

# Local Economy Evidence Report

## for Fawkham Neighbourhood Plan



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## Introduction

Employment is provided within the parish within clusters of business units at current and former farms, and also in other business premises, shown below:

- Brands Hatch Place Hotel and Spa - hotel
- The Rising Sun Inn - public house
- Battersea Dogs and Cats Home Brands Hatch - animal rehoming centre, 37 employees
- Dunrinnin - rehoming kennels
- Oak Racing Kennels at Hazelwood Kennels - kennels
- Birchgrove - kennels
- Canada Farm - boarding kennels
- Fawkham Green Garage - car repairs
- Fawkham Forge - upholstery business
- Redlibbets Golf Course - part of the course and part of the clubhouse is within the Parish
- Steephill Independent Primary School
- Fawkham Pre-school, within the grounds of Kentdown House
- Corinthian Sports Club, at Gay Dawn Farm - football, golf and indoor ball pitch
- The Black Barn and Gay Dawn Farm Offices at Gay Dawn Farm
- Units 1 and 2 Hill Barn Farm - specialist car repairers
- Buildings A and B at Woodland Park- boxing gym and stone masons
- Eureka - naturist club
- Laredo/Dakota Rose - Western town club and filming location

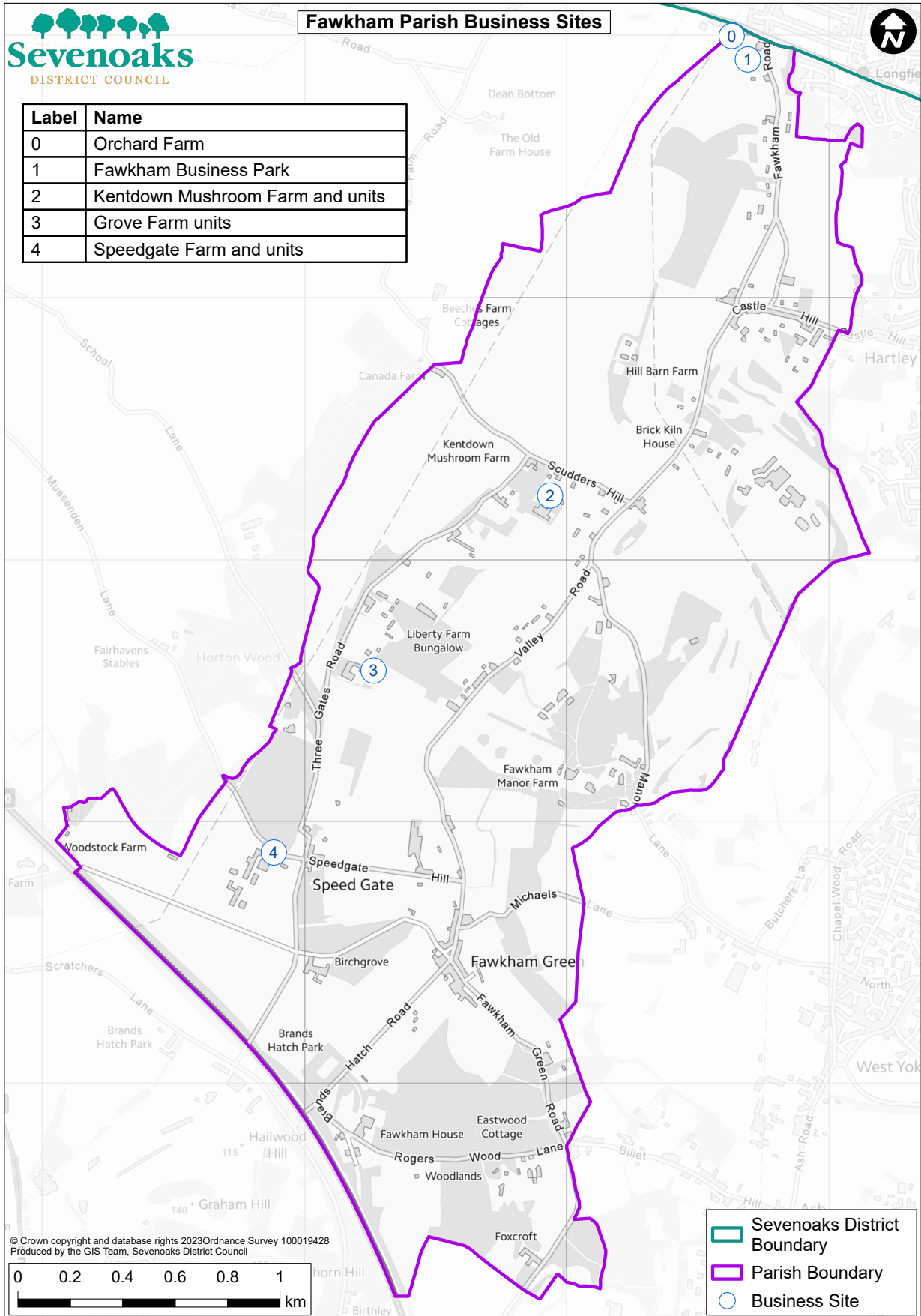
These were identified as premises subject to business rates from information obtained from Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) in February 2022<sup>1</sup>. In addition, a number of residents operate businesses from within part of their home, which range from honey production to photography, and building services to training provision.

