

University of Lincoln



Planning Statement for Proposed Centre of
Excellence in Agri Food to the west of the A151
at Holbeach

1232-1/PS/MB/fv

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This Statement has been prepared by the Robert Doughty Consultancy Limited on behalf of the University of Lincoln to support an outline planning application for the erection of a two storey research and development facility on 0.965 ha of land to the west of the A151 and to the south of Distillery Farm at Holbeach, Lincolnshire.
- 1.2. The facility will provide approximately 1360m² of floor space, including:
 - Chemistry laboratory and prep room (145 m²)
 - Food microbiology laboratory and prep room (165 m²)
 - Test kitchen and sensory suite (60 m²)
 - Conference room (95 m²) plus seminar room and boardroom (120 m²)
 - Learning resource centre and computing laboratory (120 m²)
 - Staff offices (120 m²) and postgraduate researcher accommodation (60 m²).
- 1.3. The proposed uses fall within B1 and B2 business uses, but D1 non-residential institutions is the dominant use.
- 1.4. The new building will increase the capacity of the National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM) and the Holbeach Campus of the University of Lincoln on Minerva Way, Holbeach. The new facility is crucial in enabling NCFM to become a national robotics and automation demonstration centre. The existing robot itself will remain at Minerva Way; the new building will house complementary technologies and the staff required to maximise the potential of the Agri-food Industry Robotics and Automation demonstration facility, as well as being a technology showcase in its own right for smaller, laboratory based technologies.
- 1.5. The application site is used for agriculture and lies immediately outside the settlement curtilage. It is, however, part of a wider area of land identified as a Food Enterprise Zone (FEZ), promoted as a preferred allocation in the emerging South East Lincolnshire Local Plan, which in turn is responding to measures promoted by the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership. The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is also supporting the implementation of the Food

Enterprise Zone at Holbeach, together with other such zones at the Lincolnshire Show Ground and Europarc, Grimsby, with grants to deliver a Local Development Order to facilitate development. The University development would be the first stage of development on the FEZ at Holbeach.

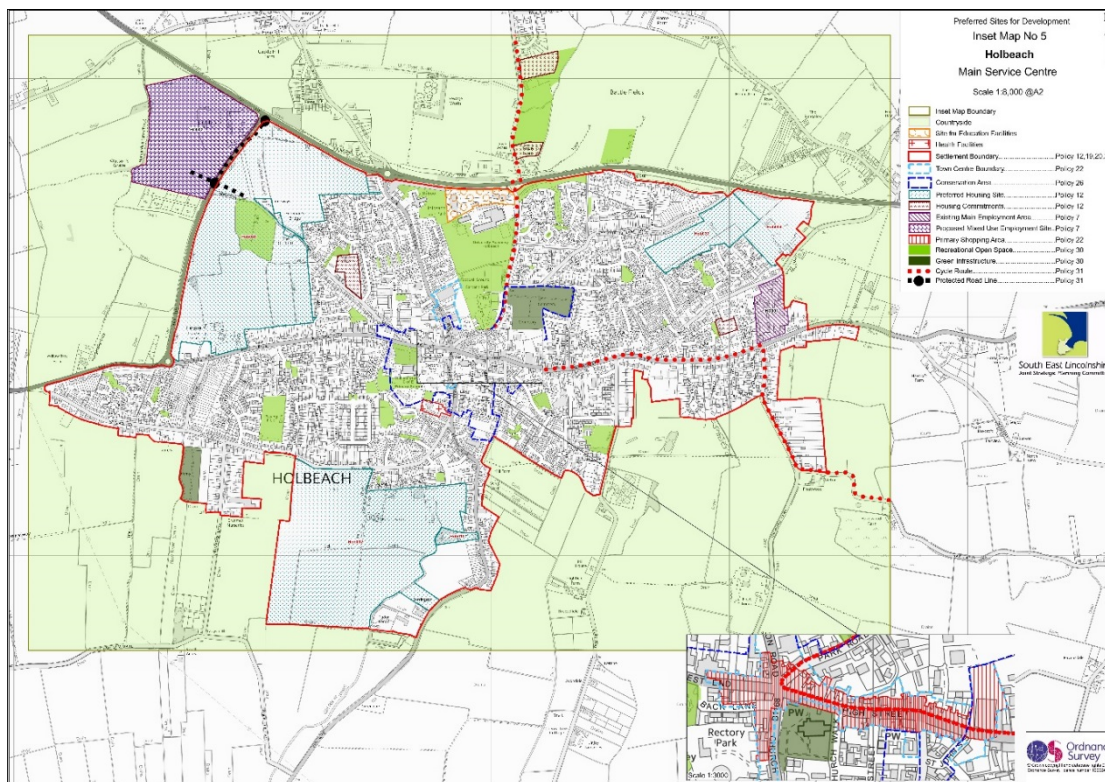


Fig 1. South East Lincolnshire Local Plan extract showing proposed Fez Allocation

