

DELEGATED FILE NOTE

CASE OFFICER: ...Alex Howard.....

APPLICATION REFERENCE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT	APPLICATION SITE
25/02741/FP	Erection of outbuilding to provide staff accommodation and kitchen storage following demolition of existing chicken shed.	Robin Hood And Little John Rabley Heath Road Codicote Welwyn Hertfordshire AL6 9UB

Submitted Plan Nos

1083 - 01 1083 - 02 1083 - 03 1083 - 04 1083 - PL10 1083 - PL11 1083 - 07 1083 - PL12 1083 - PL13

SP5	Countryside and Green Belt
D1	Sustainable design
D3	Protecting living conditions
NE4	Biodiversity and geological sites
HE1	Designated heritage assets
SECN12	Achieving well-designed places
SECN16	Conserve + enhance historic environment

2.0 **Planning History**

- 2.1 Extensive site history relating to various extensions and alterations to the Grade II listed public house, from 1977 to 2025. Not directly relevant to this proposal.

3.0 **Representations**

- 3.1 **Site Notice and Neighbour Consultation** – None received.
- 3.2 **Codicote Parish Council** – None received.

4.0 **Planning Considerations**

4.1 **Site and Surroundings**

- 4.1.1 The site is The Robin Hood and Little John public house, located on Rabley Heath Road in Codicote. The site occupies a spacious plot comprising the main building, rear garden

area, car park and a rear area comprising a mix of single storey buildings, caravans, and other ancillary structures.

- 4.1.2 The site is designated as within the Green Belt, and the host building is Grade II listed.

4.2 **Proposal**

- 4.2.1 Planning permission is sought for the erection of an outbuilding to provide staff accommodation and kitchen storage following demolition of existing chicken shed.
- 4.2.2 The existing chicken shed is a large single storey building with a dual pitched roof, located to the rear of the pub in the service area. It is currently in a state of disrepair and is not fit for purpose. It is proposed to remove this existing chicken shed and erect a single storey outbuilding in its place, to provide 4 rooms for staff accommodation and an additional kitchen storage area to support the pubs continued viability following new management and its recent extensions and alterations.
- 4.2.3 The design approach is to replicate the appearance and character of a traditional agricultural outbuilding, including using a slatted timber exterior. The scheme would offer four self-contained double-bedroom units along the north-west edge of the site. Each unit will include an en-suite bathroom, double bed, wardrobe, desk area, and lounge seating. High-quality double-glazed windows will be used to maximise natural light and thermal efficiency whilst also providing views to landscaped garden.
- 4.2.4 The staff accommodation is proposed to work as required by the employees of the business, staying for short and longer periods based on personal and business needs. In the majority, this will be a place for employees to stay and relax while they are on a shift pattern, say over a weekend period, before then returning to their homes when not working. Officers have been advised that current employees live relatively far from the site so this proposal would give them an opportunity to stay at the pub during their working periods. Employees are able to access the pubs laundry facilities, the kitchen, and the pub itself when working/not working.

4.3 **Key Issues**

- 4.3.1 The key considerations are the principle of development, impact on designated heritage assets, impact on the character of the area, impact on the amenities of neighbours/future occupiers.

Principle of Development

- 4.3.2 The site is within the Green Belt. Therefore, the provisions of Policy SP5 of the Local Plan and Section 13 of the NPPF are relevant. Paragraph 153 of the NPPF states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in 'very special circumstances'. '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. Paragraph 154 of the NPPF set out those instances where there are exceptions to inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Paragraph 142 of the NPPF sets out that *“The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence”*.

Paragraph 143 of the NPPF sets out the five purposes of the Green Belt:

*“a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land”*.

