

**Hartridge Buddhist Monastery  
Odle Cottage  
Upottery  
Honiton EX14 9QE**

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**Planning Statement**

**Change of Use of agricultural land to ancillary accommodation in connection with the Hartridge  
Buddhist Monastery comprising the provision of three meditation huts**

**Date: June 2021**

This is a planning statement to accompany the full planning application submission for the change of use of agricultural land to ancillary accommodation in connection with adjacent monastery comprising the provision of three meditation huts [kutis].

In addition to this planning statement, in which we provide context and details of what we would like to do, we attach a site plan of the monastery land, plans and elevations of each hut, a Design and Access Statement, and photographs of each location and setting.

The origins of the monastery – apart from the historic 2,500 year old Buddhist monastic tradition are in a lineage of Buddhism in Thailand which has come to be known as the Thai Forest tradition. These are monastic orders and monasteries which tend to be found in more remote or secluded places, away from towns and villages, and as the name suggests, often in the forest – although these days the forests of Thailand are much diminished compared with even 50 years ago. In fact, forest monasteries in some places are the only remnants of Thailand's once huge virgin forests. These monasteries are often fairly simple places, with a few communal buildings, with the resident community living in small meditation huts in the forest. During the twentieth century, westerners began to discover and join some of these communities, and today some of the most well-known and respected monks in Thailand are actually westerners. From around the 1950's there were people in Britain who wanted to establish and support monasteries in this country, and one result of this was the Chithurst Buddhist Monastery in rural West Sussex, which began in 1979. The Hartridge monastery is one of several branch monasteries in the UK originating from Chithurst, with more monasteries worldwide.

Hartridge monastery started in 1982, and came to its current location in 1986. Initially, it comprised just Odle cottage, and in the early 1990's adjacent fields amounting to 20 acres were purchased. About half of this new land was then planted with trees, and today this woodland is nearing 30 years old. During the 1990's several meditation huts were built in this woodland. In 2001 the monastery was granted Change of Use from a domestic dwelling to a monastery, and at the same time this agreement recognised the addition of the aforementioned woodland, along with meditation huts, as part of the monastery. Our sister monasteries in Sussex, Hertfordshire and Northumberland have, over the years, each been granted planning permission for similar developments – ranging from 12 kutis on the 100 acres of woodland at our Chithurst monastery to three kutis surrounding a large lake on a five acre plot in Northumberland. See [www.cittaviveka.org](http://www.cittaviveka.org); [www.amaravati.org](http://www.amaravati.org); [www.ratanagiri.org.uk](http://www.ratanagiri.org.uk).

The monastic discipline of Theravadan Buddhism does not allow monks individually to own or use money themselves. A monk may have a lay steward, who can help by holding funds for him if people wish to make donations. The Hartridge Buddhist Monastery Trust is a registered charity (charity number 1142439) which acts as the steward on behalf of the monks at Hartridge (and the wider community of monastics of which Hartridge is a part). The monastics are not employees, nor self-employed and not unemployed. Donations to the Trust come from many sources and people – much inspired by faith and innate generosity, and much from people and places in the south-west of England, and from further afield as well – but also consequent to activities of the community such as teaching engagements, residential stays, counselling, school groups, meditation classes, etc, some of which depend on the skills, experience and abilities of the resident monks. As a consequence, the monastery contributes to the local and wider economy in many ways.

Over the years the resident community of the Hartridge Monastery, excluding lay guests, has typically been 4-6 people. The monks traditionally live in meditation huts, but with all bathroom, cooking, dining and office facilities etc being in the main building at Odle cottage, and communal meditation space in the new Hall. In 2011 the monastery received planning permission to redevelop some of the outbuildings of Odle cottage, and today this comprises a new meditation hall and guest accommodation, which are normally open to the public and for lay visitors. However, in recent years

there has been rising interest from monastics elsewhere to come and stay, and from lay people to take up a monastic vocation, and there has often been insufficient space with the result that we have regularly had to turn people away. We have therefore been considering if there are places on the property where we could build some additional accommodation for the resident community.

The main monastery site therefore comprises the original Odle cottage, the recently built guest accommodation and meditation hall. The original part of the cottage is thought to be several hundred years old, with additions and extensions having been made over the course of time, resulting in an awkward space with typically small rooms, not very well suited to our needs. Almost every room is on a different level, with low ceilings and doorways, a very unusual layout with the main bathroom being downstairs, and uninsulated solid walls suffering from damp. The cottage contains the sole monastery kitchen, a dining room, visitor reception room, office, library, common room for the monks, and a single bathroom. None of the residents live in the building, although if we have visiting monastics then we can use one or two of the upstairs rooms as temporary bedrooms. Because the cottage is used as communal space, it does not lend itself to contemplative living quarters. Further, the building is in need of renovation, which would be a major undertaking as, ideally, much of the interior would need to be completely gutted and then rebuilt. Whilst we think that there may be potential for a small extension, we may only gain perhaps one small extra room and a bathroom from this. We therefore think that there is little meaningful potential for more accommodation in the cottage.

On our land away from the main built site, the current huts are spaced at about 50-100m from each other, which gives each the desired seclusion. We do not wish to compromise this by trying to site additional huts close to the present ones. A public footpath, which runs through our land, also restricts the possibility for siting new huts within the more mature woodland, as they would be too close to the path. However in 2008/9 we planted some additional areas of our land with more trees, and we think that glades within these plantings would now afford suitable locations for meditation huts. We understand, however, that these locations fall on the part of the monastery land which is classed as agricultural, just outside of the boundary of land included for Change of Use in 2001. We are therefore requesting Change of Use so that these three small areas of this younger woodland can be added to the existing land classed as solely for monastic use. One of these new areas is immediately next to our existing woodland, and the other two areas border our neighbour's forest.

These sites are all intentionally screened with mixed native woodland species and away from the public footpath that cuts through our land, the track that runs on the Hartridge common along our western border, and are also screened by existing woodland from any neighbouring properties and more distant views across the Otter valley. The three sites are about 100m apart and therefore each offer space for one hut in a secluded spot.

Further information about the monastery and our activities can be found at [www.hartridgemonastery.org](http://www.hartridgemonastery.org)