

PLANNING STATEMENT



April
2022

Upper Vobster Farm, Vobster, Radstock, BA3 5SA

Full planning application made retrospectively for '*change of use of existing stone barns into three holiday let units known as Valley View, The Dairy and The Barn*'

PLANNING STATEMENT

[UPPER VOBSTER FARM, VOBSTER, RADSTOCK, BA3 5SA]

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1. INTRODUCTION AND THE PROPOSAL

- 1.1** Context Planning Ltd have been instructed to prepare a planning application to regularise the use of three buildings at Upper Vobster Farm which form part of the overall complex of holiday letting accommodation at the property.
- 1.2** The unit known as Valley View (VV) is located within what is known as the Courtyard building. This building was granted a change of use in 2011 from an agricultural/general storage building into two holiday letting units with ancillary meeting room, treatment rooms and studio space. The building as a whole was granted for purposes in connection with holiday letting and the space now known as VV was originally proposed as a pottery to be used by guests.
- 1.3** VV has an independent access and is occupied as a distinct holiday let sleeping up to 3 people with one large bedroom, kitchen, living space and en-suite bathroom. Guests can also benefit from the communal facilities offered within the Courtyard building. Car parking for VV takes place in the parking court to the south east of the main building.
- 1.4** The building known as the Dairy, situated to the west of the Courtyard building did not form part of the 2011 planning application, albeit it was converted around the same time as the Courtyard building into habitable accommodation. This unit has one bedroom, sleeping 2 people, with sitting area and en-suite bathroom. There are no catering facilities within the building, there is a communal kitchen within the Courtyard building which guests have access to. One parking for the Dairy is provided directly to the south of the building.
- 1.5** The Barn is a detached stone built former agricultural barn. It was converted into residential accommodation around 2002, in advance of the wider holiday letting business beginning at the former farm. The Barn is a substantial building with internal first floor. It comprises a one-bedroom holiday let with kitchen, large open

plan living space, bathroom and bedroom. Car parking is available directly adjacent to the barn and it benefits from its own areas of curtilage.

- 1.6** Each of the building have already been converted and are operating as holiday lets available for hire. The proposal seeks permission retrospectively for a change of use of each of the buildings to allow them to lawfully continue to operate as independent holiday lets.
- 1.7** The Upper Vobster Farm complex is located within the linear settlement of Vobster to the south of the access road to the village. The Upper Vobster Farm complex also comprises a number of other buildings; the original farmhouse, which is in use for holiday letting, Cherry Tree cottage, where the applicants reside. The buildings are set within generous grounds which also extend to the woodlands in a southerly direction. Below are a series of photos of the three buildings which are subject of this planning application.



The Dairy (south west elevation)



The Dairy (side south west elevation)



The interior of The Dairy



Valley View



Valley View (frontage)



Valley View (interior)



The Barn - Entrance steps, the building and its area of garden



The Barn (exterior end elevation)



The Barn (interior)

2. PLANNING HISTORY

2.1 There have been a number of applications made at the property;

2020/0441/OHL – To upgrade transformer & replace pole no 16/1613.

Reconductor the existing open wire overhead line to Aerial Bunched Conductor (ABC) wiring.

2019/2150/CLP – Certificate of Lawful Development [Proposed] with respect to a single storey standalone outbuilding – Development is Lawful

2012/2114 – Application for prior approval for the erection of an agricultural barn
– Prior approval for the erection of an agricultural barn

2011/3172 – Part change of use of agricultural/general storage building group to two self-catering letting units with ancillary meeting room, treatment rooms and studio space, and installation of a fixed ground mounted domestic solar PV array with inverter house. – Refused (Appeal allowed)

2011/2507 – Application for prior notification of agricultural development for a proposed building (hay store) – Prior approval not required

2009/1471 – Erect agricultural and general storage buildings – Approved
108538/005 – Rebuilding of existing agricultural storage and garaging with new roof and windows - Approved

