

# **Planning, Design & Access Statement**

Hopper Huts at The Granary, Rock Farm, Gibbs Hill, Nettlestead, Maidstone, Kent ME18 5HT

Planning application for the conversion of existing Hopper Huts to two residential dwellings  
and associated parking and amenity space and landscaping

October 2021

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# 1 BACKGROUND

1.1 This statement has been prepared in support of a combined planning application and listed building consent submitted to Maidstone Borough Council. The application seeks to convert the grade II listed Hopper Huts into two residential dwellings with lower ground floor extension, parking, amenity space and landscaping.

1.2 This statement should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Site Location Plan DHA/13426/01
- Existing Block Plan HH.001
- Existing Site Layout 19407-13-T
- Existing Ground Floor Plan HH.003
- Existing Elevations (1) HH.005
- Existing Elevations (2) HH.006
- Existing Elevations (3) HH.007
- Proposed Block Plan HH.101
- Proposed Site Layout HH.102
- Proposed Ground Floor Plan HH.103
- Proposed Basement Plan HH.104
- Proposed Elevations (1) HH.105
- Proposed Elevations (2) HH.106
- Proposed Elevations (3) HH.107
- Proposed Elevations (4) HH.108
- Proposed Garage HH.109
- Heritage Statement
- Relevant Ecological Surveys
- Viability Report
- Structural Assessment

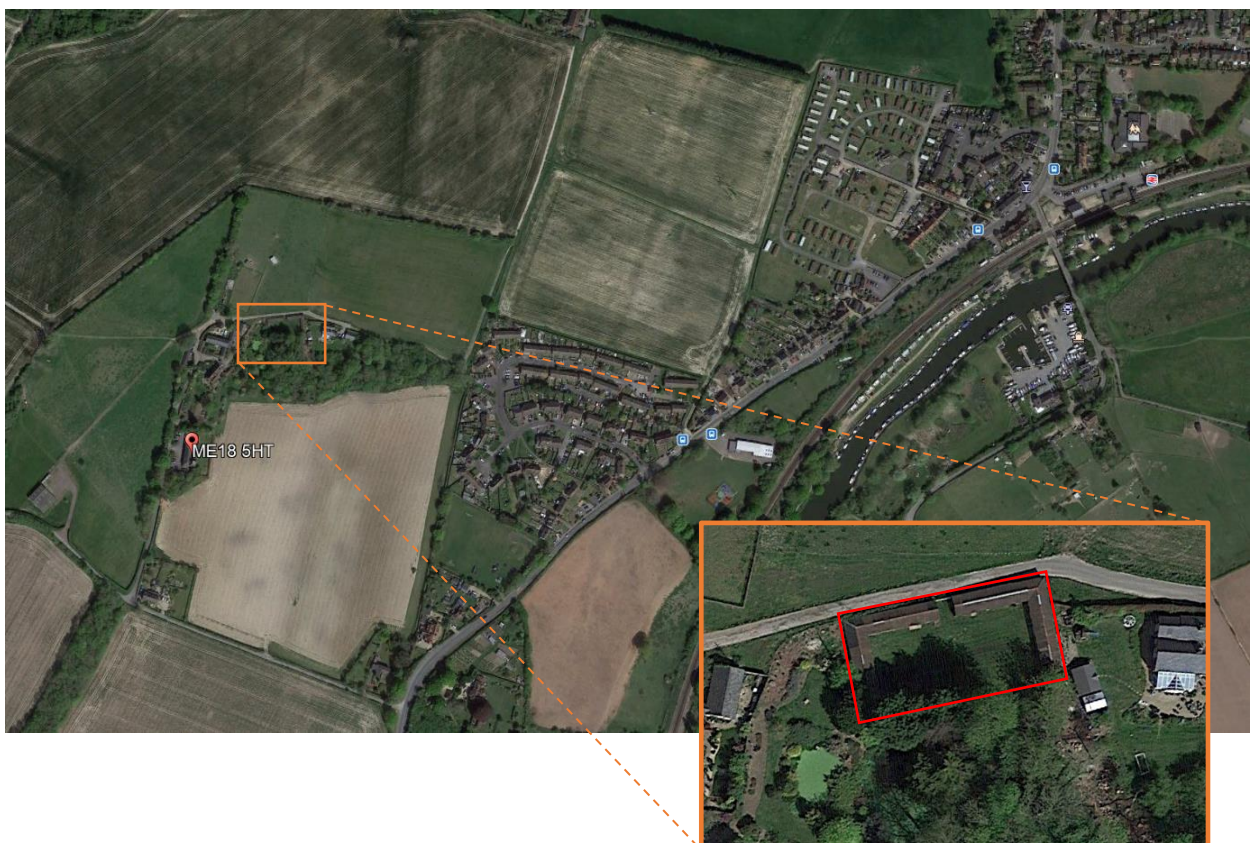
## **2 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL**

