

PLANNING, DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

CONVERSION OF AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS TO COMMERCIAL
BUSINESS/STORAGE USE AND TO A SINGLE-FAMILY DWELLING



**TITMORE GREEN FARM, TITMORE GREEN,
LITTLE WYMONDLEY, HITCHIN, SG4 7JT**

DECEMBER 2024

WeldonBeesly

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1 Introduction

1.1 This Planning, Design and Access Statement has been prepared on behalf of Ms Karen Denbow (landowner and applicant) to support two full planning applications for the conversion of two adjoining agricultural buildings at Titmore Green Farm, Titmore Green, Little Wymondley, Hitchin, Herts, SG4 7JT.

1.2 The description of the proposed development is as follows:-

BUILDING 1: *“Change of use of agricultural building to three business/storage units (Commercial Business Services Use Class E(g)(iii) light industrial and Storage or Distribution B8); external alterations and re-cladding; demolition of open storage yard, layout of car parking; construction of cycle store, landscaping and all ancillary works”.*

BUILDING 2: *“Change of use of agricultural building to one x 5 bedroomed single-family dwelling; external alterations and re-cladding; demolition of outdoor menage; re-cladding and external alterations to Atcost Barn for use with dwelling; layout of parking, landscaping and all ancillary works”.*

1.3 Titmore Green Farm comprises a (late medieval onwards) farmhouse on the south side of Stevenage Road, Titmore Green. 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.

1.4 Further to the south 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. The farmhouse and farm buildings are within some 17.2 hectares (42.5 acres) of pasture and grassland owned by the applicant.

1.5 The planning history reveals 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 permissions (references: 22/00222/FP and 22/00986/FP) were obtained by the applicant's late father, Mr Bernard Duffy.

1.6 The farmhouse is now occupied by the applicant, Ms Karen Denbow and her family, having moved to Titmore Green Farm in early 2023 following the passing of her father.

1.7 Having now moved into the farmhouse and taken over the Titmore Court business enterprise, the applicant proposes to change and enhance the design of the

approved business/storage scheme (granted planning permission in 2022) by converting the two adjoining, steel framed agricultural buildings to both business/storage and residential use.

- 1.8** In this regard, conversion to both business and residential use complies with central government policy objectives for re-using rural buildings (in Green Belt locations), supporting farm diversification and local communities by making more effective use of existing buildings and reducing pressure for new development on greenfield land.
- 1.9** The proposed new scheme will also enable the opportunity to create a superior and innovative development to that already approved, especially in terms of its design, external appearance, visual amenity, landscape and ecological benefits. A new project also engenders an opportunity to install the latest technologies and measures to help combat climate change, thereby creating a more sustainable and distinctive development.
- 1.10** Re-using or re-purposing existing buildings is highly sustainable, reducing use of new materials and sourcing materials locally where possible helps to create buildings that are rooted in their context and their locality.
- 1.11** As well as diversifying the rural economy, the applications are submitted in the context of the current national housing crisis and (new Labour) central government objectives to increase housing numbers to boost the supply of new dwellings.

2 Site Description and Context

- 2.1** The application site comprises two adjoining steel framed agricultural buildings to the south of Titmore Green Farmhouse. The larger barn (Building 1) is 396 sq metres (GIA) and the smaller (Building 2) is 302 sq m in area. Both buildings are of permanent and substantial in construction comprising portal steel frames, concrete block walls and timber cladding.
- 2.2** Between the farmhouse and the application barns is a concrete framed Atcost building. To the west of the agricultural buildings to be converted is an open storage yard (former silage clamp) enclosed by timber sleepers. To the south of the buildings is a derelict menage; the whole farm is contained within a semi-rural landscape comprising paddocks and larger fields beyond laid to grass.
- 2.3** The site is located within the Green Belt where development restraint policies are in operation. Titmore Green Farmhouse is a listed building of architectural and historic interest (Grade II).
- 2.4** A Street Map Location Plan is enclosed as Appendix 1.
- 2.5** Photographs of the site in context with its surroundings are enclosed as Appendix 2.
- 2.6** The Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning demonstrates that the buildings are located within Flood Zone 1, thus having a less than a 1 in 1000-year annual probability of flooding. Please refer to Appendix 3.