108538/004 – Conversion and extension of agricultural building to provide staff accommodation and garaging – Refused

108538/003 – Conversion of barn to a B1 use, to include part demolition and part new build and provision of 2 units of staff accommodation – Withdrawn

108538/002 – Single storey extension to west elevation and single storey extension to link house to existing outbuildings – Approved

108538/001 – Change of use from studio/office to dwelling – Approved

108538/000 – Change of use of barn to studio/office - Approved

3. PLANNING POLICY:

- 3.1** The Development Plan for Mendip District Council includes the Somerset & Exmoor National park Joint Structure Plan Review (SP), the Mendip District Local Plan 2006-2029, Part 1: Strategy and Policies (adopted December 2014) and Part II: Sites and Policies (adopted 2021). The relevant policies to this planning application are included within the Mendip District Local Plan Part 1 (MLPP1).
- 3.2** Policy CP1 advises that any proposed development, outside development limits, will be strictly controlled and will only be permitted where it benefits economic activity or extends the range of facilities available to local communities. Policy CP3 advises that Mendip District Council (MDC) will ‘*encourage a diverse, robust, thriving and resilient local economy*’. Further at 4.50 of the supporting text it advises that ‘*the Local Plan intends to set out a position that Mendip is open for business*’. This policy guides that the Council will support proposals which extend the attraction of the area to visitors.
- 3.3** CP4 guides that rural settlements and the wider rural area will be sustained by ‘*supporting proposals for development of the rural economy which enable the establishment, expansion and diversification of business in a manner and of a scale which is appropriate to the location and constraints upon it, or involves the*

conversion of existing buildings for an economic use'. rural communities will be sustained by 'making allowances for occupational dwellings in rural locations, where there is a proven and essential functional need, to support agricultural, forestry or other rural-based enterprises'.

- 3.4** Policy DP1 of the Mendip District Local Plan advises that all development proposals should contribute positively to the maintenance and enhancement of local identity and distinctiveness. Proposals should be formulated with an appreciation of the built and natural context. DP4: Mendip's Landscapes notes that outside of designated landscape area, proposals should demonstrate that their siting and design is compatible with the landscape character area.
- 3.5** DP7: Design and Amenity of New Development notes that the Council will support high quality design. DP8: Environmental Protection requires development proposals to minimize, and where possible reduce, all emissions and other forms of pollution. DP9: Transport Impact of New Development guides that development will be supported where it makes safe and satisfactory provision for access, servicing and parking. DP10 relates to car parking and advises that standards outlined in the Somerset Countywide Parking Strategy will be sought.
- 3.6** Policy DP22 relates to the reuse and conversion of rural buildings and is supportive of such forms of development where; they would not prejudice the use of adjacent land and premises; are well designed; the building(s) is of permanent construction, capable of conversion; any bat roosts are incorporated or replaced. In respect of residential use of converted buildings, this can take place where it would lead to an enhancement of the building's setting.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 3.7** Paragraph 8 outlines that one of the three overarching objectives of the planning system is to *'proactively drive and support sustainable economic development'*. Paragraph 81 advises that planning should *'help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity'*.
- 3.8** Paragraph 10 advises *'so that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development'*. Paragraph 11 outlines how the presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan making and decision taking is to be implemented. For decision taking this means *'approving development proposals which accord with an up-to-date Development plan without delay'*.
- 3.9** Paragraph 38 *Local Planning Authorities (LPA) should approach decision-making on proposed development in a positive and creative way...and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible'*.
- 3.10** At paragraph 81 the NPPF guides that *'planning policies and decisions should help to create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity'*. Paragraph 84 guides that planning decisions should enable both the *'sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings'* and *'sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside'*.
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- 3.11** Section 6: Building a strong, competitive economy places significant weight on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. In paragraph 83 it records that *'planning policies and decisions should enable: the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of businesses in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings'*.

