

North Hertfordshire District Council

Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 24/02877/FP

Date: 11/03/2025

Planning Officer: AH

Address: Titmore Green Farm, Stevenage Road, Titmore Green, Little Wymondley Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 7JT

Subject: Change of use of agricultural building to one 5-bed dwelling; external alterations and re-cladding following demolition of outdoor menage. Re-cladding and external alterations to existing atcost barn for use as ancillary storage to dwelling including parking, landscaping and all ancillary works.

1.0 Recommendation

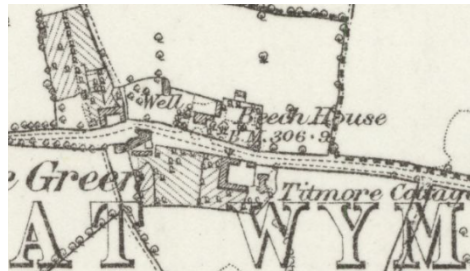
- 1.1 Buildings 1 & 2 and the Atcost building are large buildings of poor visual quality that make no positive contribution to the setting of Titmore Green Farmhouse other than reading as agrarian structures. There does not appear to be a convincing justification for retaining the Atcost building. Although smaller, there is opportunity to improve the setting to the farmhouse by replacing this building with a shorter, lower, dual-pitched building. By way of the materials, fenestration and terrace, the conversion of Building 2 to residential would be a striking and noticeable change in the context of the listed building's setting.
- 1.2 This really is an on-balance decision, and my initial thoughts were to raise an objection, and I am still of the opinion that improvements can be made to the Atcost building site. The changes to the main building impact upon the rural/agrarian setting of the farmhouse but I am not convinced that there is a sufficiently robust case to say that this will occasion harm to the significance of the farmhouse. If there is harm it would be towards the lower end of the less than substantial harm continuum. The removal of the menage is unobjectionable and returning this to grass to match the nearby paddocks will enhance the landscape. On balance, I conclude that the proposed conversion of the main building would not occasion harm to the farmhouse thereby satisfy the provisions of Section 66(1) of the Planning (LB & CA) Act 1990 and will accord with Section 16 of the Framework or Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031. However, a response is awaited regarding the Atcost building.

2.0 Context

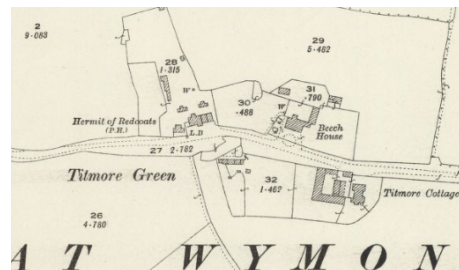
- 2.1 The site is located on the south side of Stevenage Road and south of Titmore Green Farmhouse which is grade II listed, therefore, is a designated heritage asset. The list entry refers to the farmhouse as being a *'Late medieval hall house, S wing c.1600, heightened and floored late C17, renovated C19. Timber frame on plastered brick sill, roughcast Projecting S cross-wing formed by additions to the old S bay, c.1600. Alterations in late C17 involved heightening the old range, inserting a floor and rear sidewall chimney and staircase, converting the service room to a kitchen and providing new storage space in a narrower W extension of S wing'*

- 2.2 It is apparent from the OS map regression below that not only was Titmore Green Farm formerly called 'Titmore Cottage' but its residential curtilage was quite tightly defined. The land on which the large agricultural buildings stand historically served as agricultural land to the north of what is referred to as Titmoregreen Farm which was originally located to the south on the 1950 published OS edition.

Surveyed: 1878 to 1881, Published: 1884



Revised: 1922, Published: 1924



Revised: 1946 to 1947, Published: ca. 1950



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- 2.3 As stated at 1.3 of the submitted Planning, Design and Access Statement (PDAS), *"Immediately adjacent to the west there is a range of traditional, red brick barns in business/office use called Titmore Court. This has vehicular access onto Stevenage Road and comprises some ten small business units let to local companies"*.
- 2.4 The detached agricultural storage building subject of this application was erected under ref: 84/00185/1 granted on 14 March 1984, thus has been there for approximately 40 years.
- 2.5 At 1.4 and 1.5 of the PDAS, it mentions that to the south of the farmhouse are two adjoining, steel framed buildings in agricultural and storage use. There is an open storage compound (former silage clamp) and a derelict equestrian menage. There are extant planning permissions for the change of use and

alteration of the two adjoining buildings to (former) B1 Business light industrial use (now E1(g) (iii) Commercial Business and Services) and B8 Storage or Distribution use. These large buildings are experienced in the wider setting to the listed farmhouse. At 2.2 of the PDAS it is acknowledged that *“the whole farm is contained within a semi-rural landscape comprising paddocks and larger fields beyond laid to grass”*.