3 Relevant Planning History

- 3.1** **22/00222/FP** Change of use of agricultural barns to light industrial and storage and distribution with ancillary offices, and associated parking and landscaping (renewal of planning application 11/02171/1 granted 31.10.2011).
Granted - March 2022.
- 3.2** **22/00986/FP** Alterations to existing agricultural barns with light industrial and storage and distribution with ancillary offices, and associated parking and landscaping.
Granted - May 2022.
- 3.3** **11/02173/1** Renewal of application number 08/1332/1 granted 26 September 2008 for change of use of 2 agricultural barns to a Light Industrial (B1) unit with ancillary

offices and a Storage (B8) unit with ancillary offices. Provision of 18 car parking spaces and 4 cycle racks. (lapsed)

- 3.4 08/01332/1** Change of use of 2 agricultural barns to a Light Industrial (B1) unit with ancillary offices and a Storage (B8) unit with ancillary offices. Provision of 18 car parking spaces and 4 cycle racks (as amended by plans received 26.8.08). (lapsed)

- 3.5 90/00791/1 Titmore Court** - External alterations and single storey link to facilitate change of use of three barns into offices. Parking for 22 vehicles, closure of two existing accesses and formation of new single vehicular access (as amended by plans received 3rd November 1990). Granted - 27 Sept 1990.

4 Proposals

Design

- 4.1** The proposal is to convert the two adjoining agricultural buildings to business/storage and residential use. The objective has been to create an innovative and distinctive design to complement existing development and blend into the landscape. Appendix 4 contains example barn conversion reference images which have helped to inform the overall design.

Use and Amount

- 4.2 Building 1:** Three x Commercial, Business, Services units – Use Class E (g)(iii) Light Industrial and/or B8 Storage or Distribution. 3 units of 132 sq m floorspace each.
- 4.3 Building 2:** One x 5 bedroomed dwelling (C3 Residential use class). The dwelling will be 302 sq metres in floorspace. The Atcost Barn to be retained for ancillary storage with the new dwelling and is 151 sq metres in floorspace.

Layout

- 4.4** The existing concrete surfaced storage yard to the west of Building 1 will be laid out with new parking spaces, service delivery forecourt and a cycle store.
- 4.5** The existing hardstanding/s and grassed areas to the east of Building 2 will be laid to lawn with two small, paved patio areas served via a private drive. This area has approval to be laid out for vehicle parking in the approved light industrial / storage scheme.

Scale

- 4.6** There will be no increase in the size and scale of the existing buildings. Indeed, Building 2 (residential) will be slightly reduced in scale by removal of an existing timber clad outshot/overhang to the eastern elevation. Please refer to the existing and proposed elevational drawings.

Appearance

- 4.7** The objective has been to enhance the appearance of the approved scheme and create a superior design. This has been achieved by selecting high quality construction materials for the schemes which enable it to blend in with the landscape, complimenting the adjacent Titmore Court business units and the Grade II listed farmhouse.
- 4.8** **Building 1** – This will be re-clad in a combination of profiled steel cladding (colour brown). The fibre-cement asbestos roof will be re-clad in profiled steel cladding (slate grey colour). The western elevation will contain three powder colour coated roller shutter doors (anthracite grey colour) to access the new light industrial/storage units.
- 4.9** **Building 2** – This building for conversion to a single-family dwelling will be re-clad in a combination of natural and dark stained vertical and horizontal timber boarding. The fibre-cement asbestos roof will be re-clad in profiled steel cladding (slate grey colour). The fenestration comprises vertically proportioned aluminium framed windows – the frame colour will be black. The eastern elevation contains an inset balcony along part of the frontage at first floor level to overlook the adjacent paddock and grassed areas to the east. Above this and within part of the roof will be PV solar panels.
- 4.10** The existing concrete framed Atcost barn is to be reclad in stained timber horizontal weatherboarding over a new red brick plinth. 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. These will supply electricity to the new house.
- 4.11** The proposed building conversions will be superior in appearance to the approved light industrial/storage scheme. Final details of the cladding colours, fenestration, finishes, brick samples and construction materials can be submitted and approved by planning condition.

Landscaping

- 4.12** The converted buildings will have extensively landscaped surroundings. New hedges and trees will be planted in native species. This will ensure enhancements to the landscape, adding to biodiversity and the semi-rural character of the area. The existing equestrian menage will be removed and the land re-instated as grass. An avenue of native and high-quality trees will be planted on either side of the driveway approach to the house from Lower Titmore Green.
- 4.13** Further details of both hard and soft landscaping can be submitted pursuant to a planning condition. These details will include proposals for the future management and maintenance.