1.6. The development of the FEZ is also supported by the development by Lincolnshire County Council of the Peppermint Junction improvement scheme, which has the benefit of an extant planning permission. In addition to the primary A17/A151 road junction improvement to be formed by a new roundabout, the Peppermint Junction scheme includes a new roundabout on the A151 to afford access to the FEZ and to the proposed residential development to the east of the A151, that is the subject of a current planning application.

2. THE PROPOSAL

- 2.1. Outline planning permission is sought for the erection of a two storey building with 100 parking spaces, internal roadways, associated landscaping and a Sustainable Drainage System.



Fig 2. Indicative drawing of proposed University Building

- 2.2. It is anticipated that the site will, in the longer term, be accessed from the spine road leading through the FEZ from the new roundabout proposed as part of the Peppermint Junction highways scheme. Until that scheme is in place, however, a temporary junction arrangement is proposed directly onto the A151 to the north of the application building.
- 2.3. A surface water drainage system will be agreed capable of supporting the current proposal.

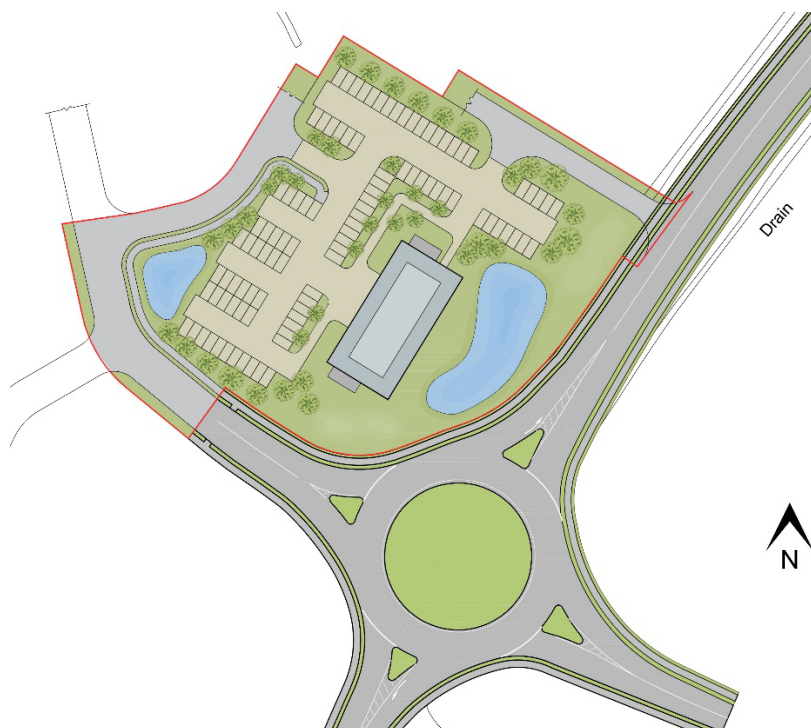


Fig 3. Indicative Masterplan

3. THE APPLICATION SITE

- 3.1. The application site is fully described in the planning application Design and Access Statement.
- 3.2. The Holbeach settlement curtilage runs to the east of the A151 and includes a wider area of land allocated as an extension to Holbeach in the 2006 Local Plan. This land is subject to a current planning application for up to 650 dwellings (application number H09-0468-16). A further application for 300 dwellings for the north western corner of that site is anticipated in due course.
- 3.3. Although the application site is currently in agricultural use, it is clearly in an area of significant change by virtue of the approved Peppermint Junction scheme, the proposed allocation of the site within a larger employment allocation and the promotion of a comprehensive residential development to the east of the A151.