3.0 The Local Plan and NPPF (Dec 2024)

3.1 The following paragraphs of the NPPF are relevant:

- **135 c)** (*sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment*),
- **207** (*local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting*)
- **210** (*desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness*),
- **212** (*great weight should be given to the asset's conservation*),
- **213** (*clear and convincing justification*), and
- **215** (*harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use*).

3.2 At 7.17 of the PDAS it states:

*The converted buildings with the proposed blend of colours within the construction materials will result in a pleasing and distinctive design. Once converted and landscaped, the conversion will enhance the setting of the listed farmhouse. **The proposal therefore complies with Policy ENV2 of the Local Plan.***

3.3 What is referred to here is the Council's 'Strategic Objectives'. Under para 3.7 of the NHDLP, it says that the strategic objectives provide the link between our vision for the district and the strategic policies set out in the Local Plan. Under the 'Environmental' subheading it reads

ENV2 Protect and enhance the historic character of North Hertfordshire's towns, villages, hamlets and landscape by promoting good design that creates a distinctive sense of place.

3.4 What is of greater relevance is Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

4.0 The Proposal

- 4.1 The proposed external appearance of Buildings 1, 2 and Atcost barn are noted at 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10 of the PDAS. The extant planning permissions for the change of use and alteration of these buildings to E1(g) (iii) Commercial Business and Services and B8 Storage or Distribution use, is quite different to that of a residential use co-existing alongside the new business/storage units (Building 1). By reason of their size, excessive linear form and overall appearance, Buildings 1 and 2 do not make a positive contribution to the wider setting and significance of Titmore Green Farmhouse. Although smaller, the open-sided, 6-bay Atcost building being located that bit closer to the listed farmhouse also has a significant deleterious impact upon the setting of the listed building. It is assumed that the height of the Atcost building is such due to its former function and I see no positive benefit to the setting of Titmore Green Farmhouse by retaining a structure of this size to serve what would be a residential use.



- 4.2 If the conversion of Building 2 to residential were to succeed then in contrast to the 6-bay Atcost building, a lower and indeed shorter building should be encouraged, and which would then hopefully complement the scale/form of buildings at Titmore Court. Even though 4.10 of the PDAS says that the Atcost barn is to be re-clad in stained timber horizontal weatherboarding over a new red brick plinth and that the existing fibre-cement asbestos roof cladding is to be replaced with a combination of profiled metal (grey / anthracite colour) and integrated (flush) solar heating panels, the CGI provides a hint as to how significant this building would be once the open sides/ends are enclosed.



- 4.3 Importantly though, the appearance of all three buildings is such that they represent relatively modern agrarian built forms that one might associate with a farmhouse setting. Unlike the proposed residential use, the previous consented scheme for change of use would not have resulted in change to their external appearance.



- 4.4 The key question is whether (as intimated in the PDAS), the design of the residential scheme is complimentary to the semi-rural surroundings and that by utilising timber, will this ensure the building blends into the landscape. I am not convinced that the converted building will appear far superior in appearance compared to the utilitarian blockwork elevations (with timber clad outshot) and fibre cement/asbestos roofing seen presently.
- 4.5 The length of Building 2 is such that any attempt to convert this building to residential would result in an excessively large house sitting alongside the grade II listed farmhouse significantly impacting upon the significance of farmhouse in its agrarian setting. The conversion could be perceived as the 'tail wagging the dog' as the conversion would become the dominant residential building in the area, particularly when viewed across the fields from Lower Titmore Green (see below). Having said that, I acknowledge that the terrace that would be created across three bays will, to an extent, visually break the building's linearity but in doing so would introduce an overtly residential/non-agrarian feature and where there would be noticeable activity at the upper level. Metaphorically, this is very much a case of *'putting lipstick on the pig or gorilla'*.



- 4.6 Of the barn conversion images provided at Appendix 4 of the PDAS, the following one is perhaps the closest representation of Building 2 if considering the left-hand elevation rather than the recessed gable end. Such an approach here would require the terrace to be omitted but has its place in design considerations.



- 4.7 The removal of the menage is unobjectionable and returning this to grass to match the nearby paddocks will enhance the landscape (see 7.13 of the PDAS) but I attach only a small amount of weight to this.



- 4.8 Finally, under para 7.18 of the PDAS it says that *“The proposed business units will be within Use Class E (g)(iii) which by definition should be compatible with a residential area”*. I note that the applicant will seek to secure low key commercial operators who will not disturb either existing business tenants in Titmore Court or residential occupiers on Stevenage Road. However, I am not particularly convinced by this relationship between the uses of Buildings 1 and 2 but appreciate that ‘use’ is a planning rather than a heritage consideration.

Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer