



SUPPORTING STATEMENT

In respect of the change of use of land for the siting of
5 no. shepherds huts for use as holiday lets at:

Woodthorpes Farm, Nayland Road, Assington,
Suffolk, CO10 5LR

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This statement is prepared on behalf of Mr Volk in respect of an application for the change of use of land to facilitate the siting of five shepherds huts to provide holiday let accommodation on land at Woodthorpes Farm, Assington.
- 1.2 It will consider the planning policy position and provide an overview of the relevant material considerations relating to the proposed development.
- 1.3 The extract below shows the location of the site relative to nearby development.

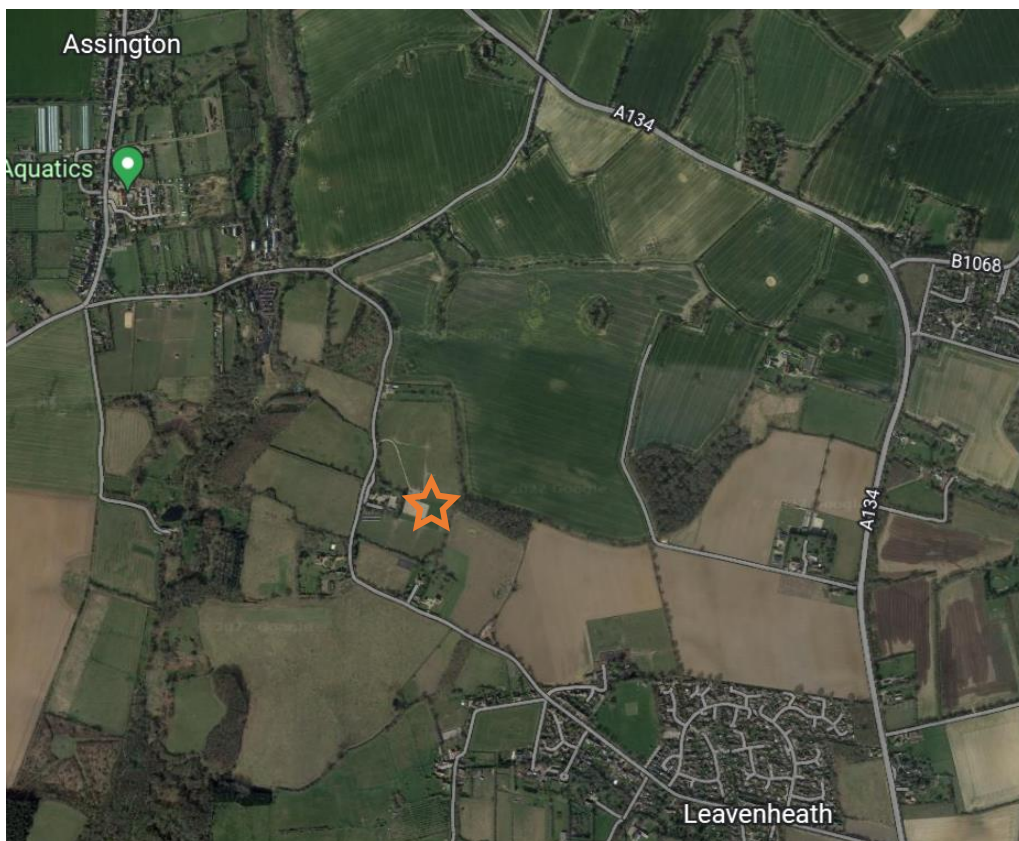


Image 1: Location Plan

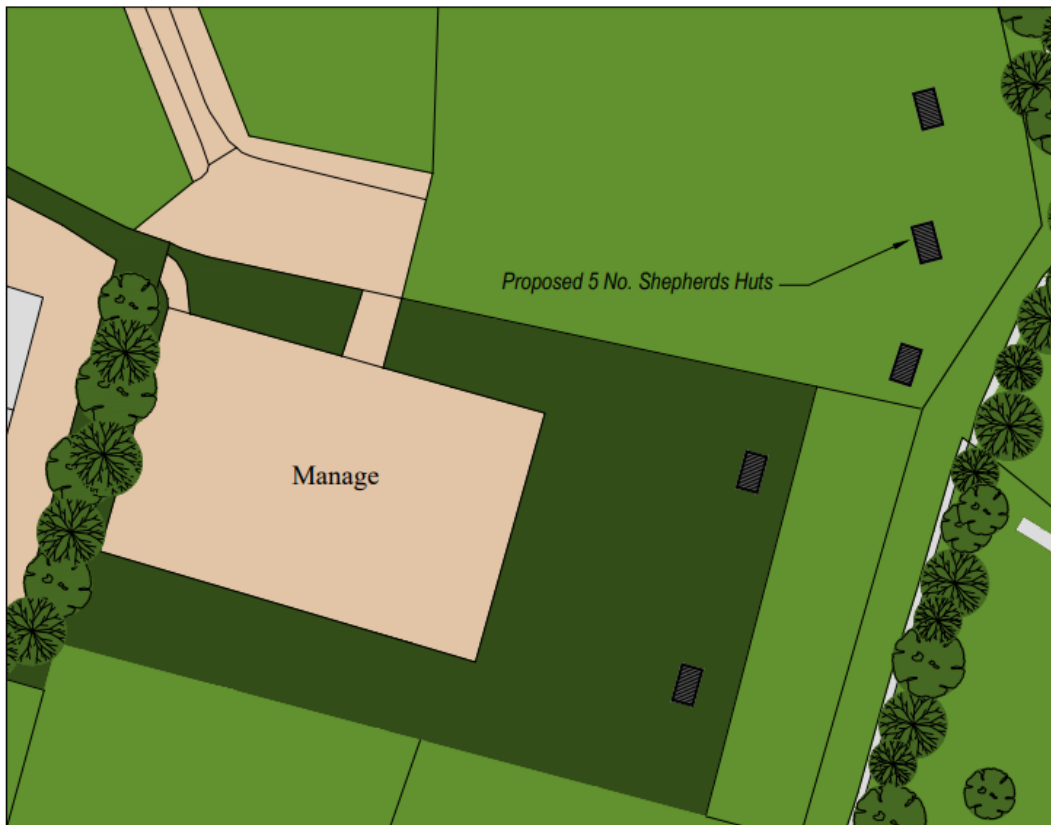
- 1.4 The application is supported by plans prepared by Medusa Design showing how the shepherds huts would be sited on the land and how they would be accessed. The application is also accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal which addresses the ecological impacts of the proposal.

2.0 The Site

- 2.1 Woodthorpes Farm is located to the southeast of Assington, and is situated off Nayland Road. The site that is proposed to be utilised for the siting of the shepherds huts is located to the east, behind Woodthorpes Farm and an existing menage. The immediate surrounding area is agricultural fields with the build up area boundary for the villager of Leavenheath to the southeast.
- 2.2 There is an ancient woodland to the east and the designated Special Landscape Area falls to the west, on the opposite side of Nayland Road.
- 2.3 The application site itself is unconstrained by any landscape designation and is situated in Flood Zone 1 such that it is not at risk of flooding.
- 2.4 There are no listed buildings in the immediate vicinity of the site and the land is not within a Conservation Area.

3.0 The Proposal

- 3.1 The application seeks planning permission for the change of use of the land for the siting of five shepherds huts to be used as holiday lets. The proposed shepherd huts would be located behind (to the east) of the menage and would be laid out in a linear form within a set area.
- 3.2 The proposed block plan shows how the shepherds huts would be set out on the site, making use of the existing access road and track within the site. The extract below is taken from this plan and shows clearly the positioning of each of the shepherds huts and the parking area serving them.



3.3 As can be seen, the shepherds huts are proposed to be sited with good spacing between them and would be accessed from the parking area to the north of the menage.

3.4 The shepherds huts would be of the type identified in the details attached to the application and which can be seen in position at the property known as Beechwood Farm, Earl Stonham.