Drainage

- 4.14** The surface water drainage will be to new soakaways (providing surface water attenuation). Foul sewage will be disposed of via an existing sewage treatment unit located to the west of the open storage yard. Please refer to the submitted Indicative Services drawings.
- 4.15** Rainwater from roofs will also be collected in water butts to be used to water the gardens and landscape areas.

Economic and sustainability objectives

- 4.16** In economic terms, in converting the two buildings, the objective is to source construction materials from local companies and local labour in the conversion works where possible.
- 4.17** For Building 1, the applicant will be looking to secure good quality commercial tenants. The applicant will seek to source key local companies for the three small business units who will generate employment and job opportunities thereby complimenting the existing office/business activity at Titmore Court.
- 4.18** In sustainability terms, it is highly sustainable to re-use existing buildings. Measures to help mitigate the impact of climate change will be incorporated into the scheme. For example high performance insulation; double glazed windows and insulated doors and window frames to secure a high degree of air tightness.
- 4.19** Water conservation measures will be installed, water-butts to collect rainwater from roofs for use in the garden and landscaped areas; water efficient household appliances; aerating showers and taps are to be installed.

- 4.20** Energy efficient electrical appliances are also to be installed. Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points for the business/storage units and the converted dwelling are to be installed. (There are EV points at Titmore Court). Smart technology will be installed via a combination of air source heat pumps and solar energy. A MVHR (Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery) system is to be installed into the new dwelling.
- 4.21** Full details of these and other measures are set out in the submitted Energy and Sustainability Statements. They are also shown on the Sustainability Strategy drawings consistent with the applicant's objective to create a high quality, energy efficient and sustainable scheme.
- 4.22** Measures to enhance biodiversity and encourage wildlife are included in the submitted Preliminary Ecology Appraisal (PEA) and Biodiversity Net Gain Report with accompanying BNG Calculation Tables.

5 Access

- 5.1** Pedestrian and vehicular access into the proposed converted Business/Storage Units (Building 1) will be via the existing access driveway from Stevenage Road. This vehicular access presently serves Titmore Court and the wider farmland.
- 5.2** Titmore Court comprises 10 existing small office/business units let to local companies. The existing commercial floorspace is approximately 824 sq metres and there are 29 parking spaces for use by the existing tenants.
- 5.3** The proposed new business/storage units (Building 1) will be provided with 15 car parking spaces in the location of the existing concrete surfaced storage yard. There will be new EV charging points. Spaces will be demarcated for disabled drivers. Provision will be made for cyclists within a new cycle store – similar to that already approved in the earlier planning permission. There will be space within the forecourt for light goods vehicles to park and turn on site.
- 5.4** The converted dwelling (Building 2) will be accessed via Lower Titmore Green via the existing gateway and access driveway. The dwelling will have parking spaces for 5 cars.
- 5.5** Refuse collection will utilise existing local authority collections. There will be a commercial bin store within the new parking area to the business units. Bins for the converted dwelling will be wheeled to the Lower Titmore Green entrance on bin collection days.

- 5.6** In terms of wider accessibility, Titmore Green Farm is very accessible by motor vehicle being approximately 2km (1.5 miles) from Junction 8 of the A1(M) with main road access (via Chantry Lane and Stevenage Road) from Junction 8. The main road running between Stevenage and Hitchin (A602) is also close by. Please see the Accessibility Map within Appendix 5.
- 5.7** Titmore Green Farm is located approximately 3 km (2 miles) from Stevenage town centre which has the full range of transport connections, local facilities and amenities. The farm is and within easy cycling distance of Stevenage town centre and Stevenage Station via Todds Green. The farm is also approximately 2.5 km (1.5 miles) from Little Wymondley (which is also within easy cycling distance), the village having two pubs and a few local services. There is a pub/restaurant (The Hermit of Redcoats) very close by to the application sites (patronised by the current business tenants) and a restaurant / accommodation at Redcoats approximately 0.5 km to the west.
- 5.8** Whilst no buses pass the site, the nearest bus stops are on the Stevenage Road (at the end of Chantry Lane) between Stevenage and Little Wymondley – No 80 Bus route (Hitchin to Stevenage) and (at Postbox, Todds Green) – No 391 Bus route (Stevenage to Weston).
- 5.9** Appendix 6 contains the No 80 and No 391 local bus route maps (Stevenage – Hitchin) (Stevenage – Weston) and the bus timetables are enclosed in Appendix 7.
- 5.10** There is a public footpath to Little Wymondley (Public Footpath 8) from Stevenage Road (located almost opposite the farm) which runs north approximately 0.7 km (1/2 a mile) from the farm to the village. It is however necessary for pedestrians to cross the A602 halfway along the route.
- 5.11** In conclusion, the site is very accessible both to the motorway network and main roads, town centre and more local facilities by vehicle. There is also the ability to use busses, cycle to Stevenage and to walk to Redcoats and Little Wymondley, should business and residential occupiers wish to do so.

6 Planning Policy Review

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) December 2024

6.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a set of policies and principles for land use planning in England. It emphasizes sustainable development, economic growth, and the protection of the environment. The NPPF encourages housing delivery, promotes green belt protection, and highlights the importance of affordable housing, heritage conservation, and flood risk management. It sets out criteria for assessing development proposals, encourages local plans, and aims to create vibrant, inclusive communities. The NPPF also stresses the need for infrastructure development and considers factors like green infrastructure, climate change, and biodiversity. It provides a framework for local authorities to shape land use policies and decisions. The following paragraphs of the NPPF are relevant:-

6.2 Paragraph 39; local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

6.3 Paragraph 61; to support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay. The overall aim should be to meet as much of an area's identified housing need as possible, including with an appropriate mix of housing types for the local community.

6.4 Paragraphs 88 and 89 seek to support a prosperous rural economy:-

Paragraph 88; Planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;
- b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;

c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and

d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

6.5 Paragraph 89; Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.

6.6 Paragraph 154; of the NPPF specifies other forms of development that are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided that they preserve the openness of the Green Belt, including:-

(h)(iv) the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction.

6.7 Paragraph 116; Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

6.8 Paragraph 139; Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

6.9 a) - development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or

6.10 b) - outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031

- 6.11** The development plan for the area is the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 adopted November 2022.
- 6.12** The application site/s are located in the Green Belt. Paragraph 6.21 within the Chapter headed *Countryside and Green Belt* of the Plan states that national policy provides clear guidance on proposals for the re-use, replacement or extension of buildings in the Green Belt which will be used, alongside the detailed design policies of this plan for relevant applications.
- 6.13** Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability; The North Hertfordshire Local Plan sets out comprehensive design policies aimed at fostering sustainable and high-quality development. These policies emphasize the importance of creating well-designed, inclusive, and visually appealing environments. The plan encourages development that respects and enhances the character of existing communities, promotes green infrastructure, and integrates sustainable design principles.
- 6.14** Design policies within the plan focus on considerations such as building scale, massing, and materials to ensure compatibility with the local context. There is an emphasis on creating attractive public spaces, promoting biodiversity, and incorporating sustainable drainage systems. The plan encourages innovative and energy-efficient designs that contribute positively to the overall built environment.
- 6.15** Policy D1: Sustainable Design; Planning permission will be granted provided that development proposals: a) Respond positively to the site's local context; b) Take all reasonable opportunities, consistent with the nature and scale of the scheme, to: i. create or enhance public realm; ii. optimise the potential of the site by incorporating Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS); iii. reduce energy consumption and waste; iv. retain existing vegetation and propose appropriate new planting; v. maximise accessibility, legibility and physical and social connectivity both internally and with neighbouring areas; vi. future proof for changes in technology and lifestyle; vii. design-out opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour; and viii. minimise the visual impact of street furniture and parking provision; c) Have regard to the Design SPD, and any other relevant guidance; d) Within Letchworth Garden City have regard to the Letchworth Garden City Design Principles contained in Appendix 5; and e) For residential schemes, meet or exceed the nationally described space standards and optional water efficiency standards.

