

Applicants' response to Conservation Officer's consultation response dated 5th March 2025

**In relation to planning application 24/02814/FP - Land at Mill Farm, Charlton Road, Hitchin,
Hertfordshire, SG5 2AB**

This statement constitutes the applicants' response to the consultation response dated 5th March 2025 from the Conservation Officer.

The applicants have carefully considered the matters raised in the consultation response including discussing them with their appointed Heritage Consultant.

Summary of Conservation Officer's consultation comments

- The impact of the proposal is considered to be supportable with some minor amendments a robust recording exercise as put forward in the Heritage Statement.
- The proposal will need to demonstrate public benefit and a robust recording exercise before a scheme will be supported.
- The loss of Barn 4 is considered regrettable, and effort should be sought to incorporate this structure with the redevelopment of plot 1.
- Recordings exercise at levels 1-4 (Historic England) should be undertaken prior to any work commencing so as to record the existing arrangement and fabric of these buildings and development of agricultural buildings in this Conservation Area over time.
- The redevelopment of this group of farm building is considered to cause less than substantial harm at a moderate level due to loss of barns 2,2a and 3, silos and the domestication of barns 1 and 2 and the overall site. To mitigate this clear public benefit will need to be demonstrated or a comprehensive recording exercise as already detailed will need to be undertaken.

Applicants' responses to Conservation Officer's comments

- The applicants agree to the retention of Barn 4 and amended drawings are submitted to address this matter.
- The applicants agree to the request for a recording exercise prior to the commencement of development and this matter can be controlled through the imposition of a suitably worded condition on any planning permission.
- As set out in the supporting documentation accompanying the planning application, the applicants consider that the proposal 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.

- 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 proposal 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.
- Paragraph 215 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that where a development will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use. Notwithstanding the applicants' position that the proposal will preserve and enhance the character appearance of the Conservation Area, should it be concluded that the proposals are considered to cause less than substantial harm at a moderate level so that public benefits need to be weighed against such harm, the public benefit arising from the proposal will be as a result of the combination of the following factors:-
 - Securing the use of the traditional buildings in an appropriate and viable use, which in this case is residential, in support of their long term conservation.
 - Any continuing agricultural use of the traditional buildings proposed for conversion is not realistic due to the changes in modern farming practice.
 - There will be economic benefits from bringing back into use under-utilised buildings in the village with some economic benefits during the conversion period with the opportunity of work to local tradespeople and the future occupiers of the dwellinghouses will help to support local services and facilities within the local area.
 - There will be social benefits as the proposal will provide homes to meet the needs of present and future generations.
 - There will be environmental benefits resulting from the preservation and enhancement to the character and appearance of the Charlton Conservation Area.

Should it be concluded that the proposal would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the Conservation Area, the above public benefits would be enough to outweigh any such less than substantial harm.

John Clarke B.A. (Hons), MA, MRTPI, Senior Planner, Howkins & Harrison, 7-11, Albert Street, Rugby, Warwickshire, CV21 2RX

31st March 2025