

Residential conversion of former agricultural units at Mount Farm, Churchill to form 3 new dwellings

Planning & Design Statement

Ref. 285-P-DAS-01
Revision A
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This report accompanies a planning application for the conversion of a series of vacant agricultural buildings to residential use along with the construction of an associated ancillary structure.

The buildings are part of a complex including light industrial workshops and commercial units on the former site of Mount Farm, Churchill. The farm has not been in operation for over 25 years and has long ceased to be connected to the land it once served. Prior Approval Notifications have been accepted (ref. 20/01608/PN56 & 20/01609/PN56) for the change of use of all the light industrial units on the site enabling their conversion to residential dwellings under the General Permitted Development Order. The remaining commercial unit is not included in this application and will retain its current usage as a gym. On the adjacent site, the former Mount Farm grain mill has also been successfully converted to residential use (ref. 16/01072/FUL).

The buildings that are subject to this application occupy the south west corner of the site and comprise a series of narrow structures clustered around a pair of courtyards, all of which are in sound condition and suitable for conversion without major structural alteration. The southernmost courtyard is currently covered by a steel framed double pitched roof structure with a pair of redundant timber framed open sided former livestock sheds to either side. Running to the rear of this is a more substantial stone barn with an elevated roofline, which forms the boundary to Stow Cottage and Mount Farm Barn (residential) and continues into the adjacent courtyard. The second courtyard is not enclosed but contains the

existing commercial unit within a stone wing running behind the northern livestock shed and an inelegant flat roofed infill building of mid 20th century origin.

The proposal is to remove the steel framed structure within the southernmost courtyard to reveal the attractive stone barn and its two timber framed counterparts. Without substantially altering the roofline, footprint or character of the buildings, two new residential dwellings will be created within these structures, the courtyard being divided into two to provide private external amenity space for each unit.

In order to facilitate the conversion, additional oak posts and beams will be introduced in line with the existing structure to the southern livestock shed, behind which glazing will be installed. The footprint of the northern livestock shed will be extended slightly but the new oak structure of the façade will again follow the rhythm of the existing structure and have glazing installed behind it. An additional storey will be created within the existing roofspace of the stone barn to the rear of the courtyard, lit by the introduction of a series of conservation rooflights. In the stone walls at ground floor, a pair of new openings will be formed and, alongside the existing opening, infilled with painted timber windows in the style of the building's existing fenestration.

Where the stone barn backs onto the adjacent residential site of Mount Farm Barn and Stow Cottage, the existing openings will be infilled with stone to match in order to avoid infringements on the privacy of the neighbouring dwellings.

In the adjacent courtyard, the majority of the 20th century infill building will be removed revealing the more attractive stone facades of the surrounding barns and creating a private amenity space in front of a third new residential dwelling. This unit will occupy the stone barn to the rear of the courtyard, which will receive an additional storey in the existing roofspace and the same external treatment as that proposed in the adjacent courtyard. The remaining section of infill building, occupied by the commercial unit, will be made good and the current function of the space retained.

The site is within the Churchill Conservation Area and the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and as a result the following policies from the West Oxfordshire Local Plan (2018) are relevant to this application (edited to remove non applicable text):

POLICY OS2: Locating development in the right places

Development in the small villages, hamlets and open countryside will be limited to that which requires and is appropriate for a rural location and which respects the intrinsic character of the area. Proposals for residential development will be considered under policy H2.

POLICY H2: Delivery of New Homes

New dwellings will only be permitted in the small villages, hamlets and open countryside where they comply with the general principles set out in Policy OS2 and in the following circumstances:

- re-use of appropriate existing buildings which would lead to an enhancement of their immediate setting and where it has been demonstrated that the building is not capable of re-use for business, recreational or community uses, tourist accommodation or visitor facilities*

or where the proposal will address a specific local housing need which would otherwise not be met.

The existing buildings have not been in formal use since the cessation of farming at the site. However, they are located alongside a number of commercial units, which have been leased for light industrial use over the past ten years. Many of these units are now vacant as the demand has appreciably weakened and they are due for conversion to residential use under the General Permitted Development Order. With the business premises already in this location proven to be surplus to demand it is apparent that conversion of the agricultural buildings to serve this use would not be commercially viable. Similarly, although one unit on the site contains a community/recreational use in the form of a gym there is no apparent need for this capacity to be expanded and it will be retained as long as it continues to meet the commercial demand.

POLICY EH1: Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

In determining development proposals within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and proposals which would affect its setting, great weight will be given to conserving and enhancing the area's natural beauty, landscape and countryside, including its wildlife and heritage. This will include consideration of any harm to the contribution that the settlement makes to the scenic beauty of the AONB.

