
HERITAGE STATEMENT

**Proposed conversion of existing outbuildings
at Rusling End Farm, Rusling End, Codicote,
nr. Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 8TD**

On behalf of Mr G Henwood

Prepared by Stephen Bradwell, MA MRTPI IHBC

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RTPI

mediation of space · making of place

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared by Stephen Bradwell, MA, RTPI, IHBC to inform and support proposals that seek the conversion of the former agricultural buildings at Rusling End Farm, Codicote, Hitchin, a Grade II listed building, to provide a two-bedroom property within **Barn 1** and an ancillary leisure annex within **Barn 2** (see building descriptions below, paras. 4.5 – 4.13).
- 1.2 To provide a sound basis for this assessment, this statement seeks to describe the historic context of these buildings and to provide an assessment of the potential impact of these proposals in respect of their surviving character and appearance, and overall significance, in the context of the relevant local and national planning policies.
- 1.3 This statement should be read in conjunction with the separate design and access statement (DAS) by IBA Planning and the plans by MPJ Design. Together these illustrate the location, design, scale and appearance of the development and provide an assessment of the proposed development having regard to the local and national planning policies.
- 1.4 The application is also accompanied by other technical reports including a structural survey which demonstrates that:
- **Barn 1:** with careful replacement of timber elements the outbuilding is capable of conversion into habitable accommodation without major structural alterations;
 - **Barn 2:** with careful replacement of timber elements the outbuilding is capable of conversion into ancillary accommodation without major structural alterations.
- 1.5 The matters covered in these supporting statements are not dealt with in any detail in this statement.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) defines a heritage asset as: *'a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape positively identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest'* and this includes both designated heritage assets and other non-designated assets identified by the local planning authority.

2.2 This statement is therefore intended to provide an assessment of the heritage interest of the former agricultural buildings at Rusling End Farm, adopting an approach that is *'proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance'* as required by NPPF paragraph 128.

2.3 The following sources of information have been used to identify the designated heritage assets within the locality:

- relevant designation records from Historic England's *Heritage List for England*;
- information on conservation areas was obtained from North Hertfordshire District Council's web site.
- the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) was accessed via the Heritage Gateway.

2.4 A site visit has been undertaken to conduct a visual survey of the buildings to assess their surviving historic fabric and local context.

3.0 SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Whilst the proposed works will not affect the principal listed building, Rusling End Farmhouse, they do however propose:

- (i) the sensitive conversion of **Barn 1** to the south of Rusling End Farmhouse to a two-bedroom (independent) dwelling which is to be served by the existing access to the paddock, and
- (ii) the conversion of **Barn 2** to the east of Rusling End Farmhouse, alongside the road frontage, to provide an ancillary leisure annex in association with the farmhouse, which will retain use of the existing domestic access.

3.2 Overall it is considered that whilst these proposals involve some loss of historic fabric and minor changes to the buildings' external appearance and existing floor plans, they will retain their historic agricultural character and principal architectural features. These proposals will therefore preserve the overall significance of these former agricultural buildings and also the principal listed building (see section 7 below).

4.0 SITE DESCRIPTION & CONTEXT

- 4.1 Rusling End Farmhouse is situated on the west side of a narrow rural road in an area of open countryside between the settlements of St Paul's Walden and Old Knebworth, about 3 miles to the south-west of Stevenage. The surrounding area is generally defined by a dispersed settlement pattern of small farmsteads and rural cottages.
- 4.2 The property at Rusling End consists of a former farm complex that includes the principal farmhouse, a two storey detached dwelling, with an L-shaped range of former agricultural buildings to the front (**Barn 2**), which appear to comprise of a former cart shed and stables, and a further range of farm buildings to the south (**Barn 1**), comprising of a former threshing barn, which is possibly the most historically and architecturally important building on this site after the farmhouse, and a range of stables/looseboxes.
- 4.3 This complex of farm buildings around the former farmhouse is shown in more detail on the early Ordnance Survey (OS) maps and the HER suggests the layout is shown on the 1845 tithe map indicating that the farm buildings date to at least the early 19th century, and the list description dates the farm house to the 17th century (see paras. 5.5- 5.6 below). This arrangement of farm buildings is then repeated on the later OS maps through the 20th century.
- 4.4 The range of farm buildings are now effectively redundant for modern agricultural purposes, and are presently used informally for purposes ancillary to the main house. These buildings are in a reasonable state of repair, but they are in need of a more beneficial use that will secure their long-term future and as the structural survey illustrates, they are capable of appropriate repair and conversion without requiring alterations or demolition works.

The Existing Buildings

BARN 1

- 4.5 To the (south) side and rear of the farmhouse is an L-shaped range of former agricultural buildings consisting of a relatively narrow single storey range of stables or looseboxes and a double-height threshing barn (Photos 1 & 3).

