



RCC TOWN PLANNING CONSULTANCY



**Site: Barn opposite The Old Post Office, Harts Lane,
Newtown, Newbury, RG20 9AP**

**Proposal: Change of use and conversion of
redundant agricultural building and associated
land to form a 2-bedroom dwelling**

On behalf of: Anne Hutchins

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RCC TOWN PLANNING CONSULTANCY

PLANNING STATEMENT

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared on behalf of the applicant, Mrs Anne Hutchins, to support this full planning application for the change of use and conversion of a redundant agricultural building and associated land at Harts Lane, Newtown to form a 2-bedroom residential dwelling. The proposed plans also show how the site would be arranged to create a new residential curtilage, with alterations to the existing field access and off-street parking provision.
- 1.2 Whilst not constituting major development, nor development within a designated area, the applicant has sought to provide a summary overview through this statement, which will examine how the proposed development relates to the site and its context. The statement will also provide an explanation and justification for the scheme having regard to the national and local plan policy context.



2.0 SITE CONTEXT

- 2.1 This application relates to a detached barn and associated agricultural land found opposite The Old Post Office, Harts Lane, Newtown.
- 2.2 The village of Newtown is a dispersed settlement located approximately 2 miles due south of the larger town of Newbury. Although a small settlement, Newtown benefits from some facilities including a village hall, public house and places of worship. Newtown is also on the bus route to Newbury with limited stops at The Swann Inn and a more frequent service found along the main road to the north of the village.
- 2.3 The application site is located toward the southern edge of Newtown, on the western side of Harts Lane, opposite a cluster of residential dwellings including The Old Post Office (which is under the same ownership).
- 2.4 Historically the application site formed part of a larger smallholding ran by the applicants and her family, with the barn subject of the conversion used for agricultural storage purposes.
- 2.5 The barn is located toward the south of the application site and is set against rising land to the south and east. To the northern and western aspects the application site borders agricultural land (also under ownership of the applicant), to the east the land rises to the hedged roadside boundary which separates the site from Harts Lane and a neighbouring residential dwelling known as 'Woodcote' borders the site to the south.



Figure 1: Aerial photograph showing application site and its surroundings

- 2.6 The barn proposed for conversion is a single storey detached building, of rectangular plan form with a footprint extending to approximately 180 square metres. The barn has a timber frame and timber clad elevations, set above dwarf concrete block walls. The external roof surfaces are constructed of corrugated metal sheet roofing with perspex rooflights. It is understood that the current barn was constructed in 1980 for agricultural purposes in connection with the wider smallholding (but there has been a building on this site since the early 1900's). However, the barn now sits redundant for its originally intended purpose, partly as the activity on the small holding has diminished in recent years and also due to changes in agricultural practices which render the building too small to accommodate larger agricultural machinery. Security at the site is also an issue (hence the covering of window openings with roof sheeting).
- 2.7 Access to the application site is currently provided by a gated vehicular entrance point at the north eastern site corner and which adjoins Harts Lane. The entrance point leads to a track which runs south toward to the front of the barn.



Figure 2: Photographs of the farm building (left) and gated access point onto Harts Lane (right)

- 2.8 Looking at the wider site context, right of way footpaths (18 and 24) run in an east to west direction crossing Harts Lane approximately 30 metres to the south of the site, but due to differences in the land levels and verdant nature of the site and its surroundings, limited visibility down into the site is possible to users of the right of ways.
- 2.9 The application site is not covered by any landscape, arboricultural or heritage designations or restrictions and with respect of flooding, the land falls within Flood Zone 1 (lowest risk).
- 2.10 The barn is currently under-utilised and without a long-term active use, the building will require ongoing maintenance so as not to fall into a state of disrepair. The application site benefits from existing vehicular access and it is sited opposite existing residential development. The site therefore readily lends

itself to the creation of a separate dwelling house with its own defined curtilage.

2.11 Structural Solutions have produced a report which accompanies this application which records that the building is of sound construction and in good overall condition. The report therefore confirms that the structural elements of the building are suitable for the proposed conversion without extensive alteration or major rebuilding outside that normally associated with an agricultural to residential conversion. As such, this application proposes the conversion and redevelopment of the redundant building to provide a single 2-bedroom dwelling.