- 4.3.3 The proposal, which is for the erection of an outbuilding to provide staff accommodation and kitchen storage following demolition of existing chicken shed, would not comply with any of the exceptions to inappropriate development in the Green Belt as set out under Paragraph 154 of the NPPF. The site is not considered to constitute Grey Belt land under the provisions of Paragraph 155 of the NPPF and in any case, this type of development would not be of a demonstrable need.
- 4.3.4 Moreover, in terms of the openness of the Green Belt, which has a spatial and visual dimension as confirmed by case law, it is considered that owing to the largely similar footprint and massing of the proposed building compared to the existing, as well as the proposed buildings rearward location and considerable screening by the host listed building and perimeter fencing, the proposal will not be visible from the vast majority of wider viewpoints. It will only be visible from the car park over the fencing, which is largely insignificant given its proportions and roof form. As such, it is considered that the proposal will not result in any harm to spatial or visual openness, in accordance with Paragraph 142 of the NPPF. With regards to the five purposes of the Green Belt, the proposal would not conflict with any of them.
- 4.3.5 As such, reviewing the proposal against the relevant parts of the NPPF, it is considered that there is harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness. As stated in Paragraph 153 of the NPPF, inappropriate development is harmful by definition and should not be approved unless in ‘Very Special Circumstances’, which 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

Very Special Circumstances

- 4.3.6 This application is submitted on the basis that the proposed erection of an outbuilding to provide staff accommodation and kitchen storage following demolition of existing chicken shed would constitute Very Special Circumstances under Paragraph 153 of the NPPF. The supporting statement makes the following points in support of this argument:

The Robin Hood and Little John Public House has operated for many years and has undergone various extensions and alterations over time. Previously owned by the McMullen Group, the building experienced a period of instability due to difficulties in securing a long-term tenancy agreement with an operator. As a result, the pub saw several changes in management and was closed and reopened on multiple occasions, each closure attributed to a lack of profitability.

In July 2024, the pub was purchased by David and Fiona Nye, who reopened it following a comprehensive refurbishment. Their vision has been to retain the traditional character and charm of the building while enhancing its quality and appeal as a popular, high-quality destination venue.

In May 2024, planning permission and listed building consent were granted for a courtyard infill extension and a new conservatory on the west elevation. These alterations were designed to provide additional space for diners and drinkers, supporting the long-term viability of the business. The courtyard extension was completed in December 2024, with construction of the conservatory scheduled to commence next year.

Justification For Works in The Green Belt:

1. Increased Operational Capacity

The proposed works will enable on-site staff accommodation, which is essential for improving recruitment and retention - key to ensuring the long-term commercial viability of the pub. Additionally, the provision of dedicated kitchen storage is critical to supporting the increased number of covers, allowing the pub to meet current and future service demand efficiently.

2. Enhanced Facilities and Staff Welfare

The new outbuilding will provide improved and functional space, enabling the integration of high-quality staff accommodation and enhanced kitchen facilities. These upgrades contribute directly to staff satisfaction, operational efficiency, and overall business sustainability.

3. Diversification of Offerings

Improved infrastructure supports the potential for a broader range of services such as events, private dining, or extended operating hours - which can diversify income streams and enhance the customer experience.

4. Adaptation to Changing Trends

Consumer expectations have shifted, with greater emphasis on quality service, sustainability, and destination experiences. These works enable the pub to remain competitive by responding to changing industry trends while maintaining its traditional charm.

5. Economic Benefits

A thriving rural pub generates local employment, supports local suppliers, and attracts visitors to the area. The proposed works will strengthen the pub's economic contribution by increasing visitor capacity and improving service delivery.

6. Preservation of Heritage through Active Use

Sustainable use is often the best way to preserve a heritage asset. By ensuring the Robin Hood and Little John Public House remains viable and active, the proposed works support the ongoing conservation and appreciation of this historic community asset.

7. Competitive Advantage

In a competitive hospitality landscape, enhanced facilities - such as on-site accommodation and expanded storage - provide a distinct advantage. These works help the business offer a compelling, high-quality customer experience in a rural setting.

8. Long-Term Sustainability

The investment in works signals a commitment to the pub's future. By expanding capacity and modernising operational infrastructure, the pub is better positioned to endure economic pressures and shifting consumer patterns.