- 4.6 The former stables/looseboxes range is constructed of brick, laid in a Flemish bond, with a corrugated sheet roof, with a series of stable doors on its principal (west) elevation and a solid brick rear elevation (Photos 1 & 2).
- 4.7 To the side of these stables is a former threshing barn that is of timber frame construction and clad in timber weatherboarding with a slate roof (Photos 3, 5 & 7). The principal north-facing elevation also has a projecting porch with double-height doors (Photos 3 & 4). A small, single storey lean-to extension, built in brick, has been added to this elevation to the side of the projecting porch (Photo 3).
- 4.8 The rear elevation is also clad in timber weatherboarding and it has a single width personnel door, adjacent to which is a metal frame window, suggesting that this elevation may have been altered in the past (Photos 5 & 6).

BARN 2

- 4.9 To the front (east) of Rusling End Farmhouse is an L-shaped range of former agricultural buildings that includes a cart-shed and a stables (Photos 9 & 12).
- 4.10 A single storey timber clad building on a brick plinth, with a concrete pantile roof supported on modern roof timbers, lies along the road frontage (Photos 9 & 10). This building has a pair of double-width doors onto the road and a single personnel door on the inner (west) elevation suggesting it was used as a cart-shed for storage with easy access to the road (Photos 9 & 11).
- 4.11 At 90° to this building is a range of single-storey buildings that run along the boundary of the site. The main element consists of a former stables building, built in brick, laid in Flemish bond, with a plain tile roof, and a small lantern in the ridge of the roof (Photo 12). The inner (south) elevation has a centrally placed single door, with a glazed fanlight above, flanked by a pair of casement windows.
- 4.12 A smaller single storey building range extends westwards from the former stables, consisting of a weather boarded building with a slate roof, although the rear wall is built of brick with a panel of flintstone (Photos 13 & 14).

- 4.13 No internal evidence remains of the former uses of these buildings, now used for domestic storage and ancillary purposes.

Assessment of Significance

- 4.14 The relative importance of these buildings has already been established by the designation of Rusling End Farmhouse as a Grade II listed building, and Annex 2 of the NPPF recognises that the significance of a heritage asset can derive from its archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic interest and also from its setting.
- 4.15 In this case the list description refers to the principal farmhouse and the proposed alterations will not affect this property. No mention is made of former farm buildings in the list description, but they are referred to in the HER, and it therefore seems reasonable to consider them as curtilage buildings of similar architectural and historic importance to the principal listed building and similarly protected. Together these buildings provide a legacy of the historic farming practices in this area.
- 4.16 Consequently, to accord with the policy objectives of the NPPF, the proposed development should seek to ensure that the elements of these buildings that contribute to their significance are not harmed or lost, in order to protect the special interest of these former agricultural buildings and also the principal listed building.

5.0 SUMMARY OF LOCAL HERITAGE ASSETS

Listed Buildings

- 5.1 As noted Rusling End Farmhouse is a Grade II listed building with the following description:
- Farmhouse. C17 timber frame. Late C18 or early C19 red brick casing. Gable ends have some C17 flint and red brick chequered walling. Plain tile roof. 2 storeys. 5 windows, those of ground floor segmental headed. 2-light C20 casements. Door on right centre in c1970 tile-hung porch. External left chimney stack. Rear gabled projection on right with some exposed timber framing. Interior has exposed beams and joists forming 3-4 bays.*
- 5.2 There are a number of other Grade II listed buildings within the vicinity of Rusling End, including the neighbouring properties of Rusling End Cottage (south) to the south

and Rusling End Cottage (north) and Lucas Farmhouse to the north. Given the limited nature of the proposed works, and their relative distance from the application site, these proposals will not affect these neighbouring listed buildings or their setting.

Historic Parks and Gardens & Scheduled Monuments

- 5.3 There are no Registered Historic Parks and Gardens or scheduled monuments within the vicinity of the site.

Conservation Areas

- 5.4 There are no designated Conservation Areas within the vicinity of the site.

Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record

- 5.5 Rusling End Farmhouse is identified on the HER (ref. MHT30429). The HER entry repeats the list description in respect of the principal farmhouse and it also notes that a few of the barns and other farm buildings survive, remnants of a substantial post-Medieval farmstead.
- 5.6 The HER also notes that the layout of farm buildings is shown on the 1845 tithe map, and in detail on the later 19th century OS maps. Large barns stood by the road north east of the house and around a yard to the south, with smaller buildings, another on the other side of the road, and a pond and orchard south of the buildings.

6.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 6.1 The relevant planning policies relating to the historic environment are considered to be:

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990

- 6.2 In summary this Act requires Councils, when determining applications, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or of any features of special architectural or historic interest it possesses (sections 16 & 66).