3.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 The Council's online records do not reveal any planning history pertaining to the application site.
- 3.2 Within the site vicinity in recent years there have been several applications for new dwellings which we consider pertinent to the current proposal, not least as the permissions indicate that the settlement represents a sustainable location for minor housing development which accords with the provisions of SS6. Those applications considered of most relevance are set out in the table below:

Application Reference:	Title
18/03068/FUL (Appeal ref: APP/H1705/W/19/3225668)	Erection of detached dwelling with associated access and landscaping – allowed at appeal 20/08/19
18/02095/OUT (Appeal ref: APP/H1705/W/19/3222118)	Outline application for matters of access and layout for the erection of a dwelling with hard and soft landscaping and associated works – allowed at appeal 08/08/19.
20/01744/FUL	Erection of detached dwelling with associated access and landscaping – approved 13/11/20.



4.0 PLANNING POLICY

- 4.1 Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) states that in dealing with an application for planning permission, the local planning authority (LPA) shall have regard to the provisions of the development plan, so as far as material to the application, any local finance considerations, so far as material to the application and any other material considerations.
- 4.2 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.3 For the purposes of this application, the development plan comprises the Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council Local Plan 2011-2029 (adopted 2016) (BDBC LP). Government guidance is provided within the revised National Planning Policy Framework published July 2021 (NPPF).
- 4.4 BDBC have produced several Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's) including those on Design and Sustainability, Landscape Biodiversity and Trees, Housing, Parking Standards and Planning Obligations for Infrastructure, all adopted in 2018 and which provide relevant background guidance for this proposal.
- 4.5 Newtown has yet to be designated within an area for the purposes of neighbourhood planning.
- 4.6 The key relevant policies within these plans and guidance are set out in the associated tables below:

BASINGSTOKE AND DEANE LOCAL PLAN (2011-2029)

Policy	Title
SD1	Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
SS1	Scale and Distribution of New Housing
SS6	New Housing in the Countryside
CN9	Transport
EM1	Landscape
EM4	Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Nature Conservation
EM7	Managing Flood Risk
EM9	Sustainable Water Use
EM10	Delivering High Quality Development



NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (JULY 2021)

Chapter	Title
2	Achieving Sustainable Development
5	Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
9	Promoting sustainable transport
11	Making an effective use of land
12	Achieving well-designed places
15	Conserving and enhancing the natural environment



5.0 PLANNING ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The key planning considerations can be outlined as:
- The principle of the proposed conversion and redevelopment of the site to residential use,
 - Impact on Biodiversity,
 - Highway safety, and
 - Residential amenity,
- 5.2 These will be considered in turn below.

Principle of Development

- 5.3 The application proposes the conversion and re-use of an existing redundant agricultural barn. Turning to the principle of such a conversion in this location, the village of Newtown lies outside of any defined settlement policy boundaries (SPB's) as defined in the BDBC LP, where policy SS1 (Scale and Distribution of New Housing) seeks to focus housing delivery. Notwithstanding this, the strategy for housing delivery set out at SS1 includes reference to the permission of exception sites outside SPB's where a proposal meets criteria set out in other policies in the plan. In policy terms, the application site is a countryside location, where LP policy SS6 (New Housing in the Countryside) makes provision for new housing where a proposal meets certain exceptional tests. These exceptions seek to respond to both local circumstance and national policy.
- 5.4 The policy 'exception' to the provision of housing only in the most sustainable of locations has been permitted in order to help meet the Government's clear aim to significantly boost housing supply, though in this instance, the re-use of existing under-utilised rural buildings. This is a better means of providing housing by efficiently using buildings which are already in existence, in order to limit the pressure on untouched countryside to provide for the growing demands on housing supply. Both national and local policy accept that residential conversions may be deemed acceptable even in isolated rural locations, which is clearly not the case here, given the site falls within a small, dispersed settlement.
- 5.5 As part of this approach towards encouraging conversion schemes, the government introduced permitted development rights under Schedule 2, Part 3, Class Q, of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 to change the use of agricultural buildings to residential (including associated building operations). It is pertinent that this conversion scheme complies with the main criteria of Class Q. Nevertheless, given the exception tests set out at SS6 outline a generally permissive approach toward the conversion of redundant permanent rural buildings, this proposal has been submitted as a full planning application, but this



background provides useful context as to the government's positive thinking towards this form of development.