- 6.16** Policy D3: Protecting living conditions; Planning permission will be granted for development proposals which do not cause unacceptable harm to living conditions. Where the living conditions of proposed developments would be affected by an existing use or the living conditions of an existing development would be affected by a proposed use, the Council will consider whether there are mitigation measures that can be taken to mitigate the harm to an acceptable level. If the Council is not satisfied that mitigation proposals would address the identified harm, development proposals will not be permitted.
- 6.17** Parking Standards; Policy T2: Parking Planning permission will be granted provided that: a) Parking for residential development is provided in accordance with the minimum standards set out in Appendix 4 of this Plan. The minimum parking provision for 2-3 bed dwellings is 2 spaces per dwelling. The requirement for visitor parking is up to 0.75 spaces per dwelling depending on whether or not garages are being provided.
- 6.18** Parking standards for non-residential development are within the North Herts Council Supplementary Planning Document (September 2011). Using the former B Use class (now Class E – Commercial Business Services use) B1(a) offices require 1 space per 30 sq m. B1 (b) R&D and B1(c) light industrial uses require 1 space per 35 sq m. For B8 storage or distribution the standard is 1 space per 75 sq m. Cycle parking (for B1) is 1 space per 100 sq m for staff and 1 space per 200 sq m for customers.
- 6.19** The North Herts Local Plan contains a number of strategic environmental objectives. Those relating to Environmental matters are noted below:
- 6.20** ENV1 Directs development towards the most sustainable locations which seek to maintain the existing settlement pattern.
- 6.21** 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.
- 6.22** ENV3 Protect, maintain and enhance the District's historic and natural environment, its cultural assets and network of open spaces, urban and rural landscapes.
- 6.23** ENV4 Mitigate the effects of climate change by encouraging the use of sustainable construction techniques, the appropriate use of renewable energy technologies and reducing the risk of flooding.

6.24 ENV5 Reduce water consumption, increase biodiversity and protect and enhance the quality of existing environmental assets by enhancing new green spaces and networks of green space for both recreation and wildlife.

6.25 The North Hertfordshire Local Plan emphasizes sustainable construction measures to reduce environmental impact and promote long-term sustainability. Several key measures can be adopted including:

1. **Energy Efficiency:** Implementation of energy-efficient designs, materials, and technologies in construction. This includes using renewable energy sources, such as solar panels or heat pumps, and ensuring buildings are well-insulated to minimize heat loss.
2. **Resource Management:** Encouraging the use of sustainable construction materials with a lower environmental impact, promoting recycling and reuse of materials, and minimizing waste generation during construction.
3. **Biodiversity Preservation:** Incorporating green infrastructure and sustainable drainage systems to support biodiversity, maintain natural habitats, and prevent the loss of wildlife.
4. **Transport and Accessibility:** Focusing on developments that encourage the use of sustainable transport options, such as walking, cycling, and public transportation, to minimize reliance on private vehicles and reduce carbon emissions.
5. **Adaptation and Resilience:** Designing buildings and infrastructure to be adaptable to changing environmental conditions, such as climate change impacts, to ensure long-term resilience.
6. **Community Engagement:** Engaging with the local community to promote awareness of sustainable construction practices and encourage participation in sustainable living.

Sustainability - Supplementary Planning Document – September 2024

6.26 This supplementary planning document sets out the standards required to meet the visions, objectives and policies of the North Herts District Local Plan as sustainably as possible. It comes at a critical time in the approach to climate change and the environmental crisis by both local and national government, and after Parliament revised the 2008 Climate Change Act to bring carbon reductions to 100% by 2050.

7 Material Planning Considerations

Principle of development

7.1 National policy within the NPPF paragraph 154(h)(iv) states that the re-use of rural buildings within the Green Belt is acceptable in principle, provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction.

- 7.2** Paragraph 6.21 of the adopted NHDC Local Plan 2011-2031 makes it clear that the Council will use guidance in the NPPF in the determination of planning applications for the re-use of rural buildings in the Green Belt, alongside the detailed design policies of the Plan.
- 7.3** The Council have previously concluded that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction in the consideration of the previous planning applications for business and storage re-use. This conclusion is set out in the planning officers report into planning application 22/00222/FP.
- 7.4** Horne and Littlemore Structural Engineers have also studied the structural condition of the buildings on behalf of the applicant. Their letter/report dated 25th October 2024 (submitted with the planning applications) concludes that the structural elements of the barn (two linked buildings) appear sound and suitable for conversion to residential or office space.
- 7.5** It therefore follows that the principle of both commercial and residential re-use of the buildings is acceptable.
- 7.6** Subject to detailed design and other policies in the Plan, the proposals should progress as soon as possible in order to assist the rural economy, foster economic growth (paragraphs 88 and 89 of the NPPF refer) and help boost housing supply encouraged by central government set out within NPPF paragraph 61.