- 2.1 The proposal is to convert the two Hopper Hut buildings into two 2-bed residential dwellings.
- 2.2 These dwellings would make use of the existing building form but to extend the floor space and provide for modern living standards, it is therefore proposed to extend the properties below ground.
- 2.3 The courtyard created by the Hopper Huts' 'L' shapes provides private amenity space for both properties.
- 2.4 The access into the site by the central gate would be retained and shared between the two dwellings, 2 parking spaces would be provided per dwelling, allowing for the rural location of the application site, and bin and cycle storage would also be incorporated into the site.
- 2.5 Each property would enjoy the use of a car port, which would be set towards the southern boundary of the site and would not require any ground works as it would be built on concrete pads. This will therefore protect any roots of the conifers which are further to the south of the site.

### 3 THE APPLICATION SITE

- 3.1 The Hopper Huts were originally built to provide seasonal residential accommodation for the hop pickers, although have not been in use since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 2019 the buildings were considered to be unique enough by Historic England to be listed as Grade II due to their special architectural and historic interest.
- 3.2 The site is located towards the end of the access road for Rock Farm, whereby a number of buildings have, over time, been converted into residential properties including The Granary which is the property that 'owns' the Hopper Huts.
- 3.3 In effect the site is within a very residential hamlet to the west of the small village of Nettlestead which is almost immediately abutted to the larger village of Watringbury. Therefore, the site is well located to services as it is within 600m of the B2015, the main road through Nettlestead, where there are 4 regular bus services; and less than 1 mile from the Watringbury train station on the Strood – Tonbridge line and only a 6 minutes journey into Maidstone.
- 3.4 Nettlestead and Watringbury have various local services including schools, pubs, convenience shops, marina and access to the Medway River.

Figure 1. Aerial photographs of the site, sourced from GoogleEarth, photograph taken 23.04.2020 (site outlined in red)



- 3.5 To the east and west of the site there are residential properties with open fields to the north and a woodland to the south.
- 3.6 The Hopper Huts are Grade II listed but are not within a Conservation Area and there are no other heritage assets within close proximity of the site. There are no known contamination issues on the site, due to its location and historic uses.
- 3.7 The site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt and to the south of the site is an area of designated Ancient Woodland, although there are no trees with Tree Preservation Orders on within or bordering the site; and the trees closest to the site are conifers.
- 3.8 Due to the age of the buildings various ecological and structural surveys have been undertaken to properly understand the site potential as a habitat and / or whether there are any protected species on site.
- 3.9 The site is within Flood Zone 1 and there are no known surface water flooding issues within or nearby the site.



## 4 PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 Due to the site being part of The Granary its planning history is quite extensive, however the only relevant application for the application site is as follows: -

- 19/501664/PNQCLA – Prior Notification for a proposed change of use of 2no. agricultural buildings and any land within the curtilage to 2no. dwellinghouses (Class C3) and for associated operational development. For its prior approval to: - Transport and Highways impacts of the development -Contamination risks on the site - Flooding risks on the site - Noise impacts of the development - Whether the location or siting of the building makes it otherwise impractical or undesirable for the use of the building to change as proposed - Design and external appearance impacts on the building – ***Withdrawn due to the listing of the Hopper Huts 10.06.2019***

4.2 A pre-application enquiry was submitted towards the end of 2020 and the written response from the council, agreed that, in principle, the conversion of the Hopper Huts would be acceptable assuming all matters below are dealt with: -

- Viability of other options for conversion;
- Site Ecology;
- Impact on surrounding trees;
- Structural impact on the listed building; and
- Good design