- 5.6 The development plan outlines permissible 'exceptions' for the location of new development including a number of criteria set out at policy SS6, one criteria of which is relevant to the consideration of this application, namely:

SS6 c) the re-use of a redundant or disused permanent building provided that the proposal:

iv) does not require substantial rebuilding, extension or alteration, and

v) does not result in the requirement for another building to fulfil the function of the building being converted, and

vi) leads to an enhancement of the immediate setting.

- 5.7 This approach is reiterated within the NPPF at paragraphs 79 and 80 which support the principle of new housing in rural locations in certain exceptional situations. At paragraph 79 the NPPF states:

"To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities".

Paragraph 80 of the NPPF concerns development which would secure the reuse of a redundant building in the countryside. Paragraph 80 states that:

"Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply:

...c) the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting..."

- 5.8 In order to accept the principle of a residential use at the site, policy SS6 requires applicants to demonstrate that the building:

iv) Does not require substantial rebuilding, extension or alteration

- 5.9 A structural report has been commissioned by the applicant to identify the likely extent of works required to the building and to ensure that it is suitable for conversion.

- 5.10 The report by Structural Solutions details the condition of the building, confirming that the building is watertight and that main components of the building including its blockwork walls and main structural timber are in good condition with very little decay. Through provision of detailed structural calculations, the report confirms that the structural frame of the building should be able to support the additional loading associated with the residential conversion, concluding that 'analysis of the existing timber framed structure



show that it is capable of supporting loads from a residential building without modification'.

- 5.11 As typically associated with agricultural to residential conversions, general upgrading of surfaces to add insulation and interior finishes appropriate to a residential dwelling are recommended, but these alterations are not structural or substantial, nor will they significantly alter the exterior profile of the building.
- 5.12 The works proposed do not extend the footprint of the existing building and will continue in totality the existing external arrangements both in terms of access and general layout. The detailed design of the conversion will reflect the former agricultural use of the barn, with an open plan living arrangement with vaulted ceiling which reflects the current arrangement and simple partitions used to create room divisions within the remainder of the scheme. Existing openings have been utilised wherever possible and new openings kept to a minimum. The material palette ensures that the building retains its original proportions and reflects the former agrarian uses, whilst creating an aesthetically pleasing modern dwelling.
- 5.13 In summary, the barn is in an overall good state of repair and as concluded in the report by Structural Solutions, *'the structure can be incorporated into a conversion of the barn without any structural alterations'*. It follows that the conversion of the barn can take place without substantial rebuilding, extension or alteration to the building.

ii) Does not result in the requirement for another building to fulfil the function of the building to be converted

- 5.14 The barn and application site were formally part of a wider landholding owned by the applicant and ran as a small holding. The barn was used for general agricultural storage; however, it was not of a sufficient size to accommodate the larger machinery now commonly associated with changing agricultural practices. In recent years the applicant has reduced the activity associated with the small holding, the storage needs of which are met by other small agricultural buildings on the wider landholding, and as such, the barn has become surplus to requirements. There is no intention to intensify the agricultural activities on the land and the barn currently sits redundant, therefore there is no functional requirement for its replacement.

iii) leads to an enhancement of the immediate setting

- 5.15 The application site is situated within a dispersed settlement, being found opposite a cluster of existing residential properties of no particular uniformity. The character of the settlement has been outlined by Inspectors within the recent appeal decisions to applications 18/03068/FUL and 18/02095/OUT, recording that *'the settlement consists of a low density somewhat random scattering of dwellings'* and that *'the overall character of the area is wooded and verdant which creates a sense of enclosure'* and that *'the established*



character of dwellings is somewhat mixed'. In view of this site context, in principle the conversion and redevelopment of the site to residential use would not detract from its wider character. To the contrary, the conversion would be viewed in close association with the existing residential uses. We therefore submit that in principle, the conversion of the building to residential use as a single dwelling would not be at variance with the character of the existing site setting.

- 5.16 Focussing now on the specifics of the design scheme, the site itself has a sylvan character however is currently somewhat overgrown. In addition to the barn subject of the proposed conversion, the site supports a number of smaller dilapidated structures to include a shed, wagon, and greenhouses which are proposed to be removed from the land as part of the site redevelopment, with associated visual benefits. A short section of existing mainly hawthorn, roadside hedging is to be removed in connection with highway improvements, which the plans indicate will be replanted behind the newly improved visibility splays. No mature trees are proposed for removal as part of the development, which would secure an active use for the building and assist in ensuring the long-term maintenance of the site, providing opportunities for visual enhancement.
- 5.17 Whilst filtered views into the application site are possible from public vantage points, the 'restrained' and sympathetic design of the scheme respects the former agrarian character of the site. The conversion does not propose any extension to the building and both new openings within the building and external lighting at the site have been kept to a minimum, with the subdivision of the land largely follow existing boundary features to provide a modest curtilage. The conversion will therefore sit comfortably within the site and its surroundings and would positively contribute to the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape, in accordance with policy contained within SS6 of the BDBC LP.