POLICY EH10: Conservation areas

Proposals for development in a Conservation Area or affecting the setting of a Conservation Area will be permitted where it can be shown to conserve or enhance the special interest, character, appearance and setting, specifically provided that:

- the location, form, scale, massing, density, height, layout, landscaping, use, alignment and external appearance of the development conserves or enhances the special historic or architectural interest, character and appearance of the Conservation Area;
- the development conserves or enhances the setting of the Conservation Area and is not detrimental to views within, into or out of the Area;
- the proposals are sympathetic to the original curtilage and pattern of development and to important green spaces, such as paddocks, greens and gardens, and other gaps or spaces between buildings and the historic street pattern which make a positive contribution to the character in the Conservation Area;
- the wider social and environmental effects generated by the development are compatible with the existing character and appearance of the Conservation Area; and
- there would be no loss of, or harm to, any feature that makes a positive contribution to the special interest, character or appearance of the Conservation Area, unless the development would make an equal or greater contribution.

Applications for the demolition of a building in a Conservation Area will only be permitted where it has been demonstrated that:

- the building detracts from or does not make a positive contribution to the special interest, character or appearance of the Conservation Area; or
- the building is of no historic or architectural interest or is wholly beyond repair and is not capable of beneficial use; and
- any proposed replacement building makes an equal or greater contribution to the special interest, character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

Wherever possible the sympathetic restoration and re-use of buildings that make a positive contribution to the special interest, character and appearance of a Conservation Area will be encouraged, thereby preventing harm through the cumulative loss of features which are an asset to the Conservation Area.

POLICY EH12: Traditional Buildings

In determining applications that involve the conversion, extension or alteration of traditional buildings, proposals will not normally be permitted where this would:

- extensively alter the existing structure or remove features of interest;
- include extensions or alterations which would obscure or compromise the form or character of the original building

The proposals seek to improve the appearance and setting of the existing buildings through the removal of the more recent interventions, which are of no architectural merit and detract from the appearance of the conservation area. This will significantly reduce the built volume and density on the site and reveal more of the original agricultural structures. The traditional scale and form of these structures are an appropriate counterpart to the adjacent converted Mount Farm barn and together form part of the visible agricultural heritage of the village.

The conversion of the buildings will be carried out in a sensitive and sympathetic manner with new openings formed and treated in a style consistent with the existing traditional elements to preserve the character of the conservation area. No increase in roof heights is proposed and only a limited expansion of the footprint of one original wing is required, however the increase in volume that will result is substantially offset by the removal of other attached structures.

The site will be landscaped in a similar manner to that successfully deployed at adjacent Mount Farm Barn, where the commercial forecourt has been replaced by a softer more traditionally agricultural aesthetic. A similar approach to ancillary buildings will

also be taken with the construction of garaging in a traditional barn style.

POLICY OS3: Prudent use of natural resources

All development proposals (including new buildings, conversions and the refurbishment of existing building stock) will be required to show consideration of the efficient and prudent use and management of natural resources, including:

- making the most efficient use of land and buildings, whilst having regard to the character of the locality*
- delivering development that seeks to minimize the need to travel*
- minimising use of non-renewable resources, including land and energy, and maximizing opportunities for travel by sustainable means*
- minimising their impact on the soil resource**
- minimising energy demands and energy loss through design, layout, orientation, landscaping, materials and the use of technology;*
- minimising summer solar gain, maximizing passive winter solar heating, lighting, natural ventilation, energy and water efficiency and reuse of materials;*
- maximising resource efficiency, including water. All new residential development will be expected to achieve the optional building regulations requirement for water efficiency of 110 litres/person/day.*
- minimising risk of flooding;*
- making use of appropriate sustainable drainage systems;*
- using recycled and energy efficient materials;*
- minimising waste and making adequate provision for the re-use and recycling of waste; and causing no deterioration and, where possible, achieving improvements in water or air quality.*

** Guidance includes the 2011 DEFRA publication: Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites*

The reuse of buildings is an inherently sustainable means of providing new dwellings and the minimal interventions required to

facilitate the conversion of these agricultural units further supports this. The proposal is to follow the 'fabric first' approach, whereby the existing structures will be internally insulated to meet, and where practicable exceed, current building regulations standards. The orientation of the buildings is fixed, however where large areas of glazing are proposed along the facades of the formerly open sided livestock sheds their relatively sheltered location below the ridge lines of the surrounding buildings will ensure that excessive solar gain will not be problematic.