## 5 PLANNING POLICY

- 5.1 The application site is in Maidstone Borough Council area in Kent. Development is controlled by policy set at a national and local level.
- 5.2 The overarching national planning policy is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF) and supported by national planning policy guidance. These documents set out the principles for policy making and decision making and should form the basis of all local plan policies.
- 5.3 Local policy is set at borough level within a Development Plan and should be specific to the physical, economic and social aspects of that particular jurisdiction. Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless the relevant policies within that plan are out of date, lacking or silent then national policy should be referred to. (Section 38(6) of The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).
- 5.4 For the purpose of this application, the Development Plan comprises:
- Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2011 -2031 (adopted October 2017)
- 5.5 It is understood there is no Neighbourhood Plan for the area in question.
- 5.6 Within the **NPPF**, the relevant paragraphs are:
- Paragraph 8: The three objectives of sustainable development
  - Paragraphs 10-11: Presumption in favour of sustainable development
  - Paragraph 38: Proactive and positive approach
  - Paragraph 39-42: Pre-application discussions
  - Paragraph 47: Determining applications in accordance with Development Plan
  - Paragraphs 55-58: Planning conditions and obligations
  - Paragraph 69: Small and medium sized residential sites
  - Paragraph 79: Rural housing supporting rural villages
  - Paragraph 80: Re-use of redundant or disused buildings in the countryside
  - Paragraphs 110-113: Transport and parking assessments
  - Paragraphs 119-127: Effective use of land
  - Paragraph 126: High quality, beautiful and sustainable building and places
  - Paragraph 131: Trees as part of design
  - Paragraph 132: Design quality

- Paragraph 134: Significant weight to be given to good design
- Paragraphs 147-151: Proposals affecting the Green Belt
- Paragraph 174: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Paragraph 180: Protection of the natural environment
- Paragraphs 194-198: Proposals affecting heritage assets
- Paragraphs 199-208: Considering potential impact on heritage assets

5.7 The relevant policies within the **Adopted Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2011-2031** are: -

- SS1: Maidstone Borough spatial strategy
- SP17: The Countryside
- SP18: The Historic Environment
- DM1: Principles of good design
- DM2: Sustainable design
- DM3: Natural environment
- DM4: Development affecting designated and non-designated heritage assets
- DM23: Parking standards
- DM30: Design principles in the countryside
- DM31: Conversion of rural buildings

5.8 Other relevant planning guidance to this application include:

- Kent Design Guide (2005)
- Kent Design Guide Review: Interim Guidance Note 3 – Residential Parking (2008)

## 6 DESIGN AND ACCESS MATTERS

### Use

- 6.1 The buildings were originally built for temporary residential purposes for seasonal hop pickers. The need for seasonal hop pickers began to decline from the 1950s, with the huts no longer required in the 1970s as farming practices further changed. Ultimately, they stopped being used entirely for this purpose in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and have been informally used by the owners for storage, ever since.
- 6.2 The proposal would convert the buildings into a permanent residential use.

### Amount and Layout

- 6.3 The proposal would create 2 2-bed detached properties each with 2 parking spaces, cycle and bin storage and communal and private amenity space.
- 6.4 Each 'L' of the Hopper Huts would be an individual dwelling with additional 65sqm of floor space provided in a new basement level. This would provide a footprint of 164sqm for each dwelling.
- 6.5 Each property would have 195sqm of private amenity space and share 95sqm of communal drive with a shared access into the application site.

### Scale

- 6.6 The proposal would maintain the scale of the existing buildings by providing additional floor space underground.

### Landscaping

- 6.7 Three sides of the site are defined by the Hopper Huts with the southerly side, defined by a post and rail fence, abutting a small area of scrub and leylandii trees which creates a buffer directly with the ancient woodland beyond.
- 6.8 The internal area of the site would have originally been open and communal with little landscaping to allow space for the hop pickers to use domestically. Therefore, the landscaping within this area will be kept simple with hard landscaping limited to the vehicle access and parking area, and physical plot divisions kept to a minimum.
- 6.9 To existing boundary treatment between the road and field will be replicated to the rear of the widened section of road.

### **Appearance**

- 6.10 The Hopper Huts will be repaired with matching materials with the roofing replaced with new metal rather than tiled. There is no intention to create any new apertures into the fabric of the building, however there is an intention to re-open a previously sealed up window in the north elevation. The existing combination of window and door openings, where original, will be retained, and the historic pattern of windows and doors reinstated where these have been removed, to bring back to life the pattern and rhythm of the buildings unique form.
- 6.11 New windows and doors will be recessed within the existing apertures, with where necessary the doorways infilled part glazing / part fixed lower stable door if not to be used as an entrance. The skylight for the basement level and secondary access to the south would be modern and simple in form allowing a clear delineation between the stages of the site's development.
- 6.12 Boundaries will be kept rural in form using post and rail fences, except in close proximity to the site access where a mid-height wall is used to ensure safe entry into the site for vehicles and provide some privacy between the properties.
- 6.13 The tops of the retaining walls to the courtyards will be finished at ground level and be covered by low level planting, to provide safe use of the grass areas above the basement level. The same low-level planting would also be used to provide some screening for the ground level roof lights.
- 6.14 Car ports will provide covered parking for one vehicle per dwellings and be oak framed with wood cladding to retain the agricultural character of the immediate area.

