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New grain store

Littlewhite Farm, Brancepeth

Mr D Jackson

DESIGN AND ACCESS & HERITAGE STATEMENT

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared on behalf of Mr David Jackson to provide additional information to support an application for full planning permission for the erection of a grain store on land adjacent to his existing farmstead at Littlewhite Farm, Brancepeth. The application includes a modest yard area for the storage of machinery and for manoeuvring space, and it follows the approval earlier this year of an application for permission for a new access.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION & DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

- 2.1 The application site comprises an existing farm located midway between Brandon and Brancepeth, some 700m north of Brancepeth. It is a working farm with a substantial range of both traditional and modern farm buildings. It is an arable farm, with grain drying and biomass contained within the existing buildings, as well as hay storage and grain storage. Planning permission was given in 2004 for the change of use and conversion of some of the buildings to form holiday lets and a function room as part of farm diversification enterprise operated by the applicant and his wife.
- 2.2 The application site is located in the Brancepeth Conservation Area.
- 2.2 Planning permission is sought for the erection of a new farm shed for the storage of grain on land to the north east of the existing buildings. Access will be via the recently approved farm track, which was altered earlier this year to segregate the domestic / holiday activity from the commercial farm business.

3.0 PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

3.1 National Planning Policy and Guidance

- 3.1.1 National Government policy in relation to planning is contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (February 2019) which is a material planning consideration. NPPF puts the presumption in favour of sustainable development at the heart of planning policy and the planning system. This means for decision taking, approving planning permission without delay for development which accords with the

development plan. The presumption in favour of sustainable development is embodied in paragraph 11.

- 3.1.2 Part 16 of NPPF deals with conserving and enhancing the historic environment. In determining applications, Local Planning Authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the asset's importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.
- 3.1.6 Paragraph 194 of NPPF states that in determining planning applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.
- 3.1.7 'Significance' is the value of a heritage asset to this, and future generations, because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from an assets' physical presence, but also from its setting. The setting of a heritage asset can be defined as being the surroundings from which it is enjoyed. This may be influenced by the relationship between buildings and assets, as well as the use to which they and their surroundings are put.
- 3.1.8 Paragraph 199 states that in considering applications for proposed development affecting heritage assets, great weight should be given to that asset's conservation.
- 3.1.9 Paragraph 84 states that planning policies and decisions should enable the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas both through the conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings. They should also support the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based businesses.

3.2 Local Planning Policy and Guidance

- 3.2.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that where determinations are to be made under the planning acts, they must be made in accordance with the Development Plan in place, unless material considerations indicate

otherwise. The adopted development plan for the area is the County Durham Plan, adopted in October 2020.

3.2.2 The most important policies contained in the County Durham Plan are set out below, with a summary:

- *Policy 44 – Historic Environment*

Policy 44 states that development will be expected to sustain the significance of designated and non-designated heritage assets, including any contribution made by their setting. Development proposals should contribute positively to the built and historic environment and should seek opportunities to enhance and, where appropriate, better reveal the significance and understanding of heritage assets whilst improving access where appropriate. It states that great weight will be given to the conservation of all designated assets and their settings. Such assets should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. Development which leads to less than substantial harm to a designated heritage asset will be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. Insofar as it is relevant to this application, in determining applications, particular regard will be given to listed buildings and conservation areas. A balanced judgement will be made where development impacts upon the significance and setting of non-designated heritage assets.

- *Policy 39 - Landscape*

Policy 39 states that proposals for new development will be permitted where they would not cause unacceptable harm to the character, quality or distinctiveness of the landscape, or to important features or views. Proposals will be expected to incorporate appropriate measures to mitigate adverse landscape and visual effects. Development affecting Areas of Higher Landscape Value will only be permitted where it conserves, and where appropriate enhances, the special qualities of the landscape, unless the benefits of development in that location clearly outweigh the harm.

- *Policy 10 – Development in the Countryside*

Policy 10 relates to all new development in open countryside. It states that development in the countryside will not be permitted unless allowed for by specific

policies in the plan or where the proposal relates to one of the stated exceptions. These include economic development necessary to support an existing agricultural enterprise or associated farm diversification scheme, including the provision of new or the extension of existing building(s), structures or hard standings required for the functioning of the enterprise. All such development, by virtue of their siting, scale, design and operation must not give rise to unacceptable harm to the heritage, biodiversity, geodiversity, intrinsic character, beauty or tranquillity of the countryside which cannot be adequately mitigated or compensated for.