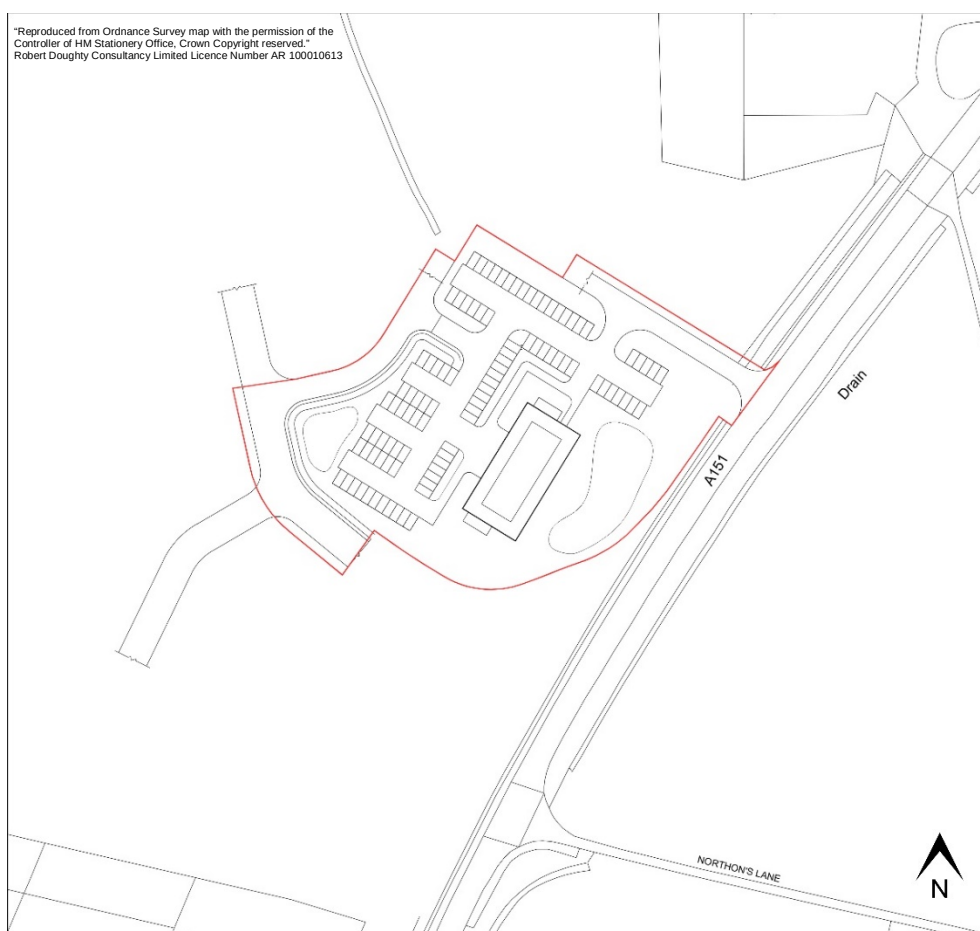


Fig 4. Application Site Plan

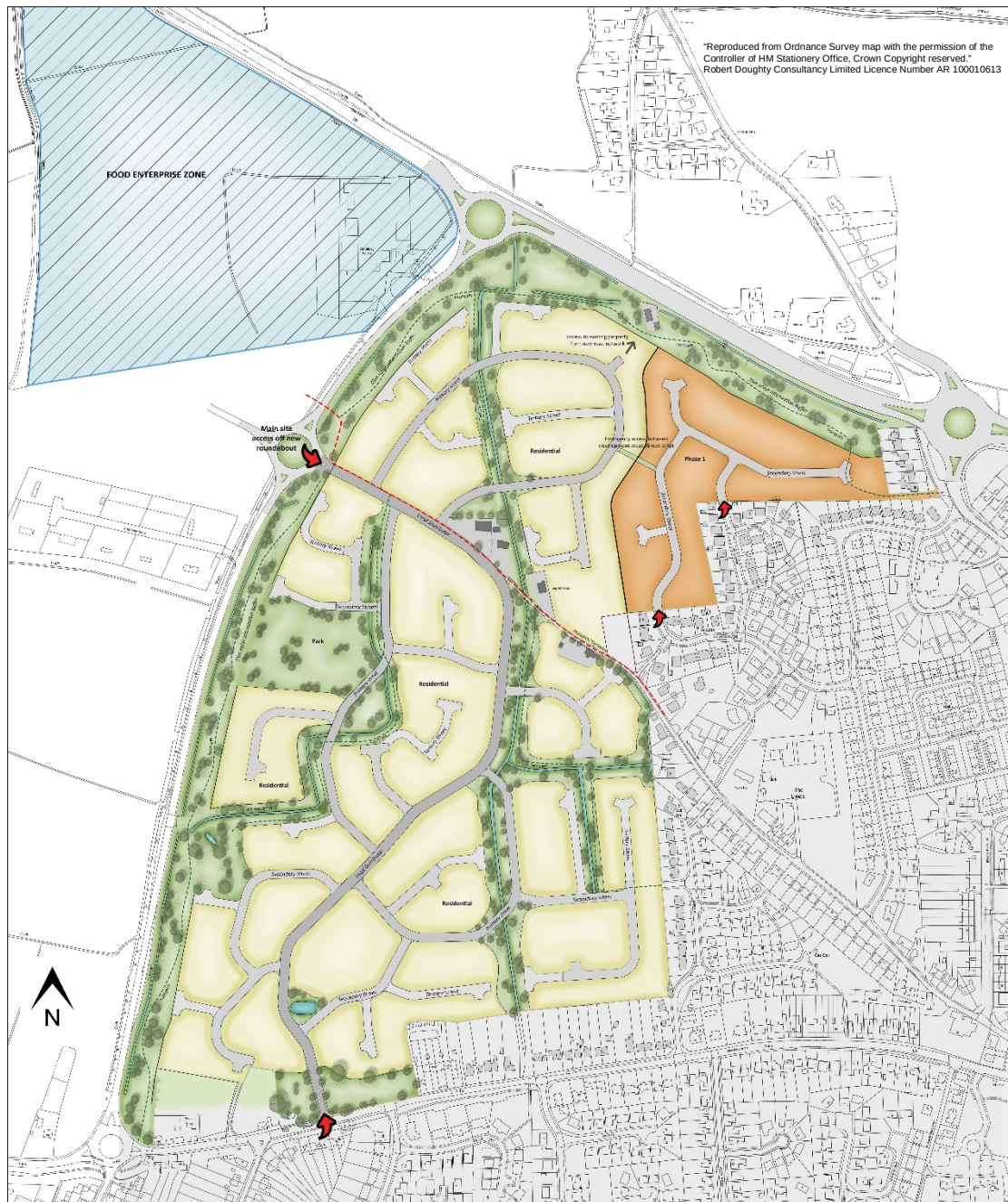


Fig 5. Masterplan for residential development showing Peppermint Junction proposals

4. PLANNING POLICY

National Planning Policy Framework

4.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (the “NPPF”) sets out Central Government’s planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

4.2. Paragraphs 6 and 7 of the NPPF confirm the commitment to sustainable development based on three dimensions:

“an economic role - contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;

a social role - supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community’s needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and

an environmental role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.”

4.3. This is followed by a commitment to a presumption in favour of sustainable development and at paragraph 14, “For decision-taking this means:

- approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and
- where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
 - any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or
 - specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.”

4.4. Paragraphs 196 and 197 confirm that applications should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan and that in such cases Local Authorities should apply the presumption in favour of development.

4.5. With regard to building a strong, competitive economy, the NPPF states at paragraph 20 that, “... local planning authorities should plan

proactively to meet the development needs of business and support an economy fit for the 21st century.” and at paragraph 28 that, “Planning Policies should support economic growth in rural areas.”

- 4.6. It is concluded that the application proposal is sustainable development that enjoys the full weight of the NPPF and the presumption in favour of development.

5. SOUTH HOLLAND LOCAL PLAN

- 5.1. The Statutory Development Plan comprises the Saved Policies of the South Holland Local Plan (Local Plan) that was adopted in July 2006. These policies are used for development management purposes in advance of the emerging Local Development Framework, now known as the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan.
- 5.2. Local Plan Policy SG1 - General Sustainable Development indicates that planning permission will be granted for development where the Council is satisfied that the proposal is consistent with the principles of sustainable development. Paragraph 3.11 of the explanatory text states,