The focus of this evidence is on the key business sites which contribute to local employment opportunities and the sustainability of the Parish. Fawkham Parish has four principal clusters of business units located at current and former farms, involving the re-use of redundant agricultural buildings and purpose built structures. The location of business sites is illustrated on Map 1. They range in size from nine to 29 units, with 68 in units in total across these sites. A range of occupiers use these units, including motor repairers and specialist motor restorers, joiners, dog groomer, tree surgeons, paper supplier, iron welder, cutlery polishers, property services/lettings companies, plus there are three specialist retail units (selling animal feed, saddlery and boxing equipment). Such sites generally comprise Use Class E (largely uses that can be carried out in any residential area without detriment to amenity), B2 and B8.

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<sup>1</sup> The list of business premises subject to business rates also includes Fawkham Primary School and Fawkham Village Hall. These are included within the Community Facilities Evidence Report

Map 1: Location of business sites within Fawkhams Parish.  
 Please note a more detailed plan for each site can be found in Appendix 1.



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## Planning Policy Context

The Sevenoaks Economic Needs Study 2022 states “*the rural economy is integral to the success, or otherwise, of the wider District economy*”<sup>2</sup>. It recommends SDC “*formulate specific policies that will encourage the growth and development of the rural economy, reflecting its key role in the District*”<sup>3</sup> and “*support rural diversification that is consistent with other emerging policies in the Council’s Local Plan*”<sup>4</sup>.

Core Strategy Policy SP8 Economic Development and Land for Business states:

‘...Sites used for business purposes will be retained in business use unless it can be demonstrated that there is no reasonable prospect of their take up or continued use for business purposes during the Core Strategy period.’ The Core Strategy also recognises that farmers are diversifying through the re-use of existing buildings and the development of new enterprises.

A recent SDC topic paper<sup>5</sup> reported that, since the beginning of the Core Strategy Plan period, there had been an overall loss of employment floorspace, despite the rise in population.

The Allocations and Development Management Plan Policy EMP1 does not identify any of the business sites within Fawkham Parish as being of strategic importance for retention. For non-strategic sites, Policy EMP5 - Non-allocated Employment Sites states: ‘The Council will permit the loss of non-allocated lawful business premises and sites to other uses provided it can be demonstrated, to the satisfaction of the Council, that the site has been unsuccessfully marketed for re-use in employment for a period of at least 6 months and that there is no reasonable prospect of their take up or continued use for business use at the site/premises in the longer term.’

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## Existing Business Sites

Fawkham Parish has four principal clusters of business units on the sites of current and former farms, involving the re-use of redundant agricultural buildings and purpose built structures (see Map 1). As the sites are farm-based they tend to be well distributed across the Parish in more remote locations.