### **Drainage**

- 6.15 The site is within Flood Risk Area 1 in planning terms and therefore is not liable to surface water flooding. There are no issues with ground water flooding.
- 6.16 The site will be connected to the main foul drainage system and surface water will be dealt with by soakaway.

### **Utilities**

- 6.17 The proposal will be connected to existing utilities, including telecommunication, already available to nearby properties.

### **Waste Management**

- 6.18 The properties will have bin storage and collection will be from the road which runs along the northern boundary of the site (unnamed).

### **Access**

- 6.19 Access will be from the unnamed road to the north through the existing access and the existing gate removed.
- 6.20 Each property would have 2 parking spaces with car ports, to make allowances for visitors and secure, undercover bicycle storage will be provided within the proposed storage areas which utilise the former toilet blocks.
- 6.21 The road outside the Hopper Huts will be widened to allow vehicles to swing into the access and ensure vehicles egressing the site can see other vehicles on the road.

## 7 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 Every planning application needs to ensure it addresses the material planning considerations related to the specifics of that site and the proposal.

### Principle of development

7.2 **Policy SS1** sets out the borough's need for the provision of 17,660 new dwellings within the plan period up to 2031. It also seeks to focus development on the main urban area but when other locations are considered it states "*protection will be given to the rural character of the borough avoiding coalescence between settlement...*". This is further supported by **Policy SP17** which confirms the development outside settlement boundaries should be in accordance with all other policies in the plan, not result in harm to the character and appearance of the area; and in terms of the Metropolitan Green Belt, accord to national policy.

7.3 **Paragraph 150** of the NPPF allows for the reuse of buildings providing they are permanent and substantial in construction and their reuse would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and not conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt designation.

7.4 **Policy DM31 part 3** allows of the re-use and adaption of existing rural buildings outside of the settlement boundary when: -

- i. *"Every reasonable attempt has been made to secure a suitable business re-use for the building;*
- ii. *Residential conversion is the only means of providing a suitable re-use for a listed building, an unlisted building of quality and traditional construction which is grouped with one or more listed buildings in such a way as to contribute towards the setting of the listed building(s), or other buildings which contribute to landscape character or which exemplify the historical development of the Kentish landscape; and*
- iii. *There is sufficient land around the building to provide a reasonable level of outdoor space for the occupants, and the outdoor space provided is in harmony with the character of its setting."*

7.5 The proposal would constitute the reuse of existing listed buildings and the viability statement submitted with this application confirms that a residential use is the only financially viable option in terms of ensuring a profit and therefore the long-term future of these buildings. Their conversion would not create any form of coalescing and would protect the rural character of

their surroundings as well as preserve the openness of the Green Belt; and there is sufficient space to provide suitable outdoor space for future occupants.

- 7.6 It is therefore considered the principle of the development is in compliance with policies **SS1**, **SP17** and **DM31 part 3**, and this was also agreed in principle with the pre-application discussions relating to this application.

### **Heritage**

- 7.7 **Policy SP18** seeks the sensitive restoration, reuse, enjoyment, conservation and / or enhancement of heritage asset and this is expanded on in **policy DM4** which requires appropriate heritage assessment to be undertaken to justify the potential harm any new development may have on said heritage asset.
- 7.8 In this case a Heritage Statement has been submitted which clearly identifies that the significance and setting of the Hopper Huts would be preserved and enhanced. The ability to bring the listed buildings back into a viable use closely related to the intended purpose (for the housing of people) also ensures their long-term maintenance and survival.
- 7.9 It is therefore considered the proposal would conserve and appropriately reuse the grade II listed Hopper Huts and so comply with policies **SP18** and **DM4**.

### **Design and appearance**

- 7.10 **Policy DM1** sets out the criteria for what the Council consider good design. Criteria iii and xi are not relevant to the proposal. However, it would maintain the linkages with the surrounding area and services; respond positively to the natural and historic character of the site; respect the amenity of neighbouring properties; respond well to the siting of the buildings, their rural location, and heritage; incorporate solar gain by the orientation of the buildings; provide relevant mitigation in biodiversity terms; not harm the safety or use of the surrounding local high network; create a safe and secure environment and provide adequate bin storage, vehicular and cycle parking and ultimately provide some flexibility to changing life needs.
- 7.11 **Policy DM2** seeks for all new dwellings to be sustainably designed. As the proposal is seeking to convert two listed buildings the ability of provide the highest level of sustainable design may not be feasible, however the proposal can achieve the requirements in relation to water efficiency and will meet all relevant Building Regulation requirements in terms of energy efficiency for such proposal.



