



Cambridge Past, Present & Future  
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24/12/2025

**Response to 25/04791/PRIOR: Erection of a new portal frame agricultural building to be used as a general-purpose agricultural store for harvested crop and straw.**

Cambridge Past, Present & Future is Cambridge's largest civic society. We are a charity run by local people who are passionate about where they live. We operate in the greater Cambridge area and working with our members, supporters and volunteers we:

- Are dedicated to protecting and enhancing the green setting of Cambridge for people and nature.
- Care about Cambridge and are an independent voice for quality of life in the strategic planning of Greater Cambridge.
- Are working to protect, celebrate and improve the important built heritage of the Cambridge area.
- Own and care for green spaces and historic buildings in and around the city for people and nature, including Wandlebury Country Park, Coton Countryside Reserve, Cambridge Leper Chapel & Barnwell Meadows, Bourn Windmill and Hinxton Watermill.

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Cambridge Past, Present and Future object to this application on the grounds that the proposal fails to meet the fundamental requirements of Schedule 2, Part 6, Class A (or B) of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended).

The proposed agricultural building is specified as a general-purpose agricultural store for harvested crops and straw. We consider that there are existing buildings on this site which are available for such a use and there is no justification for a new building.

1. Failure to Meet the 'Reasonably Necessary' Test: Under Part 6, development is only permitted if it is 'reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture within that unit'. The planning history of this site demonstrates a clear lack of agricultural necessity.

Four agricultural buildings have been built either as permitted development or through the prior approval process for agricultural use. Three have subsequently been permitted change of use.

Barn 1: This agricultural building was permitted without the need for prior approval (S/2071/10). The purpose of the building was stated as a store for agricultural produce and, when empty, for agricultural machinery and fertiliser.

However, this building was obviously not needed for agricultural purposes because in 2015 prior notification was applied for and given for change of use of agricultural floor space to B1 and B8 uses (S/1997/15/PM). This building has not been completed in accordance with the plans and remains an open sided barn.

The site is being used by Momentm Health Cambridge and a mobile MRI Scanner and portacabin are located in the shelter of the building. Does this use comply with the permission for B1 and B8 use? When visiting the

site in 2023 the barn was vacant, so this use has commenced in the last two years. However, consent for the B1 and B8 uses expired in May 2016 and not all the conditions have been met in that the access has not been constructed using a bound material. We ask that officers check that the current use of this barn has permission.

Barn 2: This agricultural store was built without the need for prior approval (S/2602/13/PA). The building has been completed.

However, the applicant has decided that this barn is not needed for agricultural purposes. In March 2025 prior approval was granted for change of use from agriculture to Class E(g) (Commercial, Business and Services). It is unclear from a site visit whether this has taken place.

Barn 3: This agricultural store was built without the need for prior approval (S/0390/16/PN). The building has been completed. It is unclear from a site visit whether the barn is being used for agricultural purposes.

Barn 4: Prior approval was granted for a store for agricultural produce and when empty for agricultural machinery and fertilizer (22/02935/PRIOR). The need for this barn was justified by the need for additional storage.

However, this building was obviously not needed for agricultural purposes because in 2023 permission was applied for and granted for change of use to a drive through blood testing unit (23/02823/FUL). The agricultural building has not been completed in accordance with the plans (it remains an open sided barn), it is superficially used for the storage of machinery (which only took place just prior to the determination of the 2023 application), and the change of use has not commenced and will expire in a year's time. If an agricultural need was used as justification for the Prior Approval application, it should not have been offered for a non-agricultural use.

2. Lack of Evidence of a Genuine Agricultural Trade or Business: The GPDO defines 'agricultural land' as land used for agriculture as a trade or business. Given that two of the four previously 'necessary' barns remain unfinished (without walls) and have never been used for the storage of agricultural produce and three of the four have permission for non-agricultural use, the applicant has failed to demonstrate a functional or economic requirement for additional agricultural floor space on the holding.

3. Strategic Proliferation of Buildings: The Council should consider the cumulative impact and the planning history of Arnold Farm/Magog Court. If the existing permitted barns were truly 'reasonably necessary' for the farm's operation, they would have been constructed and utilised. Proposing a fifth barn while three are being diverted to non-agricultural uses is an abuse of Permitted Development rights and represents an unsustainable proliferation of buildings in the open countryside.

4. Siting: The GPDO requires the Council to consider the siting of the building. The proposed building is located within the Cambridge Green Belt and the sensitive landscape setting of the Gog Magog Hills. The proposed development's siting is fundamentally incompatible with its location within the Cambridge Green Belt and the sensitive landscape of the Gog Magog Hills. By extending the existing building cluster south-eastwards, the structure would be prominent from public viewpoints, interrupting the open rural character and views toward the historic core of the city and up to the Gog Magog Hills. This siting fails to "preserve the openness" of the Green Belt; instead, it establishes a footprint for significant built mass that is currently unjustified by active agricultural trade, representing a clear encroachment into the countryside in direct conflict with core national planning purposes.

The introduction of a fifth structure, which further creates potential for a sixth plot (between the application site and A1307), represents an unnecessary proliferation of buildings in a highly protected area.

When we responded to the application for the change of use of Barn 4, we expressed our concerns that should the development be allowed, it will lead to a subsequent application for a replacement agricultural barn. We have been proved correct.

In conclusion, the proposed development fundamentally fails to meet the basic requirements of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015. The planning history of the site demonstrates a clear failure to meet the "reasonably necessary" test; the pattern of gaining prior approval for agricultural barns supported by agricultural need only to subsequently apply for changes of use highlights a lack of evidence of a genuine agricultural trade or business need. The approval of a fifth structure would represent an unjustified proliferation of buildings that cumulatively harms the openness of the Green Belt and the sensitive landscape character of the Gog Magog Hills. The current siting, while within an established "cluster," exacerbates this harm by adding unnecessary built volume to the countryside. For these reasons, the Local Planning Authority is strongly urged to refuse this application for prior approval.

I trust that you will take our comments into consideration.

Yours sincerely

*Sarah Nicholas*

Principal Planning Officer