“The strategy of the Plan is based on major development being concentrated in Spalding, the main district centre, to reinforce its role as the major employment and service centre of South Holland, followed by development in the other towns. The towns offer a balance between housing, jobs and services locally - so reducing the need to travel...”
- 5.3. Local Plan Policy SG2 – Distribution of Development seeks to adopt a sequential approach giving priority to previously developed land within settlement limits, then to greenfield sites within settlement limits and, finally, to land adjacent to settlement limits. New development must also make efficient use of land, ensure that, wherever possible, the development is served by a range of a choice of transport and that the development is acceptable in terms of traffic generation.
- 5.4. Local Plan Policy SG3 - Settlement Hierarchy identifies Holbeach in the second tier of settlements after Spalding. There is an acceptance that Holbeach, due to its size and location, operates at a different, higher level above the other settlements in the same tier and as such it is a significant location for new development.
- 5.5. Local Plan Policy SG4 – Development in the Countryside indicates that planning permission will only be permitted in the open countryside where it cannot be reasonably accommodated within settlement limits and no other site or solution exists.
- 5.6. Local Plan Policy SG11 – Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) permits development provided surface water disposal is managed.
- 5.7. Local Plan Policy SG12 – Sewerage and Development provides that development will only be acceptable where foul sewage can be effectively dealt with. The proposed foul sewage will be accommodated within the existing mains system.

- 5.8. Local Plan Policy SG14 – Design and Layout of New Development seeks to ensure that new development makes a positive contribution to the character of the area.
- 5.9. Local Plan Policy SG15 – New Development: Facilities For Road Users, Pedestrians and Cyclists, proposals must provide safe and convenient access to and within the site for motor vehicles, cyclists, pedestrians, the less able-bodied and people with disabilities to accommodate the increased movement generated by the proposal.
- 5.10. Local Plan Policy SG17 – Protection of Residential Amenity is self-explanatory. Having regard to the significant distance to the nearest residential property, which is already closer to the existing industrial development than the application proposal, there is no conflict with this policy.
- 5.11. Local Plan Policy TC2 – Cycling, Cycleways, development requires provision to be made for cyclists, including direct links to the existing or proposed cycleway network. There is no dedicated cycleway at present, although the proposed residential proposal to the east of the A151 provides the opportunity to deliver new cycleways as part of that development. In the short term Northon's Lane offers an opportunity for cycling and walking, although it is recognised it is a narrow lane on which the national speed limit applies.
- 5.12. It is concluded that the application development is in general accord with the Local Plan and will assist in meeting the strategic objectives for sustainable economic development.

6. SOUTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE LOCAL PLAN

- 6.1. The South East Lincolnshire Local Plan was subject to consultation between the 8 January 2016 and the 19 February 2016. This was the first consultation for a single local plan for the South East Lincolnshire area, merging the previous Core Strategy and Site Allocations Development Plan Documents. A further consultation focusing on the revision of Policy 2 – Spatial Strategy and Policy 12 - Distribution of New Housing, together with revised land allocations across a range of settlements, commenced on the 12 July 2016.
- 6.2. The draft Local Plan has taken into consideration new evidence regarding the demands for growth in South East Lincolnshire, such as the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Growth Strategy, an Employment Land Review and the changing household and population projections, together with comments received at different stages of consultation process. The plan is not adopted and has not yet been subject to independent testing through the examination process. The weight to be afforded to its proposals is, therefore, limited. The Plan and its evidence base, however, does set out a clear impression of the future of the area, especially when viewed against the approval for the Peppermint Junction scheme, the support for the preparation of the Local Development Order for the FEZ and the submission of major planning applications promoting large scale residential investment in the area.
- 6.3. The plan sets out a number of strategic Priorities, including:
- “1. To ensure that growth in South East Lincolnshire delivers sustainable development that seeks to meet the social and economic needs of the area, whilst protecting and enhancing its environment for the enjoyment of future generations.
2. To deliver development in sustainable locations that seeks to meet the needs of the Local Plan area through the identification of a strategic planning framework that takes account of flood risk to guide the scale, distribution and nature of new development across South East Lincolnshire.”
- and,
- “4. To provide the right conditions and sufficient land in appropriate locations to help diversify and strengthen the economic base of South East Lincolnshire to meet the needs of existing companies, to attract new businesses and sources of employment, and to maximise the potential historic and environmental assets can have for sustainable tourism.”