Table 1 below summarises the sites. Appendix 1 contains much greater detail for each site, including the provision of units and the site condition.

These sites range in size from nine to 29 units, with 68 units in total across the sites.

Occupiers of these units range from motor repairers and restorers, paper merchants, stone masons, to dog groomers, tree surgeons, catering suppliers and offices.

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<sup>2</sup> Sevenoaks Economic Needs Study August 2022, 4.5

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, Recommendation 3

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, Recommendation 9

<sup>5</sup> Sevenoaks District Council (2020) *Employment and Retail Topic Paper*. The study reported that the District had lost 57,375 sq m of employment floorspace across the District since 2008-09

Table 1: Summary of Key Business Sites in Fawkham Parish<sup>6</sup>

Site name	Number of units	Site Size (ha)
Speedgate Farm units	11	0.52
Fawkham Business Park	9	0.77
Kentdown Mushroom Farm units	19	0.59
Grove Farm	29	0.68
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>2.57</b>

## Business Survey 2022

The Sevenoaks Economic Needs Study, 2022 recommends continuing to work with rural landowners to develop a deeper understanding of the rural economy and the issues therein, in order to formulate specific policies that will encourage the growth and development of the rural economy, reflecting its key role in the District.<sup>7</sup>

A survey was designed for Neighbourhood Plan purposes for businesses operating within the Parish. This included those in business premises and those running a business from their home in a spare room, garden studio etc. It did not cover those who have their main place of work elsewhere and work at/from home a few days a week.

A copy of the survey is available at Appendix 2. The survey was made available in both paper format and online via SurveyMonkey. The survey was delivered, generally by hand, during March 2022 to:

- all houses in the Parish
- all known business premises, including those in the clusters of business units.

Forty three responses were received by the end of May 2022, of which 67% were from businesses located in the five clusters.

Analysis of results shows:

- A variety of businesses completed the survey, with manufacturing stated as the most common sector (14.0% of responses), followed by animal-related businesses (11.6%), construction and building (9.3%) and agriculture (6.9%).
- Over a fifth of respondents have operated their business in Fawkham for more than 20 years; 14.0% have been operating in the Parish for less than two years. Those here for less than five years say they chose to move here primarily due to affordable premises or proximity to home/family, or a combination of the two.
- Most respondents carry out their business from a converted farm building.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the four clusters above, the sole access to another, at Orchard Farm, is within the parish, although the 8 units themselves are immediately outside the parish boundary, as shown on Map 1.

<sup>7</sup> Sevenoaks Economic Needs Study August 2022, Recommendation 3

- 19% of respondents are sole traders, with a further 42% employing fewer than 5 people. 12% of respondents employ over 31 people, including Battersea Dogs and Cats Home Brands Hatch which employs 37 people. 73% say they have had difficulty recruiting appropriately skilled staff over the last 12 months.
- 12% of respondents state that the majority of their employees are known to live in the Parish.
- The vast majority of employees travel to work by car and only 16% of respondents feel available public transport options meet their staff needs.
- More than a third of businesses say the majority of their customers are in the Parish or within 5-10 miles.
- Transport issues are mentioned by around one third of respondents, with issues including narrow lanes, road closures, poor road maintenance and no public transport.
- The majority of vehicle movements are by car, followed by van/LGV, although 71 weekly movements by vehicle over 7.5T were reported (Fawkham's main lane and most other lanes have a 7.5T restriction except for access).

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## Needs and Aspirations of Existing Businesses

The business survey also sought to understand the current and potential future needs of the local business community:

- Looking to the future, only 2% thought their workforce would contract, and then only a little. 42% thought it would grow a little, and a similar proportion (47%) thought it would stay about the same.
- Over 70% of respondents feel their current premises will suit their future needs for the next five years, with 44% also feeling they will continue to suit them after five years.
- Of those who feel their current premises will not meet their future needs, over 70% are already, or intend to, take steps to improve their current premises, rather than relocate.
- Of those looking to relocate, none are looking to move away from Fawkham Parish.
- In terms of services, over 50% feel both broadband and mobile signal need improving, over a quarter feel both surface water drainage and water supply/pressure need improving and just under a quarter feel the electricity supply needs improving.
- 72% feel there are no constraints on operating a business in Fawkham Parish.
- Over a third of respondents rate Fawkham Parish as a very good place to operate a business from, the same proportion rate it as good, with no respondents rating Fawkham Parish as a poor or very poor place from which to operate.