4. PLANNING ASSESSMENT:

Principle of development

- 4.1** Upper Vobster Farm is a well-established holiday letting complex, having been first approved back in 2012 to commence the use of the wider site for this purpose. The 2011 permission granted two holiday letting units within the Courtyard building along with a wide range of ancillary facilities including laundry, toilets, bathrooms, meeting space, kitchen, farm offices, gym, workshop, treatment rooms, pottery, plant room and store rooms. The conversion of the entirety of the building took place and at the same time The Dairy was converted to provide living accommodation, albeit planning permission was not sought on the basis that the applicants were unaware it was required.
- 4.2** Latterly the main farmhouse has also been made available for holiday letting, this did not constitute a material change of use for planning, it having previously been a dwelling (C3) use and it is let in a similar way as an individual booking to families/extended groups. The Barn was first converted into ancillary residential accommodation to the main Farmhouse in 2002. It was thereafter used for a mixture of holiday letting and for the applicant's family members to reside in. It benefits from all of the facilities necessary to allow independent occupation.

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- 4.3** MLPP1 policy CP3 is very supportive of the expansion of all types of business in rural areas and it guides, proposals for economic development will be supported. Policy CP4 makes clear that in rural areas the expansion and diversification of business will be supported, including the conversion of existing buildings.
- 4.4** Upper Vobster Farm is particularly well suited to supporting an intensification for holiday letting given it is already an established visitor accommodation centre and it benefits from lots of supporting facilities and services which enhance the stay of visitors to the site and minimises their need to travel from the site when staying. The site benefits from ample car parking and is accessible along safe roads. The large grounds which accompany the complex of buildings allows the site owners to offer a particularly high-quality visitor stay.
- 4.5** The application is made retrospectively because the applicants were unaware that permission was required to repurpose these existing buildings into independent holiday letting units. As the buildings were first converted in 2002 and 2012 no loss of agricultural buildings would result. The use of the three units for independent holiday letting is entirely consistent with the surrounding uses of buildings which are now, save for Cherry Tree Cottage, in use for holiday letting. The principle of development finds support in CP3 and CP4.
- 4.6** Policy DP22 relates to the conversion of rural buildings. It supports changes of use in cases where conversion would not prejudice the use of adjacent land and buildings, which for the above outlined reasons this development would not. The original conversion of both buildings was sensitively undertaken preserving the character and fabric of the stone-built barns. The buildings were redundant as agricultural barns, the agricultural use of the wider site having ceased prior to the development of The Courtyard complex. The buildings are very substantial high quality rural buildings which were clearly worthy of re-use. The enhancement to the setting of the buildings following their conversion is self-evident, in
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comparison to their former dilapidated state. The terms of DP22 are also therefore met by this development.

Character and appearance

- 4.7** MLP policy DP1 advises that *'all development proposals should contribute positively to the maintenance and enhancement of local identity and distinctiveness across the district'*. MLP policy DP7 requires new developments to demonstrate that they are of a scale, mass, form and layout appropriate to the local context.
- 4.8** The re-use of all three buildings to create holiday lets did not require any external alterations to the building. The changes were limited to internal refitting of the spaces to allow them to function independently. The occupation of the buildings for holiday letting has a neutral effect on the character and appearance of the area, their independent occupation has resulted in no perceptible change to the way in which the wider site operates. The development fully accords with the terms of DP1, DP7 of the local plan.