- 6.4. There are a number of draft policies of relevance to the current proposal.
- 6.5. Policy 2 Spatial Strategy identifies Holbeach as a Main Service Sector, second only to Boston and Spalding in its importance in the area, stating that,
- “Holbeach is of a very different scale to the other Main Service Centres and has a historic core and a range of services of a much greater concentration and magnitude, including further-education opportunities. Coastal flood risk is also a significant issue for the settlement especially given its need to meet the demand for housing. The proximity of the town to the A17 also means that future traffic impacts are a significant consideration in bringing forward new development (see Policy 31).”
- 6.6. Policy 7: Improving South East Lincolnshire’s Employment Land Portfolio seeks to ensure the supply of employment land is of sufficient quality and quantity to support the anticipated economic growth of the area. It is under this policy that the FEZ was first promoted as one of the “Proposed Main Employment Areas” and a significant allocation for the South East Lincolnshire Area, as “SH4 Food Enterprise Zone, Holbeach”.
- 6.7. The supporting text for the policy at Paragraph 4.1.8 highlights the importance of the “Main Employment Areas”, specifically highlighting the significance of the FEZ at Holbeach and the relationship to the University’s Holbeach Campus and to the National Centre for Food Manufacturing. The July 2016 consultation updated the area of the FEZ to provide access from the proposed roundabout on the A151, incorporating the application site within the wider designation.
- 6.8. The policy and allocation together accord with the priorities of the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership, which has stated it will, “make real efforts to drive growth of the three sectors that it has most competitive advantage in” to deliver “world class food production and manufacturing...”. The LEP also aspires to support “University-led research supporting key sectors; effective knowledge transfer and good quality education and skills development”.
- 6.9. The LEP has also prepared and agreed an “Agri-food Sector plan” which identifies Holbeach as part of the Fresh Food and Food Processing Cluster – a key aspect of the LEP strategy. The Holbeach Campus of the University of Lincoln is identified as having a particular strength in the area and the LEP has expressed support for the University’s work to meet recommendation 6 of the strategy, which states:

“Recommendation 6 - Support the agri-food sector in accessing applied research and innovation support services by:

- Linking the Lincolnshire knowledge base to food research in other priority local LEP areas to provide a wider range of innovation and research expertise to support existing companies and inward investors;
- Developing links between the specialist agri-food knowledge base in the GLLEP area e.g. FRPERC, NCFM at Holbeach and the new Engineering, Chemistry and Computing Schools at the University of Lincoln, to provide a single access route for companies and to increase the critical mass of resources and expertise available to secure investment;”.

- 6.10. The Sustainability Appraisal for the site allocation assesses the proposed FEZ specifically. The allocation is supported overall because of the strategic benefits of the development itself, which will support key economic investment in Agri-technology, the limited impact on the wider landscape setting and the proximity to Holbeach and the strategic road network. The development of the allocation is expected to mitigate flood risk and explore public transport enhancements.
- 6.11. The January 2016 consultation on the draft Local Plan resulted in broad support for Holbeach as a major focus for development and some calls for increased residential targets for the town. The Food Enterprise Zone was subject to specific support and no objections.
- 6.12. It is concluded that the application proposal is in full accord with the emerging Local Plan and the proposed Local Development Order for the Holbeach Food Enterprise Zone.

7. ASSESSMENT OF PLANNING ISSUES

The Suitability of Holbeach

- 7.1. The Saved and emerging Local Plans are consistent in identifying the key role that Holbeach has played in the economic development of the area and its potential to act as a catalyst for future growth. Holbeach is identified as a Main Service Centre in Policy 2 of the emerging South East Lincolnshire Local Plan, due to its size, economic role and access to the strategic Road network, setting the town apart from the other Main Service Centres. This is in part driven by the town's unique relationship to the University of Lincoln, hosting, as it does, the Holbeach Campus and the National Centre for Food Manufacturing.
- 7.2. The Local Plan echoes the strategic aims of the Local Enterprise Partnership, which seeks to develop the potential of the Agri-technology and applied research to the Fresh Food and Food Processing Cluster based in and around the University's campus. This application represents a key step in realising the GLLEP's vision to further develop the application of research into the food production and processing industries by increasing the scale and capacity of the National Centre for Food Manufacturing.

The Suitability of the Site

- 7.3. The site, abutting the settlement curtilage of Holbeach at a significant junction on the strategic road network, has a number of locational advantages. The implementation of the Peppermint Junction scheme, together with the proposed residential development to the east of the A151, will ensure the site functions as an effective part of Holbeach and not as a freestanding development.
- 7.4. The application site is currently in agricultural use and, as such, development might be perceived to have an impact on the wider landscape setting. In reality, however, due to the nature of the area that is interspersed with small areas of woodland, sporadic farmsteads and residential properties, the development will not appear unduly prominent in the wider landscape setting. Views of the development will be limited to a relatively local area.
- 7.5. The site also offers a prime site frontage to A-roads, which will give a high profile to the range of activities being undertaken in the area and promote the Agri-Tech and food and farming sectors as the high

technology, high value industries they are. It will also promote the industry of the area to local people, as well as those travelling through the area. Other employment sites, including the existing Holbeach Campus, lack this profile.

