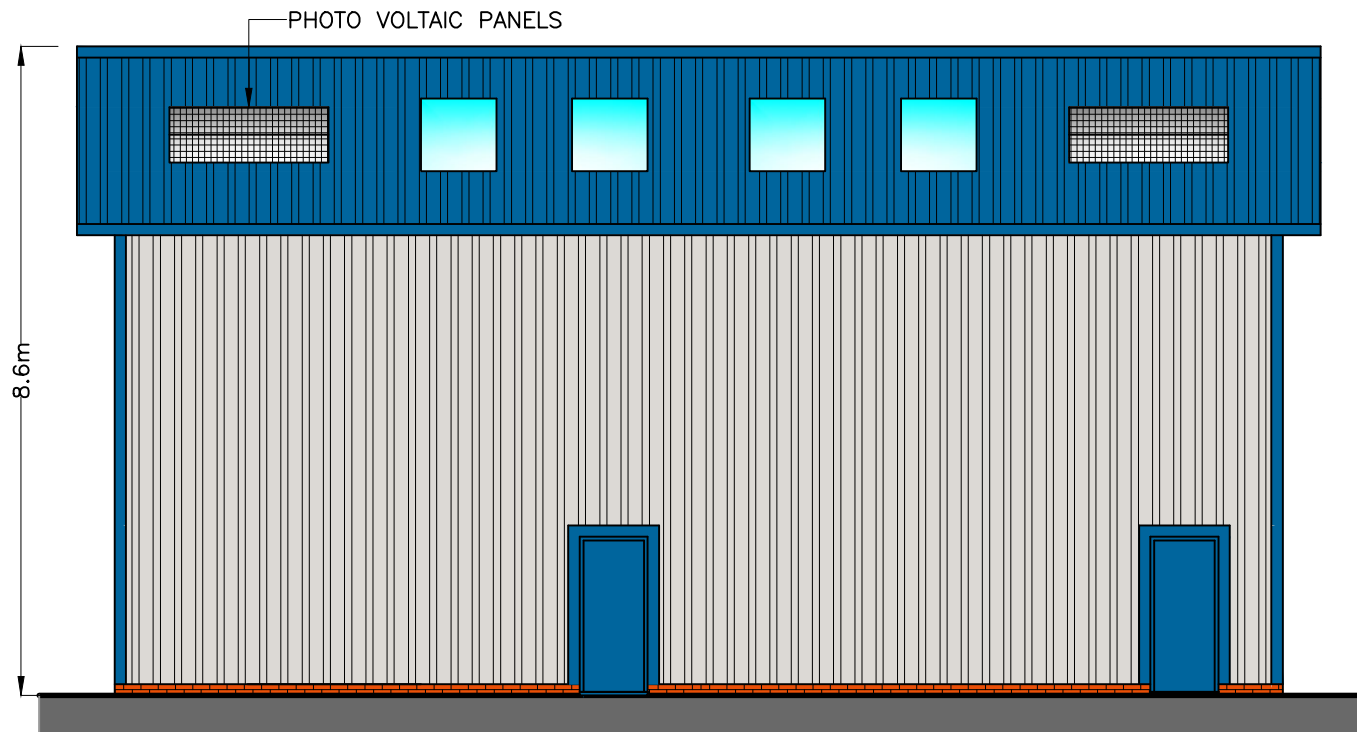
PROPOSED GROUND FLOOR PLAN
(1:100)