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## Demographic information

The Village Survey conducted in 2019<sup>8</sup> showed that over a third of households who responded (36.4%) work or had worked in the Parish. (The second most frequent location was London (31.8%), followed by Bluewater Shopping Centre, Dartford, Longfield and Sevenoaks).

The 2011 Census showed 61.9% of residents over the age of 16 were in employment, with 17.3% self-employed. The Census information does not include location of employment.

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## Local demand for Business Premises

The majority of the key business sites are fully occupied, and at least one is known to hold a waiting list for units, indicating a strong demand for the types of units which exist in the Parish.

SDC's Economic Needs Study (August 2022) notes that for industrial space there are *"low levels of vacancy observed across the District"*<sup>9</sup>, and the *"overarching need for commercial property is to protect what is there while seeking sustainable and environmentally acceptable opportunities to provide more employment land"*<sup>10</sup>. The Study recommends retaining commercial land and premises unless it can be demonstrated that the use is no longer feasible or viable (Recommendation 2).

Local agents<sup>11</sup> state that Fawkham is not a well-recognised location and they would expect demand to generally come from the local area. The narrow lanes of Fawkham are viewed by agents as presenting access limitations, although one agent described Fawkham Business Park as being *"reasonably navigable from Longfield"*. However, generally in the North West Kent area the commercial property market is seen by agents as exceptionally strong, with an extremely limited supply. Units offering adequate parking are very popular. There is very high demand for workshops and storage units, especially smaller units: *"Nothing stays empty very long"*.

Online searches<sup>12</sup> show no commercial units available within the Parish.

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## Conclusion

There is a variety of employment provision within Fawkham Parish. As well as individual premises there are four principal business sites which comprise a total of 68 units.

Local businesses employ local residents from within the Parish, whilst others commute in, mostly reliant on a private car. Access to premises by car or commercial vehicle is constrained by the lanes which serve the Parish.

Most local businesses felt that their current premises will suit their future needs, whilst others were improving their premises; none is looking to move away from Fawkham Parish.

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<sup>8</sup> FPC Village Survey 2019, distributed to all households, which had a 62% response rate

<sup>9</sup> Sevenoaks Economy Needs Study August 2022, 6.4

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, 6.7

<sup>11</sup> Watson Day; Sealeys Walker Jarvis; Altus Edwin Hill; Caxtons; George Webb Finn. March - June 2022

<sup>12</sup> Rightmove and PrimeLocation; June 2022

There is strong demand within the District and the Parish for commercial premises and the Sevenoaks Economic Needs Study 2022 recommends that commercial land and premises should be retained unless it can be demonstrated that the use is no longer feasible or viable. There may be the opportunity to intensify the use of business sites within the Parish but this will be dependent on the constraints imposed by narrow lanes, residential amenity and impact on the local landscape.

**Fawkham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
January 2024**



## Appendix 1: Business Site Appraisals

A site appraisal was completed for each site by members of the Fawkham Neighbourhood Plan working group: Housing and Built Environment.

### Methodology

A site visit was made, where possible, to assess the condition of the units in term of the maintenance of the exteriors, apparent levels of occupancy, site maintenance and access/ on site parking. In some cases only a roadside assessment and/or assessment via aerial photography was possible: such cases are noted on the appraisal.

Site maintenance issues considered included the presentation of the site, including presence and condition of signage/lighting, condition of any hard or soft landscaping (potholes, weeds), ponding of water eg due to drainage issues, litter/fly tipping, external storage of materials/waste.

