

020 - Design and Access Statement

The Ramblers, High Street, Barley, SG8 8JA

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OVERVIEW

Site & Setting

The application site forms part of the residential curtilage of The Ramblers, a Grade II listed building located along High Street in the historic village of Barley, Hertfordshire. The property lies within the Barley Conservation Area, an area characterised by traditional timber-framed and rendered buildings, long historic plot boundaries and a rural village character. The Ramblers contributes positively to this setting through its early eighteenth-century vernacular form and prominent street-facing elevation.

The proposed outbuilding is located within the rear garden, a well-enclosed and private space set behind the principal elevation. Access is provided via the existing side gate and driveway on the north side of the house, ensuring the route to the construction area avoids any interaction with the historic fabric of the listed building. Existing structures provide natural screening from the public realm, ensuring that the rear garden plays a limited role in the appreciation of the listed building or the wider Conservation Area.

The surrounding area retains a distinctly rural and historic character, with natural materials, modest building forms and a mix of older and sensitively modernised dwellings. The design of the proposed outbuilding takes cues from this context while remaining clearly subordinate to the host property.

DESIGN

Assessment

The design, scale and materials of the proposed outbuilding have been chosen to sit comfortably within the secluded rear garden while respecting the significance of the heritage setting. The building will be constructed using a prefabricated timber system by Okopod, incorporating sustainably sourced materials and energy-efficient detailing. Externally, the structure will be finished in charred thermowood, which provides a recessive, natural appearance that integrates successfully with the garden environment. This dark timber finish also relates well to the adjacent property, which is clad in black timber, helping the new structure blend into its immediate surroundings.

A sedum roof further softens the appearance of the building, providing a landscaped, low-profile form that reduces visual presence and enhances ecological value. The simple glazed door to the front elevation maximises natural daylight while maintaining an understated and contemporary appearance in keeping with the building's ancillary role.

The emphasis on sustainability, low embodied carbon, natural materials and precision off-site construction ensures the outbuilding is both energy-efficient and environmentally responsible. Okopod's lean manufacturing, low-waste construction processes and use of durable, long-life materials align with modern sustainability principles and reduce long-term maintenance requirements.

Okopod's Sustainability Statement:

Okopod is rigorous in their level of care and attention to every detail in the design and construction process, striving to make their builds the most sustainable solution possible. Their commitment extends to using sustainable materials, reducing waste, and minimising our carbon footprint at every stage of construction. This dedication ensures that each garden room they build not only meets high standards of quality but also contributes positively to environmental preservation for generations to come.

A key part of what makes Okopod special is their adoption of lean manufacturing principles, inspired by the Toyota Production System (TPS). This approach emphasises the "total elimination of waste," ensuring efficient use of resources across all aspects of our operations. By prioritising sustainability in design, materials, and processes, Okopod aligns with the vision for sustainable development.

The Design

Energy Efficiency

The PODs are designed to be more airtight than conventional construction, enhancing energy efficiency and reducing operational energy demand. Infrared heaters provide a quick and cost-effective heating solution by warming objects rather than air, reducing energy consumption and improving occupant comfort. Natural fibre Thermafleece insulation, with its low embodied energy, ensures excellent thermal performance and further reduces energy costs.

Sustainable Materials

- **Timber and Insulation:** They use sustainably sourced timbers such as birch plywood and natural cork flooring, both of which have low embodied carbon. Corka flooring, for instance, is carbon negative and has received the prestigious Blue Angel rating for environmental excellence.
- **Low-Carbon Aluminium:** The aluminium components are produced using hydropower, significantly reducing their carbon footprint.
- **Water Efficiency:** Fixtures and systems are designed to minimise water use, aligning with the sustainability goals.

Thermal and Acoustic Performance

High-performance doors minimise heat transfer, reducing drafts and energy bills. Thermally efficient materials help regulate temperature, ensuring interiors stay warm in winter and cool in summer. Airtight construction further enhances energy efficiency and indoor air quality.

Exceptional Longevity

Okopod's buildings are designed to last for generations. Cladding materials naturally weather to a beautiful silver finish, lasting between 35-80 years depending on the material. Low-maintenance materials such as aluminium doors and EPDM rubber roofing reduce upkeep while ensuring durability.

The Construction

Minimal Waste and Lean Manufacturing

Our construction process generates just one-fifth of the waste compared to traditional methods. By building off-site in a controlled environment, we ensure precision and reduce material waste. The application of lean manufacturing techniques further supports efficient resource use and waste minimisation.

Sustainable Practices

- **Reforestation Initiatives:** For every POD sold, Okopod funds tree planting programs, offsetting carbon emissions and supporting biodiversity.
- **Sustainable Timber:** The birch trees we use grow quickly and are sustainably harvested, causing minimal impact on biodiversity.
- **Circular Economy:** Materials like cork and Thermafleece are chosen for their renewability and recyclability, ensuring a circular approach to resource use.

High-Quality Waterproofing and Insulation

The Okopod structure features premium waterproofing systems and sustainable insulation materials like sheepswool, which exceed building regulation requirements. Timber frame construction enhances insulation compared to traditional brick, improving energy efficiency and comfort.

Community and Environmental Benefits

By prioritising sustainable materials and energy-efficient designs, Okopod contributes to long-term environmental and social sustainability. Our airtight construction improves indoor air quality and reduces energy costs for occupants, aligning with the goals for healthier, more efficient buildings.

Method of Construction

The outbuilding will be constructed using interlocking prefabricated timber cassette panels, enabling a precise and efficient build process. Construction on site is anticipated to take no more than 15 days. The foundation system comprises the Okobase steel raft system, installed on shallow hardcore pads within a lightly excavated area, ensuring minimal intrusiveness and reduced ground disturbance. This lightweight system avoids the need for deep excavations and responds well to the sensitivity of a listed building's curtilage.

The building will measure 6.0m x 3.0m with a maximum external height of 2.5m, ensuring it remains low-profile and visually subservient within the garden.

Access

Access to the site is straightforward and avoids any impact on the listed building. The outbuilding will be reached via the existing side gate and driveway located on the north side of the property. This allows all materials, construction equipment and site personnel to move directly to the rear

garden without entering or passing through the interior of the historic building. The frontage and side pathway are already well planned and adequately lit, providing safe and unobstructed access for construction and future use.