Design and external appearance

- 7.7** The choice of the brown profiled steel cladding colour for the elevations combined with an anthracite-coloured steel-clad roof for (Building 1) will be subdued, distinctive and very complimentary to the existing commercial buildings at Titmore Court. Please refer to the submitted drawings and CGI. The aluminium roller shutter doors will also be coloured, rather than left unfinished (silver/grey). The building will take on a superior appearance given the removal of existing blockwork and the fibre cement asbestos roof sheeting, plastic gutters and downpipes.
- 7.8** The surface treatment of the forecourt/yard area will be a concrete surfaced yard introducing some permeable paving for the parking spaces. The western strip of parking will be completed in gravel to match the format of the existing parking spaces at Titmore Court. The boundary treatments, utilising post and rail fencing, will match existing and are appropriate for the semi-rural surroundings.

- 7.9** The proposed dwelling (Building 2) will also take on a contemporary and distinctive appearance. Please refer to the submitted drawings and CGI. The attractive design utilises a combination of vertically proportioned metal framed windows set within natural and stained timber clad elevations. The design is complimentary to the semi-rural surroundings and by utilising timber, will ensure the building blends into the landscape. 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.
- 7.10** The re-cladding and renovation of the Atcost barn in stained horizontal timber weatherboarding over a matching red-brick plinth will also be a substantial enhancement over existing. The concrete frames of the existing building will be hidden and all the profiled fibre cement/asbestos sheeting removed. The new ledged and braced timber doors will complete the southern elevation. Overall, this building will appear superior to existing, taking on the appearance of a traditional looking barn, complimentary to Titmore Court and the farmhouse.
- 7.11** In all, the project will provide attractively designed business units and a distinctive contemporary house. The development will provide interest in the visual scene, blending into the landscape and enhancing the surroundings. It therefore follows that the proposals comply with the design objectives within Policies SP9 and D1 of the Local Plan.

Visual and Landscape Impact

- 7.12** Extensive new tree, hedge and shrub planting will ensure that the buildings will be within an attractive and landscaped setting. Presently there is little if anything in the way of landscaping around the buildings. The new high quality native trees proposed to line the access drive to the barn conversion (Building 2) once matured, will be an attractive feature in the landscape.
- 7.13** The proposal for conversion of Building 2 to dwelling includes for new hedgerow planting in native species between the farmhouse garden and the rear of the Atcost barn. The project also includes for removal of the derelict menage and its return to grass to match the nearby paddocks which will also enhance the landscape.

- 7.14** The objective is to create a high quality and visually attractive development which will complete the site, enhance the semi-rural surroundings and contribute towards the familiar local scene.
- 7.15** The proposal complies with Design objectives within Policies SP9 and D1 of the Local Plan.

Setting of Farmhouse

- 7.16** The applicants have carefully considered the site and the wider surroundings. The project will result in an attractive and well landscaped development. Re-cladding the existing buildings explained above, removing the eyesore storage yard/former silage clamp structure and the equestrian menage will all engender an enhancement to the setting.
- 7.17** 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.

Residential Amenity

- 7.18** The proposed business units will be within Use Class E (g)(iii) which by definition should be compatible with a residential area. 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. Hours of operation are also proposed, for example precluding late night working. The routing of commercial traffic onto Stevenage Road is also preferable to bringing commercial vehicles along Lower Titmore Green. The proposals comply with Policy D3 of the Local Plan which seeks to protect the living conditions of existing residential occupiers.

Sustainability

- 7.19** The proposals meet Economic and Social objectives within the NPPF by providing new converted bespoke units for light industrial and/or storage use. The proposal will also generate employment during the construction stage and in the longer term, provide employment in the future maintenance of the buildings. As mentioned, it is

highly sustainable to re-use existing buildings and the applicant will seek to let the units to local companies generating new employment opportunities.

- 7.20** The proposal will meet Environmental objectives within the NPPF by re-using existing buildings and re-using brownfield land by clearing the (former silage clamp) open storage yard. An attractively designed and contemporary scheme is proposed with bespoke energy efficiency and climate change (CO2 reduction measures). Full details are within the submitted Energy and Sustainability Statements and shown on the Sustainability Strategy Drawings.
- 7.21** Sustainability has been a focal point in the design of both schemes. Indeed, the proposed measures for Building 1 (commercial/storage use) achieve an on-site CO2 reduction of 135% beyond Part L (2021) providing carbon negative status based on SBEM modelling. Proposals for Building 2 (residential re-use) achieve an on-site CO2 reduction of 100% beyond Part L (2021) demonstrating that Net Zero regulated carbon can be achieved.
- 7.22** It therefore follows that the proposal complies with Local Plan ENV4 and some of the Gold Standard initiatives within the Councils September 2024 Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document.

