

Development and Conservation
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Date: 5 December 2024

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Our Ref: PL/Taylor/JFAC

Dear Sir or Madam,

RE: PROPOSED CONVERSION AND EXTENSION OF EXISTING BARNs TO 2 NO. DWELLINGHOUSES INCLUDING DEMOLITION OF DETACHED SHED/OUTBUILDINGS/SILOS, LAND AT MILL FARM, CHARLTON, HITCHIN, HERTFORDSHIRE

This letter constitutes the supporting Planning/Design & Access Statement in relation to a detailed planning application for the above proposal submitted on behalf of Messrs M & W Taylor.

This Statement should be read in conjunction with the following:-

- Survey drawing nos. 10923-E1, E2 & FP1 and topographical survey by CJ Surveys Limited;
- Drawing nos. 22203-PL01A, PL02A, PL03, PL05, PL06, PL12A, PL13A, PL15 & PL16 by BBR Design;
- Heritage Statement by Heritage Network;
- Structural Report by Burdon;
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by Philip Irving (July 2022); and
- Letter dated 14th August 2024, Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (August 2024), Biodiversity Net Gain & MoRPh Report (November 2024), Biodiversity Metric and Biodiversity Metric MoRPh assessment by Coyne Environmental Limited.

1.0 Site and Surroundings

The site lies within the Charlton Conservation Area and is close to the Grade II listed Mill Farmhouse. It is also located within the Green Belt.

The authorised use of the buildings and site is agricultural and the barns proposed for conversion are currently visually dominated by the adjacent large detached concrete portal frame shed.

According to the Environment Agency's floodplain maps the site is located outside of both Flood Zone 3 and Flood Zone 2 i.e. located in Flood Zone 1 which represents the lowest probability of flooding at 1:1000 annual probability.

2.0 The Proposal

The proposal is shown in detail on the submitted drawings. In essence it entails the sensitive conversion of, and extension to, existing traditional brick barns to 2 no. dwellinghouses. As part of the proposal, the existing adjoining shed will be demolished along with the demolition of 2 no. grain silos and other outbuildings.

As well as discussing the planning merits of the case, this Statement includes the components of design (i.e. use, amount, layout, scale, landscaping and appearance) and access.

3.0 Proposed Use

The proposed use of the barns is C3 (dwellinghouses), whereas the existing authorised use of the site is agricultural.

4.0 Amount of Development

The proposed dwellinghouses will both be three bedroomed, with Unit 1 having an internal floor area of approximately 125 square metres and Unit 2 having an internal floor area of approximately 136 square metres.

5.0 Layout

The layout has been dictated by the principle of the sensitive conversion of the existing traditional barns on the site and the demolition of existing 'unattractive/functional' buildings.

The design theory behind the scheme has been underpinned by the objective of respecting and enhancing the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings, and this has been a key factor in planning the layout of the site.

The proposed layout of both dwellinghouses includes an open plan living area including a kitchen/dining/living area, 3 bedrooms, a bathroom and a wc.

6.0 Scale

As the proposal is in essence the conversion of existing buildings, the proposed scale of the dwellinghouses has been restricted to the existing scale of these buildings i.e. single storey. The proposed extensions have also been restricted to single storey.

The ridge height of the adjoining detached shed to be demolished is approximately 6 metres.

7.0 Landscaping

The landscaping for the site, both soft and hard landscaping, can be controlled through the imposition of a suitably worded condition on the grant of planning permission.

Private amenity areas will be provided for each dwellinghouse including on-site parking provision and bin storage.

8.0 Appearance

Entailing a conversion scheme, the proposed external materials of the dwellinghouses are as per the existing buildings i.e. brick, and the corrugated cement sheet roof will be replaced with natural slate. The external materials of the proposed extensions are brick with stained featheredge boarding. Black aluminium windows and doors are proposed.

9.0 Access

Each dwellinghouse will have its own vehicular access which utilise existing vehicular access arrangements onto the Lane.

10.0 Planning policy

The proposal accords with the following national planning policies:-

Paragraph 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) confirms that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the provision of homes.

Paragraph 8 of the NPPF identifies three overarching objectives to sustainable development: *economic, social and environmental*. *An economic objective*, by inter alia, contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy; *a social objective*, by inter alia, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places; and *an environmental objective*, by inter alia, protecting and enhancing the built and historic environment.

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF confirms that decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development and for decision-taking it is explained that this means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay.

Paragraph 38 of the NPPF exhorts local planning authorities to approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way.

Paragraph 84 of the NPPF states that planning decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless certain circumstances apply, including that the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhances its immediate setting.

Paragraph 131 of the NPPF emphasises that the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve and that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development.

Paragraph 142 of the NPPF confirms that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts and that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

Paragraph 150 of the NPPF explains that once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity.

At paragraph 153 of the NPPF it is set out that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt and that 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

The re-use of buildings, provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction, is classified at **paragraph 155 (d) of the NPPF** as appropriate development in the Green Belt provided it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

Paragraph 180 of the NPPF confirms that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, by inter alia, minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity.

Paragraph 200 of the NPPF states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting.

Paragraph 203 of the NPPF requires local planning authorities, in determining applications, to take account of various matters, including the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

The proposal also accords with the following local planning policies:-

Policy SP5 (Countryside and Green Belt) of the adopted North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 confirms that development proposals in the Green Belt will only be permitted where they would not result in inappropriate development or where very special circumstances have been demonstrated.