## Fawkham Neighbourhood Plan Existing Business Site Appraisal

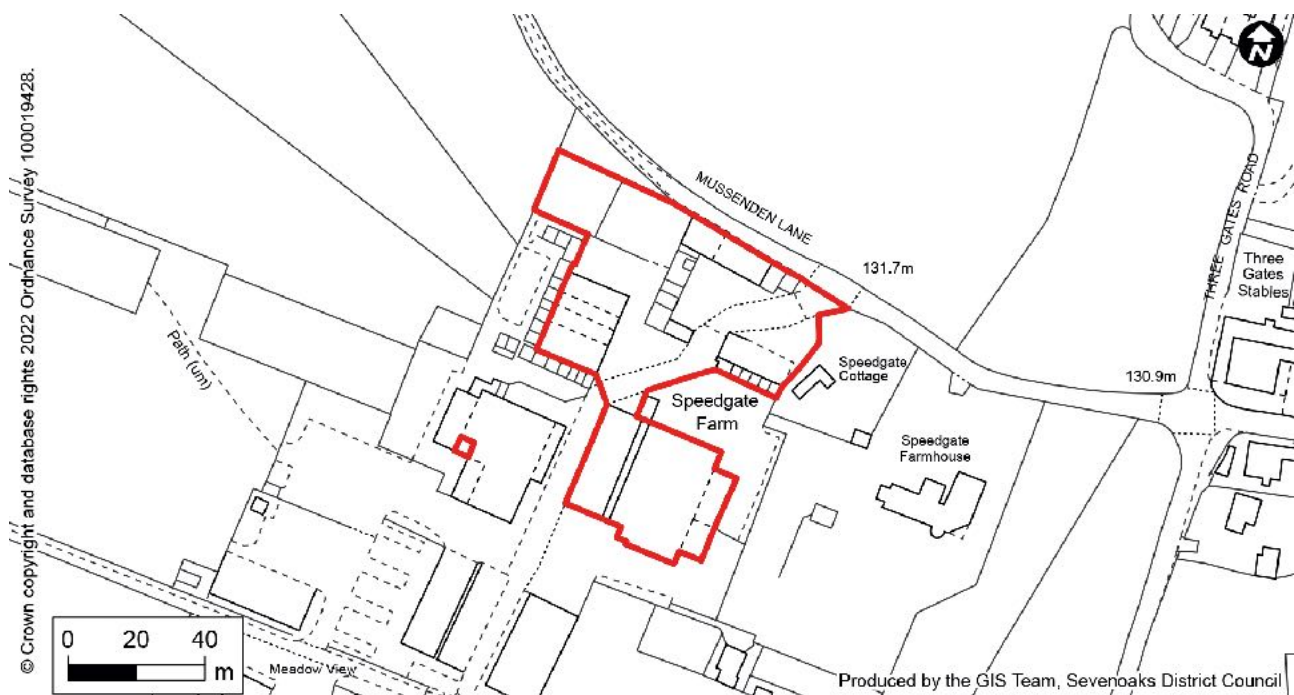
**Name of site:** Speedgate Farm

**Address:** Mussenden Lane, Fawkham, DA3 8NJ

**Site area (ha):** 0.52 (including access road that is also in agricultural use)

**Number of units:** 11

**Map:**



**Site description:** The site is broadly flat, running along the top of the Fawkham Valley/Horton Wood ridge, and largely surrounded by woodland, some of which is ancient woodland, and agricultural land.

Converted farm buildings of various construction types: wooden barns; solid wall with asbestos sheet roof; brick with metal profile sheet roof; part solid wall with upper part metal sheet profile with asbestos roof.

**Existing use:** Of the 11 units within the business park, the largest are the retail premises (equestrian and pet feed barn and saddlery shop) of Speedgate Enterprises Ltd. The small and medium sized units have various types of businesses, including a joinery, dog grooming, cafe, photography studio, engineering business, catering supplies, cutlery polishing, and the offices of cleaning contractors. One very small unit is storage only.