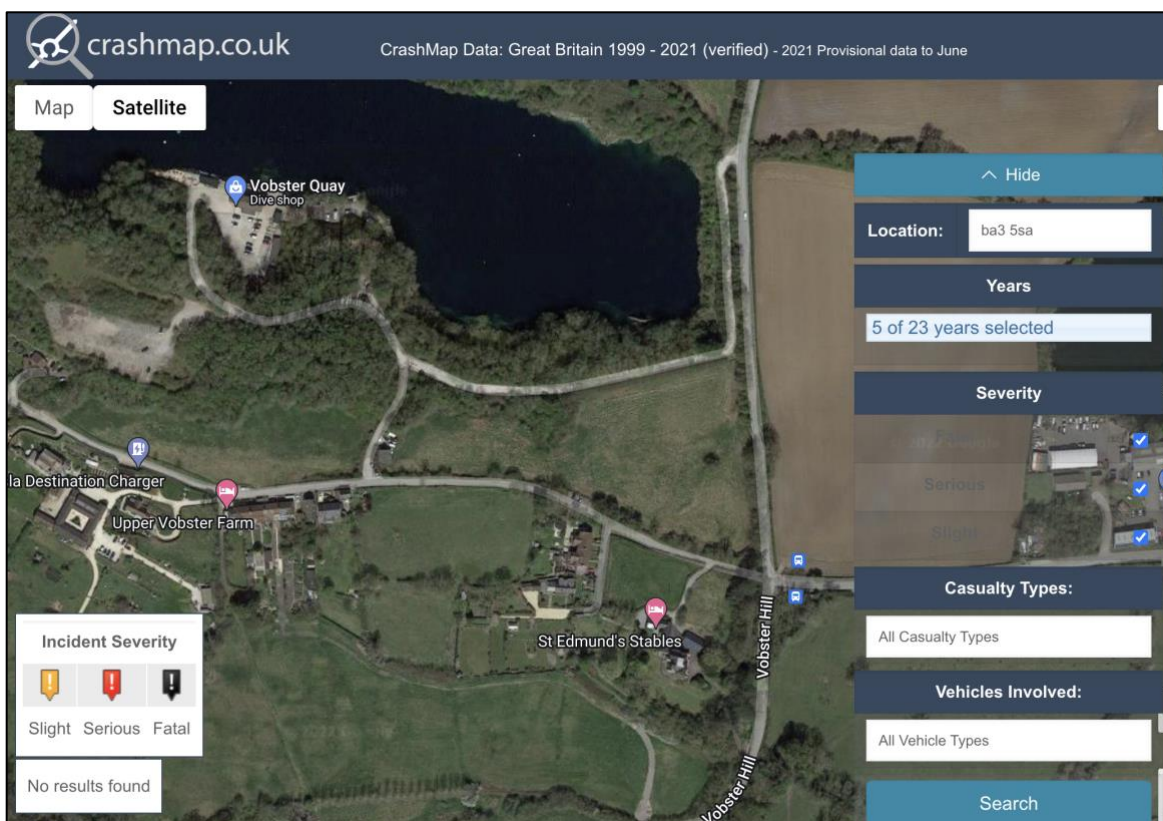
Parking and servicing

- 4.9** The Upper Vobster Farm complex accommodates ample existing car parking provision to meet the needs of the holiday letting units. The submitted 'site wide parking plan' provides a site wide overview of the parking spaces found on site. There are a total of 24 existing parking spaces. The holiday lets known as Valley View, The Dovecote, The Barn and The Dairy are 1no. bed units. Courtyard Cottage is a 2no. bed property whilst The Farmhouse is a 4no. bed unit. The

submitted existing and proposed block plan shows the car parking space provision for each holiday let within the overall site.