POLICY OS4: High quality design

High design quality is central to the strategy for West Oxfordshire. New development should respect the historic, architectural and landscape character of the locality, contribute to local distinctiveness and, where possible, enhance the character and quality of the surroundings and should:

- demonstrate high quality, inclusive and sustainable design with the provision of a safe, pleasant, convenient and interesting environment where the quality of the public realm is enhanced and the likelihood of crime and fear of crime is reduced; and*
- not harm the use or enjoyment of land and buildings nearby including living conditions in residential properties; and*
- demonstrate resilience to future climate change, particularly increasing temperatures and flood risk, and the use of water conservation and management measures; and*
- conserve or enhance areas, buildings and features of historic, architectural and environmental significance, including both designated and non-designated heritage assets and habitats of biodiversity value; and*
- enhance local green infrastructure and its biodiversity, including the provision of attractive, safe and convenient amenity open space commensurate with the scale and type of development, with play space where appropriate.*

Designers of new development will be expected to provide supporting evidence for their design approach. They should have regard to specific design advice contained in supplementary planning guidance covering the District. The West Oxfordshire Design Guide, Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Appraisal, Landscape Assessments, Conservation Area Appraisals and Cotswolds AONB guidance documents are key tools for interpreting local distinctiveness and informing high design quality

The proposals involve minimal interventions being made into the external fabric of the existing buildings, with their overall form and appearance preserved. Where new openings are required, they will be formed by using stone detailing to match the existing and new timber casement windows will be set back 75mm from the face of the wall, fabricated in accordance with the recommendations contained in Section 10 of the West Oxfordshire Design Guide.

POLICY T1: Sustainable transport

Priority will be given to locating new development in areas with convenient access to a good range of services and facilities and where the need to travel by private car can be minimised, due to opportunities for walking, cycling and the use of public transport... In addition to this;

- All new development will be designed to maximise opportunities for walking, cycling and the use of public transport, ensure the safe movement of vehicles and minimise the impact of parked and moving vehicles on local residents, business and the environment*
- To promote increased home working and telecommuting, all new residential and commercial developments will be required to make provision for superfast broadband.*

The site is located a short walk from the centre of the village of Churchill, which contains a full range of basic local services. Bus links to Chipping Norton (3 miles) provide access to a greater range of

services, whilst Kingham railway station (3 miles) allows onward connection to the wider public transport network.

POLICY T2: Highway Improvement Schemes

All development will be required to demonstrate safe access and an acceptable degree of impact on the local highway network.

Vehicle and pedestrian access to the site will remain as existing via William Smith Close. The entrance has always adequately and safely facilitated the vehicular movements associated with the commercial and light industrial uses on the site and it is envisaged that any additional usage caused by the introduction of residential units on the site will be negligible.

POLICY T3: Public transport, walking and cycling

All new development will be located and designed to maximise opportunities for walking, cycling and the use of public transport. Where opportunities for walking, cycling and using public transport are more limited, other measures will be sought to help reduce car use as appropriate (e.g. measures to promote home working or the opportunity for linked trips e.g. through mixed-use development).

Home working will be facilitated on the site by the provision of superfast broadband.

POLICY T4 : Parking provision

The Council will work with partners to provide, maintain and manage an appropriate amount of off-street public car parking, particularly to support our town and village centres and to address issues of congestion and air quality. Parking in new developments will be provided in accordance with

the County Council's adopted parking standards and should be sufficient to meet increasing levels of car ownership. Proposals for new off street public car parking areas will be supported in accessible locations where they would help to ensure the continued vitality and viability of town centres, where they would support visitor and tourist facilities and attractions or where the local environment is being seriously damaged by on-street parking and alternative parking provision is essential. Development proposals which significantly increase car parking demand will be expected to make appropriate public car parking provision or equivalent financial contributions.

Off-street car parking, in accordance with adopted parking standards, will be accommodated on the site, discretely located to minimise its visual impact on the wider setting:

Unit R1, 3 bedrooms – 2 car parking spaces

Unit R2, 3 bedrooms – 2 car parking spaces

Unit R3, 3 bedrooms – 2 car parking spaces

In conclusion, the conversion of the redundant agricultural units at Mount Farm will require minimal external alteration and meet the requirements of planning policy, enhancing the appearance and traditional character of the existing buildings and the wider conservation area through sensitive interventions and the removal of a series of poor quality and inappropriate structures. An enhancement to the openness and character of the AONB will also result from the reduction in built volume on the site. The buildings cannot support any commercially viable alternative uses and, whilst the site will still contain a community recreational facility in the form of a gym the conversion to residential is ultimately the only way to secure the long term future of this piece of the agricultural heritage of the village.