**Occupancy:** The units are fully occupied, and a waiting list is in operation.



**Accessibility, parking and servicing (turning areas etc) within the site:** Parking and servicing on site is good; access is via one entrance from a single track, unclassified rural lane (Mussenden Lane).

**Condition of units and site :** Good. The maintenance of the site and units is good/very good. Well-presented site with no litter, good signage

**Ownership:** Leasehold

**Development constraints and environmental issues:**

- Green Belt
- Adjacent to traditional orchard with UK BAP Priority Habitat status
- Source Protection Zone 3

- Archaeological potential notification area
- Adjoins residential use (farmhouse and farm cottages)
- Surrounded by open countryside, including farmed agricultural land, with ancient woodland to north, east and west, LWSs to north and east
- A PROW crosses to the south of the wider site

**Other Notes:** Parts of the larger site is used for Speedgate Enterprises' farming operation and equestrian operation, with stables, dressage site, equestrian event site, etc. Speedgate Farm began to diversify into the equestrian market the early 1980s. The business now employs over 40 staff across the stores, feed delivery department and arable farm. The 600 acre farm still produces hay and straw, whilst the equestrian events continue to grow year by year<sup>13</sup>.

There is also a Camping and Caravanning Club certified site for up to 5 caravans or motorhomes and up to 10 trailer tents or tents (also part of Speedgate Enterprises). A livery yard known as Orchard Yard is also in operation on the larger site as a separate business.

**Summary:** The defined business site provides a range of unit sizes, is in good condition and is fully occupied. There remains demand for this type of premises and the site contributes to local employment provision and the sustainability of the Parish.

**Date of survey:** 9.3.22, updates to businesses 1.24

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.speedgate.co.uk/pages/aboutus/>

## Fawkham Neighbourhood Plan Existing Business Site Appraisal

**Name of site:** Fawkham Business Park

**Address:** Fawkham Road, DA3 7BE

**Site area (ha):** 0.77

**Number of units:** six buildings ranging in size from 55sqm to 831sq m, total built form 1702 sq m<sup>14</sup>, containing 9 units plus a site manager's dwelling.

**Site description:** The site is close to the northern parish boundary, adjacent to the main route along the valley floor. The site slopes upwards to the west.

Converted farm buildings of various construction types and ages. Majority are steel portal frames with metal profile clad roofs and walls; others are timber clad above brick with metal profile roof and solid wall construction with pebble-dash style render under an asbestos sheet roof.

Also a farm building converted to a site manager's dwelling. Buildings occupy a limited part of the site. The site also comprises associated servicing and parking areas. The buildings are well set back from Fawkham Road behind a wide grass verge and service road. The buildings to the west of the site are cut into a rising valley slope.

### Map:



**Existing use:** various occupiers, including iron work/welding; car servicing; vehicle body repairs; race car servicing and hire; boiler maintenance and installation; paper merchants; and kitchen manufacturer/supplier/designer. Many long-term tenants; some units with bespoke fit outs.

**Occupancy:** Fully occupied

<sup>14</sup> DHA Site plan 8/2018



**Accessibility, parking and servicing (turning areas etc) within the site:** access is good c.300m from the B260 in Longfield, although via a narrow railway viaduct. Servicing is good. There is good onsite parking available, including for the large HGVs which visit the site.

**Condition of units and site:** Units appear in good condition and site presentation is good (no litter, well-maintained soft-landscaping to road frontage, good signage).

**Ownership:** Leasehold

**Development constraints and environmental issues:**

- Green Belt site
- Majority Groundwater Source Protection Zone 1 (inner), minority part zone 3 (total catchment)
- Less than 100m Ancient Woodland (to east)
- Ancient Woodland and Local Wildlife Site less than 250m to south
- Residential use adjoining the site
- Less than 100m BAP Priority Habitat

**Summary:** The site provides a range of unit sizes, is in good condition and is fully occupied. There remains demand for this type of premises and the site contributes to local employment provision and the sustainability of the Parish.