Policy SP13 (Historic environment) of the adopted North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 confirms that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight will be given to the asset's conservation and the management of its setting. The policy goes on to say that the Council will pursue a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment through certain measures, including maintaining a strong presumption in favour of the retention, preservation and enhancement of heritage assets and their setting according to their significance.

Policy HE1 (Designated heritage assets) of the adopted North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 confirms that planning permission for development proposals affecting Designated Heritage Assets, such as Conservation Areas, or their setting will be granted where they (as applicable):

- a) Enable the heritage asset to be used in a manner that secures its conservation and preserves its significance;
- b) Incorporate a palette of materials that make a positive contribution to local character or distinctiveness, where it is appropriate and justified; and
- c) Will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset, and this harm is outweighed by the public benefits of the development, including securing the asset's optimum viable use.

11.0 Heritage Statement

The Heritage Statement by Heritage Network has identified and considered the designated and non-designated heritage assets on and in the vicinity of the site. It has defined the significance of these assets and assessed the likely impacts of the proposed development on that significance in order to assign a grade to those effects, and it has proposed appropriate mitigation, in line with the requirements of the NPPF, which would reduce the assigned grade to an acceptable level.

The development proposals would have a *Slight Beneficial* effect on the Conservation Area, through the removal of deteriorating and redundant agricultural buildings and the resultant aesthetic benefit, and a *Neutral* effect on the setting of Mill Farmhouse.

Archaeological investigation of areas where intrusive groundworks are proposed, and the preparation of an historic building record of the eastern farmyard wall and of the small brick/slate outbuilding (Barn 4) would reduce the adverse effects on the buildings and on the buried resource arising from the proposed development to *Neutral*.

The archaeological recording of the buildings to be converted, and their associated plant, would reduce the adverse effects on them arising from the proposed development to *Neutral*.

12.0 Consideration of the planning merits of the case

The applicants consider that there are two key planning issues in determining this planning application: *firstly*, the principle of the development; and *secondly* site specific factors.

Turning to the first issue, **Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990** requires decision makers in their exercise of planning functions with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

It is the applicants' conclusion that the scheme will not only preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area but it will enhance it. This preservation and enhancement will be achieved through the sensitive conversion of these traditional buildings and by the removal of 'unsightly functional buildings', particularly the adjoining detached shed.

The above enhancement fully accords with the guidance at paragraph 84 of the NPPF which supports homes in the countryside where redundant or disused buildings are re-used and where there is an enhancement to its immediate setting.

As regards Green Belt policy, the proposal constitutes appropriate development in the Green Belt, under paragraph 155(d) of the NPPF, because it entails the re-use of buildings of permanent and substantial construction, which preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Significantly, the removal of the existing shed, grain silos and other outbuildings will enhance the openness of this part of the Green Belt.

Finally, in terms of principle, the proposal constitutes sustainable development in relation to an assessment against the three overarching objectives of sustainable development, as identified at paragraph 8 of the NPPF, for the following reasons:-

Economic – this is positive because it will contribute to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy. There will be economic gains made through the construction period and then the occupiers of the dwellinghouses will utilise the services and facilities within the local area and the District overall;

Social – this is positive because it will provide homes to meet the needs of present and future generations; and

Environmental – this is positive because it will preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, it will enhance the setting of the barns to be converted, it constitutes appropriate development in the Green Belt, it entails good design and a BNG can be achieved.

In relation to the second key planning issue, namely site specific matters, there are no known site specific planning objections to the proposal and no planning matters which the applicants conclude could not be satisfactorily addressed through the imposition of suitably worded conditions on any approval. The applicants have commissioned various supporting reports (listed above) which confirm that there are no site specific objections to the development proceeding as proposed under this planning application.

As set out above, the proposal represents good/sensitive design with the design theory for the scheme having been underpinned by the objectives of enhancing the character and appearance of the Charlton Conservation Area, enhancing the setting of the traditional barns to be converted and preserving the openness of the Green Belt.

The submitted Structural Report confirms that the barns are capable of conversion and in recognition of the need to address any ecological impact, the submitted ecological reports conclude that there will be no adverse ecological impact as a result of the scheme. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) has been addressed by the submission of the relevant information by the applicants' appointed environmental consultant and which confirms that a BNG can be achieved.

A safe and satisfactory means of vehicular access can be achieved to both dwellinghouses and there will be a benefit to the local community and residents from the displacement of heavy agricultural traffic, which could be associated with an active agricultural use of the site, with traffic to be generated in association with two dwellinghouses.

In terms of the protection of the amenities of neighbouring occupiers, their amenities will be enhanced through the introduction of a residential use compared with the authorised agricultural use of the site and the removal of the 'unsightly shed' and also there will be no loss of any privacy as a result of such matters as any overlooking from windows.

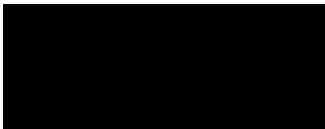
13.0 Conclusions

In conclusion the proposals represents a golden opportunity to support a scheme which will preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Charlton Conservation Area, will enhance the setting of the barns, will enhance the openness of this part of the Green Belt and which represents a sustainable form of development. There are no site specific factors which would render the proposals unacceptable in planning terms.

As such the proposal fully accords with paragraphs 7, 8, 11, 38, 84, 131, 142, 150, 153, 155(d), 180, 200 and 203 of the NPPF, Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and policies SP5, SP13 and HE1 of the adopted North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.

In the light of the above it is respectfully submitted that the application is entirely appropriate and acceptable. The planning authority is therefore asked to approach its decision on this proposed development in a positive and creative way, as required under paragraph 38 of the NPPF, and to grant planning permission.

Yours faithfully,



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