Impact on Biodiversity

- 5.18 Policy EM4 requires that assessment be made regarding the potential for the development to affect any protected species or habitats, on and off site. If applicable, measures should be proposed to mitigate any impacts which arise.
- 5.19 This application is therefore accompanied by a protected species survey and mitigation report by Malford Environmental Consulting. Appropriate baseline ecological surveys were undertaken, including a Phase 1 bat (roost inspection) and ecology survey of the study area, encompassing the barn scheduled for conversion and the surrounding land within the application site.
- 5.20 The survey of the barn found no evidence of bat roosting/occupation or other bat activity, commenting that the building provides sub optimal environmental conditions for bats, being open, light, and thermally unstable, with a strong petroleum smell, all of which makes the structure generally unsuitable for roosting bats. Similarly, the report found that the other small, dilapidated outbuildings (shed, wagon and two greenhouses) were considered totally



unsuitable for supporting roosting bats. No evidence of bat roosting or other bat activity was found within or outside any of the buildings surveyed. As such the ecological survey report concludes that roosting bats are not a constraint for the development; the site having a negligible potential to support roosting bats. The report states that the works to the barn do not require a Natural England licence under the provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and no mitigation to protect roosting bats is necessary.

- 5.21 The report confirms that the site is unsuitable for ground nesting birds and no evidence of any nesting birds was found during the surveys. However, the possibility of individual or low numbers of common garden birds nesting at the site can-not be completely discounted. All wild birds and their nests and eggs are legally protected. Appropriate mitigation to be enacted to ensure protection of bird nests/roosts is set out in Section 5 of the ecological report; this includes a nesting bird inspection of the building and wooded vegetation should the works be undertaken during the bird nesting season (March – Aug inclusive). Ecological enhancement is proposed by the provision of new habitats in the form of bird and bat nesting box/bricks either within the fabric or attached to the building. Any permission can ensure, by means of a condition, that the scheme is carried out in accordance with the findings and recommendations of the ecology report.
- 5.22 The ecology surveys did not find evidence of any other protected mammal species within or immediately adjacent to the development site. However due to the overgrown nature of the site, the report considers there to be potential for hedgehog to be present. As such, a generally precautionary approach to site clearance is recommended within the mitigation section of the report.
- 5.23 Subject to the mitigation and enhancement measures outlined within Section 5 of the ecological report, the development of the site would not have any significant impact on protected species or their habitats.

Highway Safety

- 5.24 Policy CN9 of the BDBC LP deals with the traffic impacts of development. It aims to create a safe, convenient and efficient transport system and ensure developments adequately address matters of access arrangements and road safety alongside adequate parking provision.
- 5.25 Paragraph 111 of the NPPF states that:

*“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**” (our emphasis).*

- 5.26 Access to the site utilises an existing gated vehicular access onto Harts Lane. The access point joins the road at a straight stretch of carriageway and within a 30mph speed restriction zone. An access track leads from the gated