North Hertfordshire Planning Policies

North Hertfordshire District Local Plan

- 6.3 The Development Plan relevant to the assessment of this application consists of the

saved policies of the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No. 2, adopted in 1996. There are no saved policies in the Local Plan relating to the listed buildings, although Policy 25, whilst no longer consistent with the NPPF, discusses the re-use of rural buildings and supports their re-use for residential purposes where amongst other things, the use of the building and its curtilage will not harm the character of the countryside, or have an adverse effect on highway safety.

North Hertfordshire District Council Proposed Submission Local Plan

6.4 The emerging Local Plan recognises that the District has a rich built heritage and Policy SP13: *Historic Environment* notes that the Council will balance the need for growth with the proper protection and enhancement of the historic environment, including a strong presumption in favour of the retention, preservation and enhancement of heritage assets and their setting.

6.5 Policy HE1: *Designated Heritage Assets* notes that planning applications relating to designated heritage assets should be accompanied by a heritage assessment/justification statement and this notes that planning permission for development proposals affecting designated heritage assets or their setting will be granted where they (as applicable):

- enable the heritage asset to be used in a manner that secures its conservation and preserves its significance;
- incorporate a palette of materials that make a positive contribution to local character or distinctiveness, where it is appropriate and justified.

National Planning Policy Framework

6.6 The NPPF is also a material consideration and to promote sustainable development, it identifies the conservation of heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance as one of the core land-use planning principles that should underpin decision-taking [paras. 17].

6.7 The policies on conserving and enhancing the historic environment appear at section 12 of the NPPF and this recognises that the significance of a designated heritage asset can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of the asset [para. 132]. It therefore advises that substantial harm to a Grade II listed building should be

exceptional [para. 132], although where it is considered that a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal [para. 134]. The accompanying National Planning Policy Guidance makes clear that the test for 'substantial harm' is a high one that is not expected to occur in many cases.

7.0 IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 7.1 The proposed development relates to conversion works to the former agricultural buildings associated with Rusling Farmhouse. Overall the proposed alterations are relatively modest in scope and they generally respect the buildings' historic and architectural interest and their associations with the principal listed building.

Barn 1: The Threshing Barn and Looseboxes

- 7.2 The threshing barn is presently used for low key storage uses and is in need of a new beneficial use. It is proposed to convert the threshing barn and its adjoining stables/looseboxes to a two-bedroom (independent) dwelling, and the proposed alterations, which are relatively modest in scale, have been designed to retain, as far as possible, existing openings, historic fabric and historic floor plans in order to preserve and enhance the traditional rural and historic character of these two buildings.
- 7.3 The proposed bedrooms are located within the former stables/looseboxes range with a new arrangement of internal walls and rooms to adapt the building to this new use. These works will however retain the existing arrangement of openings on the principal west facing elevation that reflects the original use of this building (Photo 1). It is also proposed to insert three casement windows on the rear elevation, these will be relatively discreet changes that will have little impact on the overall character or appearance of this building.
- 7.4 The internal space within the threshing barn, which is presently open, has three distinct bays reflecting its historic functional use, and the proposed conversion works have been largely guided by this historic plan form. It is proposed to retain the former threshing barn as a single open plan living space, save for a mezzanine floor over the end bay which will not enclose the existing space in the threshing barn.

- 7.5 More minor internal changes include new internal doors between the threshing barn and the single storey lean-to extension. These will not affect the overall layout of the building and the loss of historic fabric is negligible.
- 7.6 Details of the roof and wall insulation works required for the domestic use of the building can be agreed by condition to ensure they also respect the historic form and fabric of the building.
- 7.7 The principal external changes are to glaze the existing double height opening into the former threshing barn to maintain the scale and appearance of this historic opening (Photos 3 & 4). It is also assumed that there was a similar opening in the rear wall to allow the hay carts to drive through the building in one direction. Whilst there is no longer any evidence of such a door on the rear elevation (Photo 6), the principal timber posts within the building clearly indicate a central passageway through the building following the line of the main doors. It therefore appears that the rear doors may have been removed and the original opening clad in weatherboarding, as it presently is, to adapt the building to new uses after it was no longer used as a threshing barn.
- 7.8 It is therefore proposed to insert a full-height glazed screen in the rear south elevation, removing the existing weatherboarding but not the timber posts. This design feature will provide a visual and physical re-instatement of the threshing barn door on the rear elevation, conveying something of the building's original spatial and functional qualities, allowing the opportunity to better understand how the building was originally constructed and used, thereby better revealing its significance.
- 7.9 The proposed alterations to convert the existing threshing barn and stables/looseboxes to a dwelling are therefore relatively modest in scope and will retain their historic character and appearance and their association with the principal farmhouse.

