



**Ref . PLANNING APPLICATION 20/03180/FUL** | Conversion of existing agricultural structures to form three new residential dwellings with associated external modifications and construction of ancillary outbuilding | Mount Farm Junction Road Churchill Chipping Norton Oxfordshire OX7 6NP

## INTRODUCTION

The adopted Local Plan contains a policy specifically related to the conversion of existing buildings in the countryside and small villages to residential use. The policy states that such conversions will, exceptionally be permitted if the building is not suitable or reasonably capable of re-use for employment purposes, recreational or community uses, visitor facilities or tourist accommodation and that its retention can only be secured through its conversion to residential use.

The Local Plan Policy H2, when referring to the re-use of buildings, requires demonstration that the building is not capable of re- use for business, recreation or community uses, tourist accommodation or visitor facilities.

This document is intended to provide the relevant information required to demonstrate the case for full residential conversion of these redundant traditional stone agricultural buildings at Mount Farm, Churchill.

### THE CASE for Employment Use:

Whilst the building would physically be capable of use for business purposes, an unrestricted Class B1 use, defined as being an appropriate use within a residential area, would generate significant amounts of traffic.

Surveys of such uses have been undertaken as part of the TRICS database and the accepted traffic generation for a B1 use is one vehicle movement per day per 10m<sup>2</sup> of gross floor area. For these three buildings assuming only single story use, could mean in the region of 39 vehicles per day visiting the site.

Mount Farm Workshops Units 1-8 have with applications 20/01608/PN56, 20/01609/PN56 obtained PD permission in 2020 for residential use. Therefore the access to the proposed buildings for conversion will soon be through the centre of a solely residential development of seven homes.

There is also insufficient land available for commercial parking or regular deliveries. Larger vehicles would not be able to turnaround within the site and therefore have to reverse through a residential development which would result in a significant risk to the residents particularly any young children playing unaware of the dangers of reversing lorries.

Mount Farm Workshops Units 1-10 have provided rural employment facilities for more than 30 years. However the demand for this type of basic commercial accommodation has been reducing steadily. In early 2020 units 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 and 10 were either let or available to let totalling 11,798 ft<sup>2</sup>. (Unit 9 has planning for alternative recreational use).

Despite a very competitive annual rent based on just £4.50 per square foot, over 6000 ft<sup>2</sup> has remained unlet throughout 2020 which is less than 50% of the space available.

Putting aside the access issues, the proposed buildings if converted for employment use would probably only achieve a maximum annual rental of £18,000 a year if all the space was let, which seems unlikely due to the challenging economic outlook. Conversion costs for these traditional buildings to modern commercial standards including required insulation upgrades would be in excess of £120 ft<sup>2</sup> plus considerable additional site-specific service media upgrade or installation requirements. There is currently no mains drainage, no surface water soakaways, no mains water supply, no useable electrical supply or any fast internet access. Mains drainage would require an upgraded sewage pipe across and under Junction Road to the Thames water facilities. Budget cost £40-£60,000. The current overhead power does not have sufficient capacity for any additional commercial use, therefore a transformer and capacity upgrades would be required, budget cost £30-£50,000. New water connections to Thames water in William Smith close, budget £20,000, so probably an additional £100,000+ to provide the basic commercial services. Therefore the conversion cost to commercial use would be well in excess of £600,000 with annual returns of just £18,000 which would generate less than 3% annual returns which would not be economically viable.

**With regard to community use**, Churchill is a popular village that does have existing community and recreational facilities.

Significant funds would be required to make these buildings useable for community or recreational use and the applicants are not aware of any potential users that need or could fund such accommodation. Access and limited parking would also be a problem in this soon to be mainly residential area of the village.

**Tourism accommodation** is the other preferred use for buildings of this type but, again, such use would not be financially viable.

The costs of converting a buildings of this type into holiday use would be at least £2,200 per m<sup>2</sup>, which for a buildings of this size would cost upwards of £514,000, £481,000 and £237,00 respectively, plus the site infrastructure costs of over £100,000. So £1.3M not including the purchase price of the buildings.

Tourist accommodation has vacancy rates in the Cotswolds of about 40%. To fund such a venture and meet bank and service costs, as well as achieving a yield of about 10%, the net income of the three units would need to average about £2,150 per week per unit or £6,500 collectively. This is unlikely to be achievable in this location as this is the amount achievable in peak weeks by substantial houses in the Cotswolds, after reviewing other holiday accommodation on various websites. No financial institution would lend money to finance such a venture.

In view of the above, none of the uses preferred by the policy would be achievable or viable. Thus, the preferences listed in Policy H10 are unlikely to be implemented.

This proposal for residential conversion will retain and preserve a non-designated Heritage Asset within the Churchill conservation area and make beneficial use of it with only minimal changes to its appearance. West Oxfordshire District Council recognises the importance of non-designated Heritage Assets in its Local Plan documentation, which states that they represent a crucially important aspect of the District's heritage and play a defining role in the local character of an area