4.0 HERITAGE / PLANNING / DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

- 4.1 The justification for, and reasoning behind the current proposals is important to the consideration of the application, and the impact on heritage assets and the landscape.
- 4.2 Littlewhite farm is a substantial arable enterprise, with 4 no. holiday lets which were developed following consent in 2004. Both businesses are mutually supportive. In addition, the farm operates a biomass plant from within an existing building, which provides heat and energy for the farm and in particular the grain drying. The applicant also dries grain for other nearby farms who do not operate their own equipment.
- 4.3 Machinery connected with arable farming is getting larger and more difficult to manoeuvre in the small space within the existing yard. In addition, the existing modern sheds are no longer water tight and are nearing the end of their useful life. Consideration has been given to their replacement, but they are not optimally situated within the farm, and access to them with larger machinery is difficult. These buildings will be retained and repaired, and used for general storage and as hay stores.
- 4.4 The proposed shed is therefore essential for the continued viable operation of the farming business. A modest hardstanding is proposed around the building for the storage of machinery and equipment and for access around the building proposed.
- 4.5 Policy 10 of the County Durham Plan states that proposals will be supported in the countryside where it is necessary to support an existing agricultural enterprise, and this includes the provision of new building(s), structures or hard standings required for the functioning of the enterprise.

- 4.6 The requirements in relation to heritage assets and their preservation during development are set out within section 16 of NPPF.
- 4.7 Paragraph 194 of NPPF states that in determining planning applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant Historic Environment Record should have been consulted and the assets assessed using appropriate expertise.
- 4.8 'Significance' is the value of a heritage asset to this, and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from an assets' physical presence, but also from its setting. The setting of a heritage asset is defined as being the surroundings from which it is enjoyed. This may be influenced by the relationship between buildings and assets, as well as the use to which they and their surroundings are put.
- 4.9 The heritage asset affected by the proposed development is the Brancepeth Conservation Area. The traditional buildings and dwelling associated with Littlewhite Farm may be considered undesignated heritage assets. The field in which the proposed building is to be located shows evidence of rigg and furrow.
- 4.10 The proposed development will be visible from footpath numbers 10 and 16 to the south of the application site. It will be read against the existing farmstead of which it will form part. The site levels will be reduced to enable the building to sit level with the existing yard, providing a screening function and mitigation. The building will be constructed of concrete to lower walls and profile sheets to upper walls (colour to be agreed). Muted, darker colours will be appropriate to mitigate the landscape impact. The proximity of the building proposed to existing buildings will serve to reduce the impact of the proposed development.
- 4.11 The Brancepeth Conservation Area covers a significant area of the countryside surrounding the village of Brancepeth. The area was designated a conservation area in 1981, though a smaller conservation area existed before that. The farmland and parkland within the conservation area form the setting to the outer edge of Brandon and Meadowfield and act as a buffer and surround to Brancepeth Castle and the village. The A690 road runs from Durham through Brandon and on to Willington. This road and its

busy traffic sever the main village street. Adjacent to the Southern boundary of the Conservation Area is the estate surrounding Whitworth Hall. The deserted medieval village of Stockley lies to the west.

- 4.12 Brancepeth is predominately a large estate, incorporating a small village and a number of important listed buildings and other interesting structures. The estate encompasses attractive historic parkland, open spaces, estate style cottages and small farm buildings. The area is centred on the impressive Brancepeth Castle and incorporates many other historically important buildings of considerable architectural quality within its boundary including St Brandon's Church. All of the estate farms have been constructed in the architectural style of the main Brancepeth Estate, and add considerably to the unity and character of the area.
- 4.13 A conservation area character appraisal has been prepared for the Brancepeth Conservation Area. The document divides the area into separate character areas. The application site lies within zone A (estate farmland) and Littlewhite Farm is expressly mentioned in the document. The area's key characteristics are referred to as being individual farm buildings (including Littlewhite Farm, Morley Farm and Quarry Hill); mature trees forming avenues and hedgerows; and distinctive estate farm character that contributes to the Conservation Area and helps to provide the setting for Brancepeth Village.
- 4.14 Clearly the important characteristics of the conservation area involve Brancepeth Castle and the village, and the farmland and parkland surrounding these are critical to their setting. Nevertheless, this is working farmland. Active and viable farm activity ensures the proper management of the land, including maintenance of trees, woodlands, hedgerows and field boundaries, as well as the various traditional buildings. Farms and their diversified activity are also crucial to the rural economy, providing much needed rural employment and supporting a range of contracting activity. Farming also provides food for communities and preserves the openness and setting of towns and villages.
- 4.15 The proposed building is essential for the farm business. Additional space is required for grain storage to support the growing efficiency and activity of this arable enterprise. The siting of the building has been carefully considered so that it related visually to the existing farmstead. In addition, this location enables more efficient and safe vehicular movement between the proposed new shed and the existing buildings which are to be retained.

4.16 The addition of the large building, and the potential loss of some rigg and furrow will result in a degree of change, and this is likely to amount to less than substantial harm to the conservation area – a change in the landscape setting referred to as estate farmland in the character appraisal. However, the building is needed and has been sited to minimise its impact. The continued operation of this substantial farming business in a viable and competitive way is important to the rural economy, employment, continued food production, support for neighbouring farmers, and maintaining the remainder of the landscape for future generations to enjoy – field boundaries, woodlands, traditional buildings. These public benefits outweigh the harm identified both to the heritage asset and any residual impact on the landscape sufficient to satisfy policies contained within the County Durham Plan and NPPF.