- 7.6. The potential role of the site in delivering the economic strategy for the area is clearly recognised, as indicated by the proposed allocation of the wider site in the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan.
- 7.7. Indeed, the decision to submit an application on this site was driven by the wider strategy for Holbeach and the proposed allocation of the wider site as a FEZ, which is, in turn, driven by the importance of links to the University campus, as highlighted in the emerging draft local plan, the Greater Lincolnshire LEP's Agri Food Sector Plan, and the decision by DEFRA to fund South Holland District Council's bid to promote a Local Development Order for the Food Enterprise Zone.
- 7.8. It is essential to ensure that the expansion of the University's activities in food production and manufacturing are located in or around Holbeach. To do otherwise would be to potentially undermine the wider economic strategy for the area. The application site offers the potential to bring forward investment in the university sector in a location that can support and encourage the delivery of the Peppermint Junction scheme and future investment in the Food Enterprise Zone itself.
- 7.9. Although currently in the countryside, the development conforms with Saved Local Plan Policy SG4 as the development, which is clearly necessary to support the economic growth of the area, cannot be accommodated elsewhere in the urban area. The site is also part of a larger development site coming forward through the Development Plan and will, in due course, be supported by a Local Development Order promoted by South Holland District Council and supported by grant funding from DEFRA and the LEP.
- 7.10. The existing employment site on Fleet Road in Holbeach neither has the capacity to accommodate the proposed development, nor does it have the relationship to the proposed FEZ and easy access to the major road network that the proposal does. Although the proposed building could be accommodated at Minerva Way, that area is dedicated to education uses in the emerging Local Plan and the current use, whereas the application proposal seeks to provide an interface between business and

academia that is not a strict educational facility. The application site, despite lying in the open countryside abutting the settlement curtilage of Holbeach, represents the most appropriate location for investment at this time.

- 7.11. Although the development would initially be visually removed from Holbeach, with limited opportunities to access the site by public transport, cycling or pedestrian routes, this will improve over time as the residential development comes forward, together with the implementation of the Peppermint Junction and as investment comes forward on the rest of the FEZ, which will facilitate greater opportunities for alternative modes of travel.

Drainage and Flood Risk

- 7.12. An FRA and drainage strategy have been prepared to support the application. These have informed the indicative layout provided as part of the application. The report covers a wider area than the application site, but demonstrates the site is capable of accommodating a new development incorporating appropriate flood mitigation measures through a raised floor level and the application of flood resilience measures. The illustrative layout incorporates a surface water attenuation pond, although the size of the pond can be reduced if other methods, such as grey water recycling and storage under the car park, are used.
- 7.13. The drainage scheme has been developed to support the current proposal but changes can be incorporated to tie in with proposals for the rest of the FEZ.

Ecology

- 7.14. An ecological assessment has identified an area of Marsh Orchids in the drainage ditch. Those, together with some invasive species in the drainage ditch, are the key ecological issues across the site. A scheme to relocate the orchids can be agreed as part of the reserved matters application, if deemed necessary, although work on the Peppermint Junction will also lead to the removal of these plants. If the invasive species need to be disturbed, it is recommended that a suitable contractor is involved to reduce the risk of the plants spreading any further.

Residential Amenity

7.15. The nearest residential properties are to the south. The proposed development is of a scale and location that will ensure there will be no impact on the existing premises. The outline application for residential development to the east of the A151 indicates new properties will be set back from the A151. There will be no resulting conflict between the two proposals.

Loss of Agricultural Land

7.16. The application site, like much of the land around Holbeach, is classified as Grade 3 agricultural land. No detailed assessment has been undertaken to assess whether the land is 3A. The proposal, however, is to provide a new facility to support further and ongoing innovation and improvement in food production. There is a need to increase the capacity based in Holbeach and the potential advantages for the wider food production sector arising from the proposed development should be weighed favourably against the loss of what, in the context of supply of Best and Most Versatile land in the area, is a relatively small area of land especially in light of the absence of available sites with a lower classification.

8. THE PLANNING BALANCE

- 8.1. When considering any proposal, the Local Planning Authority must have regard to the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in paragraph 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework. This states that when considering applications

“where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out of date, granting permission unless:

Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in this Framework, taken as a whole: or

Specific policies in this framework indicate development should be restricted”.