9. Strengthening the Pub as a Community Hub

Rural pubs often serve as vital community spaces. By securing the operational future of the Robin Hood and Little John, these proposals help retain its role as a social and cultural focal point for the local population.

10. Boost to Local Tourism

Located in a scenic and culturally rich area, a well-functioning, high-quality pub enhances the local tourism offer. With suitable facilities in place, the pub becomes a desirable destination for visitors, further supporting local tourism strategies and businesses.

- 4.3.7 The supporting statement makes the point that there are significant issues in the pub industry at the moment, with increased rates and lower spending power by customers causing a lot of them to shut down. This also comes down to the ability of pub owners to offer their staff a good package of employment, which aside from fair wages is the ability to offer on-site accommodation for those employees that would benefit from having this option, whether that's due to their home location being some distance from their workplace and saving on commuting daily or the flexibility to stay on site after busy shifts for example. Officers acknowledge that these are profound issues facing the pub industry at present which does have weight in this consideration of the application.
- 4.3.8 The submitted rationale for the proposed staff accommodation building is considered to be comprehensive and well justified in this instance. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), North Herts Local Plan and Codicote Neighbourhood Plan are clear in their general thrust of support for development which seeks to expand and support existing businesses to meet their needs and support their long term viability. This proposal would clearly allow the owners of the pub to provide an advantageous offer to current and future employees, helping to recruit and retain staff and to increase operational capacity as a result. At a stage where so many pubs are closing down for various reasons, a scheme which seeks to directly improve on-site conditions for employees and as a result, the offerings for customers and increased viability for owners, is considered to be well placed and supportable in principle. This would directly align with Policy COD8 and COD9 of the Neighbourhood Plan. In this respect, the points made in the statement are deemed to be weighty considerations in favour of this scheme as Very Special Circumstances. The rest of this report will consider whether there are other relevant matters which can weigh in favour of this under the umbrella of Very Special Circumstances.

Impact on Designated Heritage Assets

- 4.3.9 Policy SP13 of the Local Plan states 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". This reflects paragraph 212 of the NPPF which stipulates that great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets, such as listed buildings. Policy HE1 of the Local Plan states that "Planning permission for development proposals affecting Designated Heritage Assets or their setting will be granted where they: 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". This is reinforced by paragraph 215 of the NPPF and Policy COD20 of the Neighbourhood Plan.

- 4.3.10 The host building is Grade II listed. Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that where considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building, or its setting special regard shall be had to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural interest which it possesses.
- 4.3.11 The existing chicken shed building, whilst located to the rear of and within the curtilage of the host building, is not curtilage listed. In terms of the impact of the proposed building on the host listed building, the building is detached so it will not result in any loss of historic fabric and does not require Listed Building Consent. In terms of setting, it is considered that the proposal will largely occupy a similar footprint to the existing, will be of a character that would resemble a traditional agricultural outbuilding, including using a slatted timber exterior, and would appear to be wholly ancillary in form, scale and use to the host building, which is considered appropriate in this context. For this reason, it is considered that the proposed building will have a neutral impact on the setting of the listed building, such that there will be no harm on the host Grade II listed building. This is in accordance with Policies SP13 and HE1 of the Local Plan and Section 16 of the NPPF.
- 4.3.12 Furthermore, owing to the fact that this grade II listed building is a pub, which is considered to be its optimum viable use, the proposed development which seeks to secure the long term viability of the site through its offer of employee on-site accommodation and increasing its operational capacity, would directly contribute to the listed buildings continued use as a pub and its maintenance, in a time where so many pubs, many of which may also be listed buildings, are closing and as a result those buildings are falling into disrepair through lack of maintenance. This should also be given due weight in the case of Very Special Circumstances.