Barn 2: The Cart Shed and Stables

- 7.10 The former cart shed and stables are also presently used for low key storage uses and are in need of new beneficial use. It is proposed to convert these buildings to an

ancillary leisure annex to Rusling End Farmhouse. The proposed alterations, which are relatively modest in scale, have been designed to retain, as far as possible, existing openings, historic fabric and historic floor plans in order to preserve and enhance the traditional rural and historic character of these two buildings.

- 7.11 No major alterations are proposed within the cart shed and the principal elevation to the road frontage will be unchanged (Photos 9 & 10). It is proposed to insert a new casement in the gable elevation (Photo 10), but this new opening will be relatively discreet and will not affect the overall character of the building.
- 7.12 Internally it is difficult to discern any surviving historic layout, and as a consequence this part of the building is of limited interest. The proposals seek to provide a new arrangement of rooms, providing a relatively simple sub-division with new internal walls to form the individual rooms, which will provide a central passageway between the doors in the front and rear elevations. These alterations will have no impact on its character or appearance, or its significance.
- 7.13 The existing stables are to be relatively unchanged, there are no changes proposed to the principal elevation, although it is proposed to insert two casement windows in the rear elevation (Photo 14). These new openings will be relatively discreet and will not affect the overall character of the building. Internally, the existing floor space is to be largely retained in its present form. These minor alterations will have no impact on the character or appearance, or significance, on this building.
- 7.14 The single storey range is to be retained in its present form except for a replacement roof covering, replacing the corrugated sheeting with a natural slate roof which will improve the appearance of this building.
- 7.15 The proposed alterations to the range of buildings alongside Rusling End Farmhouse are therefore relatively modest in scope and will retain the historic character and appearance of these buildings and their associations with the principal farmhouse.

Boundary Wall

- 7.16 It is also proposed to construct a 1.8m garden wall, to sub-divide the garden between

Rusling End Farmhouse and Barn 1. This wall will be built of reclaimed brick and flintstone using the existing stock already on site to match an existing boundary wall alongside Barn 1 (Photo 8). This wall is therefore in keeping with the existing boundary walls within the site, and it will maintain a degree of uniformity of appearance across the site, reinforcing its local character and sense of place without compromising the overall setting of Rusling Farmhouse.

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 This statement provides a detailed assessment of the curtilage buildings associated with the Grade II listed Rusling End Farmhouse, and the potential impact of the proposals to convert these buildings to new uses having regard to the objectives of the relevant local planning policies and the NPPF.
- 8.2 As described above these alterations to convert the former threshing barn and associated stables/looseboxes to a new dwellinghouse and the former cart shed and stables to uses ancillary to the main farmhouse are relatively modest in scope, but they will provide a long-term beneficial use for these curtilage buildings enabling them to be used in a manner that secures their conservation without adversely affecting their overall character or appearance, or the overall significance and setting of Rusling End Farmhouse, the principal listed building.
- 8.3 Furthermore the proposed development offers the opportunity to better reveal the significance of these buildings, particularly the threshing barn, where the proposed changes will reveal both the internal double height space and internal floor plan of the building as well as the historic circulation route through the building.
- 8.4 In this context the NPPF advises local planning authorities to take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation, and the Council's emerging planning policies support development proposals that enable heritage assets to be used in a manner that secures their conservation and preserves their significance.
- 8.5 It is therefore considered that these proposals accord with the objectives of Local Plan Policy 25, which supports the re-use of rural buildings for residential purposes,

together with the objectives of emerging Local Plan Policies SP13 & HE1 and the NPPF, which seek to ensure that heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, whilst promoting viable uses consistent with the conservation of the heritage asset.

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Photo 1: Front elevation of the stables/looseboxes to the south of Rusling End Farmhouse



Photo 2: Rear elevation of the stables/looseboxes



Photo 3: Front elevation of the former threshing barn with brick built lean to extension



Photo 4: Detail of the double height doors and projecting porch within the front elevation of the former threshing barn



Photo 5: Rear elevation of the former threshing barn with a possible earlier opening outlined by the blue plastic sheeting



Photo 6: Detailed view of the rear elevation of the former threshing barn showing existing openings and outline of a possible earlier opening



Photo 7: Internal view within the former threshing barn showing timber framing



Photo 8: Remains of existing boundary wall



Photo 9: Front elevation of the former cart-shed fronting the road



Photo 10: Front and gable elevation of the former cart-shed fronting the road



Photo 11: Internal (rear) elevation of the cart-shed



Photo 12: Front and gable elevation of the former stables



Photo 13: Front and gable elevation of single storey building



Photo 14: Rear elevation of the single-storey building and stables