- 4.10** The Somerset Parking Strategy (2013) designates this area as a ‘Zone C’ area. The optimum standard for car parking in this location for a 1no. bed residential unit is 2 spaces. For a 2no bed unit 2.5 spaces is the optimum and for The Farmhouse 3.5no spaces. A total requirement of 14 spaces represents the optimum parking standard for the existing levels of development (including the three holiday lets for which permission is now sought retrospectively). Having regard to the standard, less than half of the parking spaces are allocated to specific units so there is no requirement for separate visitor parking to be provided. This notwithstanding, the overall availability of parking clearly allows for visitor parking given the number of spaces.
- 4.11** The parking spaces for each unit are shown on the submitted plans, each holiday lets benefit from parking in close proximity to each respective unit. Bicycle parking is available in the two garages on the northern wing of The Courtyard and also within and adjacent to the holiday lets to enable the standard of 1no space per bedroom to be met, in this case 3no. cycle spaces are required.
- 4.12** A previous planning appeal (APP/Q3305/A/12/2188411) considered the wider issues of highway safety in connection with re-use of parts of the site for holiday letting. The Inspector recorded that use for holiday letting, even if predominantly occupied by persons with cars, would generate less overall movements than either the residential or commercial uses at the site and less movements by heavy vehicles.
- 4.13** The Inspector opined that the addition of 2no holiday lets using the cul-de-sac access, *‘given its character as a cul-de-sac and the level of existing usage, there is no reason to conclude that the additional traffic generated by the appeal proposal would add significantly to the risks experienced by its users’*.

- 4.14 The Vobster Cross junction was considered by the County Highways Authority to be safe and the Inspector concurred with the view that given the lack of accidents at the junction that it was safe. Overall, the Inspector reasoned '*I therefore conclude that the proposed development would not result in unacceptable risk to highway users*'.
- 4.15 The below extract from the website www.crashmap.co.uk indicates that there have been no accidents recorded in the vicinity of the application site or at the Vobster Cross junction to the east in the last 5 years (the period to which the Highways Authority work). This data further confirms that the access arrangements are safe.



Extract from Crashmap showing no reported accidents

- 4.16 As has been referenced, parking for cars and bicycles are available for the holiday lets. Paragraph 84 of the NPPF advises that planning application

decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. This is regularly true in respect of holiday letting accommodation which is often provided in converted agricultural buildings that tend to be located outside of settlements in the open countryside.

- 4.17** The application site is within comfortable walking distance (less than 500m) of bus stops at Vobster Cross from which the No.184 bus service Frome-Stratton-on-the-Fosse-Midsomer Norton can be accessed. This service provides a two hourly service commencing at 6:30am linking these two large settlements. There are options for public transport to be used in this regard by occupants of the holiday lets who need not necessarily rely on the private car.
- 4.18** Overall the application is considered to be compliant with policies DP9 and DP10 of the Local Plan.

Neighbouring amenity

- 4.19** Valley View and The Dairy are ensconced between other holiday let uses and the associated communal services and facilities which support and broaden the offer for guests at the site. The existing overall use of the site has meant that the use of these buildings for holiday letting purposes has had no materially detrimental effect to the living conditions of occupiers of these two, or any of the other, holiday lets.
- 4.20** The use of the two units as one bedroom holiday lets only allows for very small booking groups, typically couples, who do not cause any nuisance in occupying the buildings. The applicant's land holding includes the full complex of buildings

which neighbour The Courtyard. The closest neighbouring property outside the applicant's control is around 100m from these buildings.

- 4.21** The Barn is situated detached from neighbouring buildings. It is positioned well removed from the Farmhouse and the Courtyard and diagonally offset from Cherry Tree Cottage. The Barn only has roof lights above ground floor level facing Cherry Tree Cottage and no overlooking occurs between properties which are either side of the access into the site in any event. Overall, this proposal will not harm neighbouring amenity and complies with the requirements of MLP policy DP7.

Ecology

- 4.22** As has been referenced, the existing buildings were converted into residential accommodation in 2002 and 2011. This application, made retrospectively, simply seeks permission for a change in the use of the existing buildings. There has been no interference with the external fabric of the buildings or their roof spaces. The repurposing of the buildings from ancillary accommodation to the overall holiday letting use of the site to individual holiday lets has no potential to affect protected species.
- 4.23** There has been no new additional external lighting installed and none is proposed as part of this application. The proposed development would safeguard protected species in accordance with DP5 and DP6 of the local plan.

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