Design and Impact on the Character of the Area

- 4.3.13 Policy D1 of the Local Plan states that planning permission will be granted provided the development responds positively to the site's local context in addition to other criteria. Policy SP9 of the Local Plan further considers that new development will be supported where it is well designed and located and responds positively to its local context. These considerations are echoed in Section 12 of the NPPF.
- 4.3.14 The proposal is for the erection of a single storey outbuilding, to provide 4 rooms for staff accommodation and an additional kitchen storage area. The building would occupy an L shaped footprint, measuring approx. 13.7m wide and 11.3m deep, with a dual-pitched roof with a maximum eaves height of approx. 2.15m and a maximum ridge height of approx. 3.25m, given the slight drop in ground level from east to west. The building is to

resemble a traditional agricultural outbuilding, finished in slatted timber weatherboarding on a brick plinth, slate roof tiles, and timber windows and doors. The roof pitch is reasonably shallow and the part of the building that is on slightly raised ground will largely resemble the existing chicken shed building in terms of scale and footprint, with the additional footprint extending westward on lower ground level so wholly screened from view.

- 4.3.15 The proposal is considered acceptable in form, appearance and scale. The building will have a larger footprint but will largely be the same height as the existing building, which is acceptable. The form, appearance and choice of materials would appear reasonable to resemble a traditional agricultural building which is appropriate in this instance. Materials details will be subject to a pre-commencement condition, given the host building is listed and the need to ensure high quality materials are used. Overall, the building will appear ancillary to the host listed building which is acceptable. This is considered to respond well to the sites local context, in accordance with Policies D1 and SP9 of the Local Plan and Section 12 of the NPPF

Impact on the Amenities of Neighbours/Future Occupiers

- 4.3.16 Policy D3 of the Local Plan states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals which do not cause unacceptable harm to living conditions.
- 4.3.17 The site is isolated and is not within close proximity to any neighbouring properties given its use as a public house. The proposal, given its nature, is unlikely to result in increased noise and disturbance. Therefore, the proposal will not cause any overdominance, loss of daylight/sunlight or loss of privacy to any neighbours, such that it would not result in any harm to the amenities and reasonable living conditions of neighbouring properties, in line with Policy D3 of the Local Plan.
- 4.3.18 In terms of future occupiers, the proposed development is primarily for the delivery of four self-contained double-bedroom units along the north-west edge of the site, with each unit including an en-suite bathroom, double bed, wardrobe, desk area, and lounge seating. The units would be between 17.8sqm and 20.2sqm in floor area, with a double glazed bi-fold doors for entry. The building would benefit from its own private pedestrian access from the pub car park, with the pubs primary garden, laundry facilities, the kitchen, and the pub itself available to occupiers.
- 4.3.19 It is important to clarify from the outset that these proposed units are not dwellings, so it is considered that there is no requirement for them to comply with the National Space Standards. There are no local or national standards for this type of accommodation, but Officers consider that these proposed units would be more akin to hotel rooms/Airbnb's and even HMOs in relation to whether the amount of floor space and general standard of accommodation is acceptable for future occupiers. There are no space standards for hotel rooms/Airbnb's and North Herts does not benefit from its own standards for HMOs. However, HMO standards for bedrooms are provided at a national standard, which is 6.51sqm for one person over 10 years of age, and 10.22sqm for two persons over 10 years of age. These units would exceed these floor space requirements given the employees are likely to be 18 years old and above, whilst also providing private amenities such as an en-suite, lounge area, storage etc and shared amenities as already stated. Owing to the nature of accommodation reasonably expected in these units, largely by employees of the business over weekend periods during a shift pattern

or as an option for those employees finishing a late shift, it is considered that the proposed development would have an acceptable impact on the reasonable living conditions of future occupiers. A condition will be enforced that the accommodation provided shall be limited to a person solely or mainly employed in the business occupying the plot edged in red on the submitted location plan and cannot at any time be their primary residence, given the nature of the proposed use.

- 4.3.20 The proposal is deemed to comply with Policy D3 of the Local Plan and Section 12 of the NPPF.