**Date of survey:** April 2022

## Fawkham Neighbourhood Plan Existing Business Site Appraisal

**Name of site:** Kentdown Mushroom Farm

**Address:** Scudders Hill, Fawkham DA3 8PA

**Site area\* (ha):** 0.59 (including access road shared with residential and agricultural use)

**Number of units:** 19 units, plus one storage container, are shown on Sevenoaks District Council's record of business premises.

**Site description\*:** The site is on the western slope of the central part of the Fawkham valley, and rises westwards. Converted farm buildings. Most appear to be pre-fabricated steel frames, painted dark green or with green plastic-coated tin walls. Ten units have metal curved roofs.

### Map:



**Existing use\*:** A number of tree surgeons occupy units/storage areas at this site; other tenants include stage equipment hirers, floristry cards and props suppliers, mobile tyre fitters, and automated gates specialist.

**Occupancy\*:** Not possible to assess on site.

**Accessibility, parking and servicing (turning areas etc) within the site\*:** Access is via one entrance from a rural lane with a 6'6" except for access limit; the access is shared with Kentdown House and the Old Stables (in residential use) and with agricultural use. A traffic management plan has been observed to operate to guide large articulated lorries to and from the site, in which they are held on Valley Road outside the church and escorted to the site. Parking and servicing on site is understood to be sufficient.

**Condition of units and site\*:** Not possible to assess on site.

**Ownership:** Leasehold



*Aerial image showing Kentdown Mushroom Farm (areas hatched in black are in agricultural use)*

**Other notes:** \* Access to the site was not possible. The information above was obtained from planning history, business rate information from SDC, aerial photography and information submitted by the landowner, and via completed business surveys.

Parts of the site in current agricultural use are excluded from this appraisal. Kentdown Mushroom Farm no longer produces mushrooms; the farm sells logs, bark and compost<sup>15</sup>.

The wider Kentdown site also includes Kent Down House (business premises) with a children's pre-school in a converted garage, plus access to a separate residential property.

**Development constraints and environmental issues:**

- Green Belt
- 195m to Listed Building
- Groundwater Source Protection Zone part 2/part 3
- 685m to Local Wildlife Site
- 250m to Ancient Woodland
- Archaeological potential notification area
- Adjoins residential use to east and west; open countryside to north and south

**Summary:** The site provides a range of unit sizes, and is occupied, although the extent is not known. There remains demand for this type of premises and the site contributes to local employment provision and the sustainability of the Parish.

**Date of survey:** 13th September 2022

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.kentdownmushrooms.co.uk> and information from the landowner