- 8.2. In this case the benefits of development are significant. Not only are there benefits arising from the investment in the construction itself and the new jobs that would come to the area employing people directly on site, but also there is the positive impact the operation of the new facility will have in supporting investment in the wider food and farming sector. The Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership has identified the key role played by the National Centre for Food Production in supporting investment in food production and manufacture. The sector is a major employer in the area and the NCFM is helping local businesses increase value, capacity, productivity and skills levels across the sector, helping employers adapt for the future through higher skills levels, innovation and advanced technologies making effective use of the food production potential of the wider area.
- 8.3. This development is expected to lead to increased investment in a much wider area.
- 8.4. Although the saved Local Plan policies identify this area as countryside, the emerging South East Local Plan identifies the site as a new “Major employment Area” and it is described as a Food Enterprise Zone. The concept of the FEZ is to develop links between the NCFM and industry, including developing the role of the National Centre for Food Production. This application represents a clear sign of the University of Lincoln bringing forward the investment to start the delivery of the Food Enterprise Zone and realising the ambitions set out in the GLLEEP “Economic Strategy” and “Agri-Food Sector Plan” and the emerging Local plan.

8.5. These benefits must be weighed against the potential impacts, which can be summarised as follows:

- Development in the Countryside
- Loss of agricultural land
- Flood risk and drainage
- Highways safety
- Ecology.

Development in the Countryside

8.6. Development in the countryside is only acceptable when there are no alternative sites available and where locational decisions have been made to mitigate the impact of development.

8.7. The application site abuts the settlement curtilage of Holbeach. There are no other suitable sites in terms of location, size or servicing within Holbeach and this development, acting as an expansion of the National Centre for Food Manufacturing must sensibly be located in or near the town.

8.8. The wider site is promoted in the emerging draft local plan as a major employment area. The application pre-emptes the formal allocation of the site by a short period and will support the delivery of the FEZ, which already benefits from grant funding from DEFRA and is a major plank of the economic development strategy for the Greater Lincolnshire Area. The FEZ is also bounded by Distillery Farm to the north and existing residential properties to the south.

8.9. As a freestanding development the proposed building will reflect the existing pattern of development around the Holbeach area. Although visible from local road frontages, the impact of the development on the wider area will be minimal. The overall impact on the open countryside in this context will be minimal.

Loss of Agricultural Land

8.10. The land is Best and Most Versatile agricultural land, as defined by the NPPF, but the fen area around Holbeach is dominated by Best and Most Versatile agricultural land. The scale of development when compared to the availability of such land in the area, is minimal.

- 8.11. The nature of the development is also to aid food production businesses make more effective use of the resources. Against the loss of less than 1ha of agricultural land must be measured the immense benefit the development could bring to the sector as a whole.

Flood risk and drainage

- 8.12. An FRA has been prepared to support the scheme and the risk to the development of flooding can be mitigated on site, without increasing risk off site.
- 8.13. The drainage strategy identifies the principles of an appropriate approach to draining the site, although the details of this will be agreed at reserved matters stage.

Highways safety

- 8.14. The site will be accessed from the A151 by a temporary access road in the first instance in anticipation of the delivery of the Peppermint Junction improvement scheme that will bring major enhancements to the local network and an opportunity for a new access from a dedicated roundabout.
- 8.15. Access to the scheme will be improved significantly as other developments come forward in the wider area, which will deliver much improved opportunities for travel by foot, bicycle and public transport.

Ecology

- 8.16. As a farmed site, it has limited ecological value and the main value comes from an area of March Orchids in the drainage ditch along the site frontage. An appropriate scheme can be agreed to translocate any plants, should it be deemed necessary.
- 8.17. In conclusion, the development proposal, whether it is seen as a single development in its own right, or as part of the proposed Food Enterprise Zone development, is in accordance with the economic aspect of the NPPF and is a key foundation to delivering the GLLEP economic strategy and the emerging Local Plan. It will bring jobs to the area and act as a catalyst to further investment in Greater Lincolnshire, bringing increased investment, innovation and boosting skill levels across the industry. This benefit far outweighs the potential impacts of the development which, it is concluded, are minimal.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1. The application development meets the objectives of sustainable development as defined by the NPPF, the strategic objectives of the adopted South Holland Local Plan and of the emerging South East Lincolnshire Local Plan.
- 9.2. There are no significant adverse impacts associated with the application proposal and, accordingly, the overwhelming planning balance is in favour and it is concluded there is no substantive policy objection to the application, but significant and persuasive planning reasons to grant planning permission.