Other Matters

- 4.3.21 The development would be exempt from the mandatory 10% BNG requirements, as confirmed by the Council's Ecologist. Given the site's rural location, it is considered reasonable to incorporate a condition requiring the implementation of a swift/bat box as part of this development, to deliver measurable gains in biodiversity in line with Policy NE4 of the Local Plan and Policy COD4 of the Neighbourhood Plan.

- 4.3.22 Given that these units are associated with the host pub building, the provision of waste and recycling from these units will likely be done as part of the business, so no separate provision is required.

4.4 Conclusion

- 4.4.1 Overall, it is acknowledged that there is harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness. As stated in Paragraph 153 of the NPPF, inappropriate development is harmful by definition and should not be approved unless in 'Very Special Circumstances', which 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.
- 4.4.2 The submitted rationale for the proposed staff accommodation building is considered to be comprehensive and well justified in this instance, noting that the NPPF and North Herts Local Plan are clear in their general thrust of support for development which seeks to expand and support existing businesses to meet their needs and support their long term viability. This proposal would clearly allow the owners of the pub to provide an advantageous offer to current and future employees, helping to recruit and retain staff and to increase operational capacity as a result. At a stage where so many pubs are closing down for various reasons, a scheme which seeks to directly improve on-site conditions for employees and as a result, the offerings for customers and increased viability for owners, is considered to be well placed and supportable in principle. Moreover, owing to the fact that this grade II listed building is a pub, which is considered to be its optimum viable use, the proposed development which seeks to secure the long term viability of the site through its offer of employee on-site accommodation and increasing its operational capacity, would directly contribute to the listed building's continued use as a pub and its maintenance, in a time where so many pubs, many of which may also be listed buildings, are closing and as a result those buildings are falling into disrepair through lack of maintenance. The proposal would deliver an acceptable form and appearance for this new building and would provide a reasonable standard of amenity for future occupiers in line with the employee/business requirements.

- 4.4.3 These matters are cumulatively considered to amount to provide 'Very Special Circumstances' that outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm in accordance with Paragraph 153 of the NPPF, which justifies the granting of planning permission in this case. The development would accord with the NPPF, Local Plan and Codicote Neighbourhood Plan in the round.

4.5 **Alternative Options**

- 4.5.1 N/A

4.6 **Pre-Commencement Conditions**

- 4.6.1 The applicant/agent are in agreement with the proposed pre-commencement conditions.

5.0 **Recommendation**

- 5.1 That planning permission be **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out wholly in accordance with the details specified in the application and supporting approved documents and plans listed above.

Reason: To ensure the development is carried out in accordance with details which form the basis of this grant of permission.

3. The occupation of the 4NO accommodation units hereby permitted shall be limited to a person solely or mainly employed or last employed in the business occupying the plot edged red on the location plan and shall not at any time be the occupier's primary residence.

Reason: To avoid the creation of self-contained residential dwellings in this location which would be inappropriate, in line with Policy SP5 and D1 of the Local Plan.

4. Details and/or samples of materials to be used on all external elevations and the roof of the building hereby permitted shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority before the development is commenced and the approved details shall be implemented on site.

Reason: To ensure that the development will have an acceptable appearance which does not detract from the appearance and character of the surrounding area and host listed buildings, in line with Policy D1, SP9 and HE1 of the Local Plan.

Biodiversity Net Gain

1. This development is not subject to the statutory Biodiversity Gain Plan condition because it is considered exempt under the statutory exemptions (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain-exempt-developments>) or transitional arrangements in respect of the biodiversity gain condition.

Proactive Statement:

Planning permission has been granted for this proposal. The Council acted proactively through positive engagement with the applicant during the determination process which led to improvements to the scheme. The Council has therefore acted proactively in line with the requirements of the Framework (paragraph 38) and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

Signed  Anne McDonald	Development Management North Hertfordshire District Council Council Offices Gernon Road Letchworth Herts SG6 3JF
Determining Officer Date: 19 January 2026	