## Fawkham Neighbourhood Plan Existing Business Site Appraisal

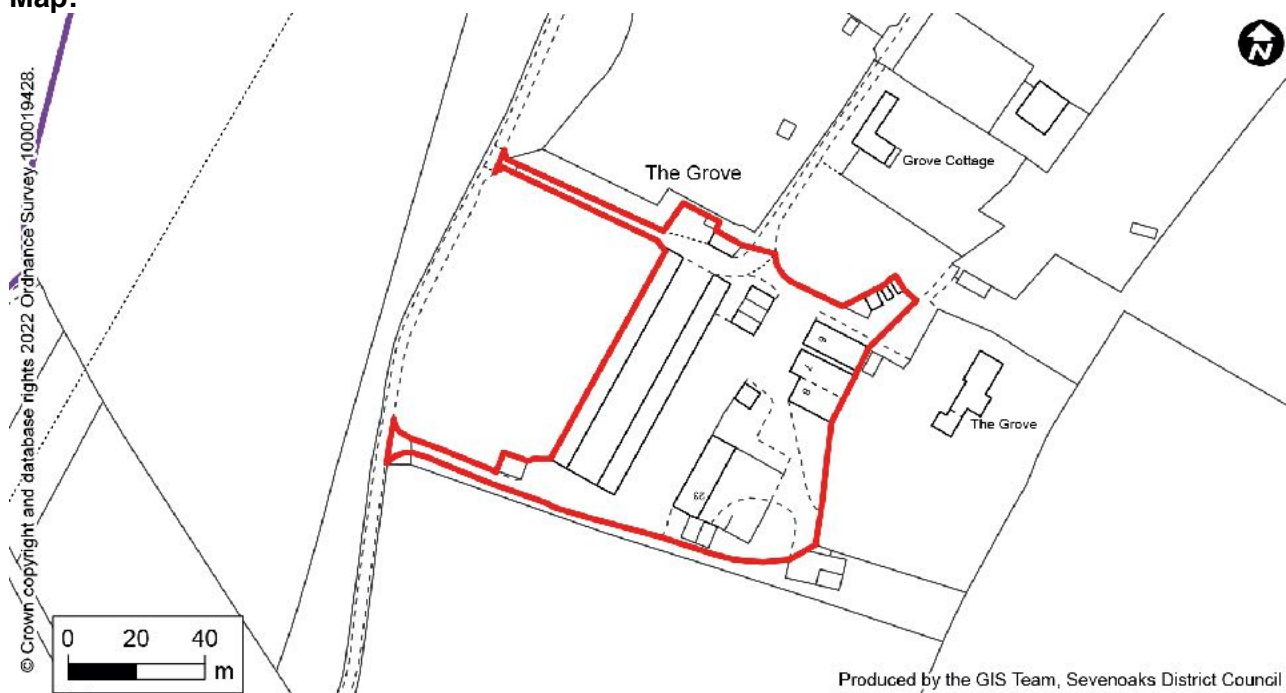
**Name of site:** Grove Farm

**Address:** Three Gates Road, Fawkham DA3 8NZ

**Site area (ha):** 0.68 (including two access roads with shared residential use)

**Number of units:** 29 units are shown on Sevenoaks District Council's list of business addresses. Difficult to assess accurately due to site condition.

### Map:



**Site description:** The site is broadly flat, running along the top of the Fawkham Valley/Horton Wood ridge, and largely surrounded by woodland, some of which is ancient woodland.

Converted farm buildings: planning history shows several conversions of redundant farm buildings have occurred since 1989 at this former pig farm, including 15-17 small units in the former pigsty, the old boiler house and cooking plant. Units 7 and 8 were rebuilt in 2004. The main part of the site includes a former pigsty constructed with a concrete portal frame and walls, plus asbestos roof with skylights; other buildings are steel portal frames with metal cladding.

**Existing use:** Various occupiers, including domestic appliance company offices and storage unit, furniture restorer, blinds supplier, mobility scooter supplies, second hand goods, and screen printing equipment & services company.

**Occupancy:** The units appear to be mostly occupied.

**Accessibility, parking and servicing (turning areas etc) within the site:** Parking and servicing on site is good; access is via two entrances from a single track, unclassified rural road (Three Gates Road) which is shared with residential use.

**Condition of units and site:** The condition of the units varies from reasonable to poor. The maintenance of the site is generally reasonable to poor. Some areas used for waste storage; some



overgrown areas; some puddling of surface water. Signage at entrance does not appear to be up to date in terms of tenants occupying the site.



**Ownership:** Leasehold

**Development constraints and environmental issues:**

- Green Belt
- Part of site adjoins ancient woodland (Grove Wood)
- Remains of traditional orchard on site, with UK BAP Priority Habitat status
- Groundwater Source Protection Zone 3
- Archaeological potential notification area
- Part of site in residential use (three detached dwellings plus associated garages/outbuildings)
- Residential use to north, open countryside, including ancient woodland, to east, south and west.

**Other notes:** part of the wider site is in residential use (three detached dwellings plus associated garages/outbuildings/access road). A track leads to further buildings, some in poor condition, understood to be a converted pig sty and other redundant farm buildings, some of which appear to be in use as stables and associated storage, with others appearing not be in current use. Owner recently deceased.

**Summary:** The site provides a range of unit sizes, and although the maintenance of the site could be improved, it appears to be mostly occupied. There remains demand for this type of premises and the site contributes to local employment provision and the sustainability of the Parish.

**Date of survey:** 6.3.22

**Appendix 2: Business Survey**

*Document provided separately*