- entrance point leading due south toward the front of the barn, where the proposed plans illustrate that the site can comfortably accommodate off road parking and turning facilities to serve the new dwelling, at levels to comply with the requirements of the Council's parking standards for a 2-bedroom dwelling.
- 5.27 In order to improve visibility at the access point, the scheme allows for highway improvements, to include the slight rerouting of the entrance track close to the access point and removal of short sections of the roadside hedge to provide for improved visibility splays at the access point. These works will improve highway safety for users of this existing access point and represent a highway gain. Nevertheless, it is important here to acknowledge the fallback position being that the existing access point as currently stands could be used to cater for all trip generation in association with the agricultural use of the land, including by larger farm vehicles.
- 5.28 The improved access point serving the site will result in excellent visibility in both directions at its junction with Harts Lane, and would safely and suitably accommodate the vehicular trips generated from the use of the site as a single 2-bedroom dwelling, which are likely to be fewer in number than could potentially be generated by the established agricultural use, which by its nature could lead to the unrestricted use of the access by a variety of larger agricultural vehicles.
- 5.29 Although occupying a countryside location in policy terms, the application site is within the dispersed settlement of Newtown and could not be considered unduly isolated or remote. As previously referred within this statement Newtown does benefit from a range of facilities and some public transport options from which future occupiers could benefit. It should be noted that paragraph 79 of the NPPF states that '*to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities*' and that '*where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby*'. This would likely be born out here. In addition, the settlement has been deemed to represent a sustainable location for minor housing development of this scale through the precedent set by approvals for several other applications for single residential units, the details of which have been previously recorded within this statement.
- 5.30 For the reasons outlined above, it is considered that the development provides for suitable access and parking arrangements to facilitate the development of the site as proposed, in compliance with the requirements of CN9 and the scheme represents a sustainable form of development in this regard.

Impact upon Residential Amenity

- 5.31 Although relating to an agricultural building, the application site also has a residential context, being located within the rural settlement of Newtown. Residential development is found to the east and south of the site, with the properties Jasmine Cottage, The Old Post Office (under same ownership as



site) and Southcote forming a ribbon development along the opposite side of Harts Lane and a single property, Woodcote bordering the application site to the south.

- 5.32 The change of use of the site to residential will cause no demonstrable harm to the amenities of the occupiers of these neighbouring dwellings, given the orientation of the new dwelling, the principal elevation of which faces due north west toward the agricultural land and away from the existing dwellings and due to the separation distances, being comparable or in excess of those found between existing properties in the site vicinity. Furthermore, in respect of the relationship with the ribbon of properties to the east, activity along the intervening village road and intervening boundary treatments will further mitigate against any impacts, and in respect of the relationship to the south, the rising land levels and heavy vegetation along the southern boundary will act to further limit any impacts on residential amenities. Moreover, as a conversion, the development does not increase the volume or parameters of the existing barn, ensuring no change in the relationship with surrounding properties by virtue of built form. It could also be argued that introduction of a residential use within the barn is a more compatible neighbouring land use than any intensified agricultural use of the building.
- 5.33 Turning to the new dwelling itself, the proposed plans show that this would be served by sufficient amenity space, with the provision of private amenity space surrounding the building, however it is envisaged that the level space to the west of the barn would provide the main amenity area, being free from overlooking, furthest from the road and offering views over the neighbouring agricultural land. The curtilage for the new dwelling is delineated largely by existing boundary features or built form on the site and is considered commensurate with the size of the dwelling it serves.
- 5.34 The proposals therefore comply with the requirements as set out in policy EM10 of the BDBC LP with regard to residential amenities.



6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This statement has justified why the proposed conversion is entirely compatible with both the Basingstoke and Deane Borough Local Plan and the advice and guidance contained within the NPPF. Examples of precedence relating to proposals for other minor housing approvals within the settlement have been cited to illustrate that the location of the site has been deemed appropriate and sustainable for single unit housing schemes.
- 6.2 The proposal is for a sensitively designed small scale development, converting an established permanent building within the landscape to provide one dwelling, which will clearly retain elements of its former agricultural character and as such can be successfully accommodated within the surrounding landscape.
- 6.3 This statement, together with the accompanying structural report has justified that the proposed conversion of the building to residential use is possible without substantial rebuilding, extension or alteration to the barn and will secure its long-term future in a manner that is sensitive to the wider landscape. The compliance of the scheme with policy SS6 has been explained within this statement.
- 6.4 The submitted ecological survey fully assesses and identifies likely impacts of the proposal on protected species and outlines adequate mitigation and ecological enhancements. This statement also justifies why that the proposal will not result in any severe impact on highway safety and will preserve residential amenities.
- 6.5 Finally, it is relevant to consider that at the current time Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council is unable to demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites and as such the tilted balance of the framework comes into consideration. However, as this statement demonstrates the compliance of the scheme with policy SS6, it is not necessary to examine the consequences of the tilted balance as the application site is in a location suitable for housing development of the nature and scale proposed. Nevertheless, the absence of a 5-year housing land supply is a further material consideration that weighs in favour of the proposal.
- 6.6 As demonstrated within the statement, the proposed conversion complies with planning policy at all levels and accordingly, the Council is politely requested to approve this application.