7.12 **Policy DM31 part 1** looks specifically at the reuse / conversion of rural buildings and requires that: -

- i. *“The building is of a form, bulk, scale and design which takes account of and reinforces landscape character;*
- ii. *The building is of permanent, substantial and sound construction and is capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction;*
- iii. *Any alterations proposed as part of the conversion are in keeping with the landscape and building character in terms of materials used, design and form;*
- iv. *There is sufficient room in the curtilage of the building to park the vehicles of those who will live there without detriment to the visual amenity of the countryside; and*
- v. *No fences, walls or other structures associated with the use of the building or the definition of its curtilage or any sub-division of it are erected which would harm landscape character and visual amenity.”*

7.13 The buildings in question are of a form, bulk and scale which reinforces the landscape character; are permanent, substantial and can be converted without major or complete reconstruction; and the conversion would be sympathetic to the buildings themselves as well as their surroundings. The parking and any additional structures will all be enclosed within the site with no detriment to the visual amenity of the countryside or the landscape character.

7.14 The proposal is therefore considered in compliance with policies **DM1, DM2** and **DM30 part 1**.

### **Ecology**

7.15 **Policy DM3** seeks to protect the natural environment.

7.16 By incorporating the mitigation proposed and by ensuring that all development is away from the southern boundary, where the Ancient Woodland is beyond, the proposal is in compliance with **Policy DM3**.

### **Residential Amenity**

7.17 The proposal seeks to convert existing buildings and reuse the existing openings, which all face into the site. There is no intention to increase the height, bulk or massing of the building above ground, nor include any additional windows or doors within the outer facing walls; and all alterations will be internal to the site screened by the buildings themselves. The existing

window, and the window to be reinstated, within the outer walls would be obscure glazed as they will service W.C.s. This therefore means the proposal will not alter its relationship to the residential properties on either side and will not harm their privacy, or access to light. It is highly probable that bringing the buildings back into a viable use would actually improve the outlook of the existing properties by the proper maintenance and repair of the Hopper Huts.

#### **Traffic and access**

- 7.18 **Policy DM23** sets out the car parking standards for residential development which for 2 bed dwellings in rural settings 1.5 spaces, with 1 space allocated.
- 7.19 However, the proposal seeks to provide 4 parking spaces with 2 allocated to each dwelling, due to the lack of on-road parking potential on the quiet rural lane the application site is accessed by, and therefore ensure the safety and free flow of that road.
- 7.20 It is noted that the road is not a through road and vehicle use of it will be at a minimum with only one further house along it before the end; the specific location of the access and the limitations to visibility due to the position of the Hopper Huts has been taken into consideration. To this affect the gate will be removed to ensure vehicles can turn off the road directly thereby ensuring the safety of the road. The site layout will allow cars to access / egress in a forward gear, whilst the widening of the highway on the opposite side of the road will ensure vehicles can swing into the site safely and with full view of any vehicles potentially leaving at the same time.
- 7.21 The proposal is therefore considered in compliance with **policy DM23** and would not impact on the local highway or road safety.

## 8 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 Drawing all the above threads together leads to the following conclusions.
- 8.2 Having regard to the development plan and the requirement imposed by section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the application proposal is considered to accord with all relevant local policy and therefore, in accordance with the NPPF, should be considered as appropriate development.
- 8.3 The principle of the proposal is considered acceptable and an appropriate use of the site and its design would be in keeping with the site and its surroundings.
- 8.4 The proposal is considered the only viable and suitable reuse of the Grade II listed buildings and has been designed in such a manner as to retain their historical importance, as well as not harm the surrounding landscape character and openness of the Green Belt.
- 8.5 The proposed use of the site will not compromise the amenity of the nearby residential property nor will it harm the accessibility or useability of the site.
- 8.6 The proposal is therefore considered to be in compliance with all relevant local policies and it is respectfully requested that planning permission be granted.
- 8.7 It may be deemed necessary to impose suitably worded planning conditions that meet the NPPF paragraph 56 tests (avoiding 'prior to commencement' conditions, unless lawfully justified). Planning conditions could cover such matters (list is not intended to be exhaustive) as:
- The use of matching materials
  - Landscape and planting details
  - Details relating to new windows and doors within the Hopper huts
  - The retention of the parking spaces
- 8.8 It is understood there are no issues whereby it is considered necessary to enter into obligations under Section 106 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) as this type of development would be liable to charge under the Community Infrastructure Levy.