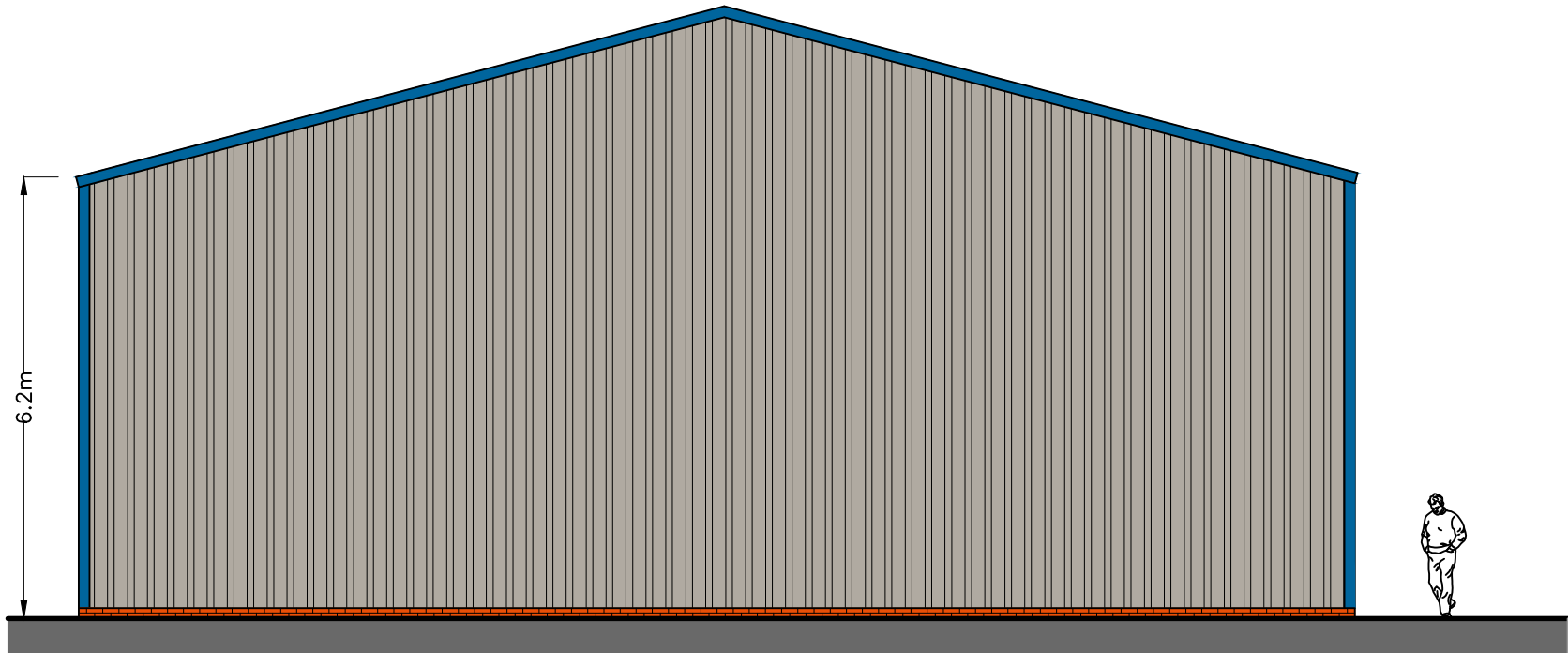
PROPOSED FRONT ELEVATION
(1:100)



PROPOSED RHS ELEVATION
(1:100)



PROPOSED REAR ELEVATION
(1:100)



PROPOSED LHS ELEVATION
(1:100)

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REVISIONS		DATE
MORTON & HALL CONSULTING LIMITED CONSULTING STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS 1 Gordon Avenue, March, Cambridgeshire, PE15 8AJ Tel: 01354 655454 Fax: 01354 660467 E-mail: info@mortonandhall.co.uk Website: www.mortonandhall.co.uk Fenland District Council Building Design Awards winner Building Excellence in Fenland		
CLIENT Mr S Rutterford		
PROJECT 49 Whittlesey Road March Cambridgeshire PE15 0AG		
TITLE Proposed Ground Floor Plan & Elevations (UNITS 11 – 12)		
DRAWN R.Papworth	DATE OF ISSUE	
CHECKED		
DATE Mar 2025	DRAWING NUMBER H10280/07	
SCALE As Shown		