Parking and Access

- 7.23** The applicant confirms that appropriate and safe access can be provided to the new business units (Building 1) via the existing Stevenage Road access. The access has good visibility and was designed in 1990 to provide safe access and egress for vehicles associated with Titmore Court. The access can also cater for farm machinery and HGV's if needed. Vehicle movements are likely to be low because the applicant will be looking to let the new small commercial units to quiet, low key and local business operators.
- 7.24** There is good visibility from the existing Stevenage Road access in both directions. Please refer to the submitted photographs in Appendix 2.
- 7.25** The converted dwelling (Building 2) will generate very little traffic (one single-family dwelling only) such that there will be minimal impact on users of Lower Titmore Green Lane.

- 7.26** Indeed, overall, there is likely to be less traffic than the approved Business and Storage use conversion scheme under planning permission (22/00222/FP) which utilises the Lower Titmore Green access.
- 7.27** The converted dwelling will be provided with 5 on-site parking spaces in compliance with adopted parking standards within Policy of the adopted North Herts Local Plan.
- 7.28** The converted buildings will have good vehicular and cycling access to the services and amenities in Stevenage which is close-by.

Contamination

- 7.29** The applicant appointed Lustre Consulting to carry out a Phase 1 Desk Study. Lustre Consulting have identified a potential risk from contaminated soils and risk to groundwater from existing and previous uses. The mitigation recommended comprises undertaking a Phase 2 Site Investigation to determine the contaminative status of the shallow soils and the condition of any shallow groundwater. The investigation will also study an underground cavity that may have previously been an underground tank. A non-specialist watching brief is recommended during any groundworks during the construction stage to identify any visual or olfactory evidence of contamination.
- 7.30** Phase 2 site investigation works, soil sample testing, remediation measures, reporting and verification can be fully dealt with by way of standard planning condition/s.

Ecology

- 7.31** The planning application is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) which concluded that the habitats on the site are common and widespread such that the projects would not have a significant ecological impact. Additional surveys are recommended in due course as well as a precautionary approach during certain phases of the construction.
- 7.32** The PEA sets out numerous ecological enhancement measures including for example, new tree and hedge planting in native species; introducing bird and bat

boxes which will be incorporated into the scheme. Installation of these measures will ensure the proposals comply with Policy ENV5 of the adopted local plan.

- 7.33** The submitted Biodiversity Net Gain Report and Calculators demonstrate a Net Gain in habitat provision of **+ 44.68%** accompanying proposals for the conversion of the barn to a dwelling (Building 2). The Biodiversity Net Gain is **+11.86%** for the business units conversion proposal. These benefits are to be welcomed in planning terms and demonstrate how the proposed schemes comply with and achieve national and local objectives to enhance biodiversity within the Council's Sustainability SPD.

Summary of Benefits

- 7.34** There are a number of proposed tangible planning benefits associated with these projects as summarised below :
- Re-using existing buildings and brownfield land which is highly sustainable.
 - Generating new business/storage units to help support the local economy.
 - Enhancing the appearance of existing buildings with proposals which compliment existing development at Titmore Court.
 - Providing a new, distinctive and attractively designed family dwelling.
 - Incorporating new planting in native species to enhance the landscape and providing biodiversity net gains in wildlife habitat.
 - Enhancing visual amenity by removing an eyesore former silage clamp, open storage yard and disused menage.
 - Installing numerous measures helping to reduce energy and water usage, creating an energy efficient sustainable development which minimises CO2 emissions and helps combat climate change.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1** The proposals comply with North Herts Local Plan and NPPF policy on the re-use of rural buildings within the Green Belt.

- 8.2** The design of the building conversions is pleasing and distinctive; the scheme will enhance the setting of the listed farmhouse, complimenting existing development at Titmore Court and enhancing the familiar local scene.
- 8.3** The proposal re-uses brownfield land and existing buildings which is highly sustainable.
- 8.4** Measures have been designed in to ensure that the project is highly energy and water efficient.
- 8.5** The project also incorporates a range of landscape, tree planting, ecological and biodiversity enhancements.
- 8.6** Set in the context of both the need to grow the economy and the current national housing crisis, the proposals should be approved without delay.

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