4.0 Planning History

4.1 There is no recent/relevant planning history relating to the application site.

4.2 The existing menage was granted permission in March 2006 under planning reference B/06/00240.

5.0 Planning Policy Context

- 5.1 The revised National Planning Policy Framework was published in July 2021. It sets out the Government's planning policy and is a material consideration when determining planning applications.
- 5.2 The NPPF is supported by the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which assists applicants and decision makers to interpret the NPPF.
- 5.3 The development plan for Babergh District Council consists of the saved policies of the Babergh Local Plan Alteration No.2 (2006) and the Babergh Core Strategy (2014). AS the site lies within the Assington Neighbourhood Plan Area, the policies within the ANP also form part of the development plan. The following policies within these documents are considered to be relevant to this proposal:

Babergh Local Plan Alteration No.2 (2006)

- CN01 Design Standards
- CR07 Hedgerows
- TP15 Parking

Babergh Core Strategy 2014

- CS01 Applying the presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development in Babergh
- CS02 Settlement Pattern Policy
- CS03 Strategy for Growth and Development
- CS11 Core and Hinterland Villages
- CS15 Implementing Sustainable Development
- CS17 The Rural Economy

Assington Neighbourhood Plan

- Policy ASSN1 – Spatial Strategy

- Policy ASSN7 – Area of Local Landscape Sensitivity
- Policy ASSN9 - Dark Skies
- Policy ASSN11 - Biodiversity
- Policy ASSN14 – Design Considerations

5.4 Where relevant to the consideration of this proposal, these policies will be referred to within the ‘Planning Considerations’ section of this report.

6.0 Planning Considerations

6.1 Paragraph 10 of the Revised NPPF states *“So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development”*.

6.2 The proposal seeks permission for the use of the site for tourism use, including the siting of five shepherds huts.

6.3 Paragraph 84 of the NPPF states that:

“84. Planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*
- b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*
- c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and*
- d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship”*.

6.4 This site is outside of any village settlement boundary and for planning purposes is therefore considered to be in the countryside. Policy CS17 of the Babergh Core Strategy provides the Council's strategy for supporting the rural economy. It identifies that:

“Historic villages, such as Lavenham and Long Melford and coastal villages such as Chelmondiston and Shotley play an important role in tourism and leisure within the district, and appropriate new development that supports this role will be encouraged.

The economy in the rural area will be supported through a number of measures including: a) through the encouragement of:

- i. proposals for farm diversification;*
- ii. the re-use of redundant rural buildings;*
- iii. sustainable tourism and leisure based businesses (including those offering a diverse range of visitor accommodation, activities or experiences);*
- iv. businesses involved in the renewable energy / low carbon industry at an appropriate scale for the location;*
- v. rural ‘business parks’, and workshops, rural and community business ‘hubs’ that share facilities and other innovative rural enterprises, and innovative business practices such as co-operatives or microbusinesses based on shared facilities / services;*
- vi. and where appropriate, farm shops and farmers markets;*

and b) support for / promotion of rural businesses.

All proposals for development should comply with other policies in the Core Strategies and Policies document, particularly Policy CS15, and other subsequent documents as appropriate”.

6.5 The proposal delivers a sustainable tourism-based business for which there have been a number of recent examples approved across the Babergh district. It is clear, therefore, that there is support for the principle of such accommodation through the provisions of both national and local policy and that such uses have been found to be accepted in rural settings with recognition of the contribution that such accommodation can make to the rural economy.

- 6.6 Furthermore, the siting of the five shepherd huts would be well located relative to the historic villages recognised by policy CS17 as being important to the tourism and leisure offer within the district. The site lies close to a number of areas of open space and would offer opportunities for people to take advantage of the Suffolk/Essex countryside through a range of activities and by a range of means.
- 6.7 It is possible to walk or cycle from the site to the facilities in the village and also would give access to bus stops within the village. The proposal would provide holiday accommodation that would offer an attractive countryside setting but which would not be isolated from day to day facilities and services. As such, recognising that the purpose of many holiday sites is to offer a 'get away' where parties are able to break away from towns and larger villages, this site scores well in achieving such a get away space but offering local services that holiday makers would require within an accessible distance.
- 6.8 In addition, it has been acknowledged by the Planning Inspector in a recent appeal decision (APP/D3505/W/21/3286928), that in terms of a sustainable location, from the point of view of minimising travel by unsustainable means, holiday accommodation of this sort in a district such as Babergh is likely to be car based to some extent. The proposal therefore in terms of sustainable development clearly meets the requirements of both paragraph 84 of the NPPF and policy CS17 of the adopted development plan. The Assington Neighbourhood Plan is silent on proposals for tourism/holiday based development (the words 'tourism' and 'holiday' do not appear in the document at all) such that the ANP is of little relevance to the consideration of the principle of this development.
- 6.9 In light of the above, attention will now turn to the specific impacts of this proposal on important material considerations that will be taken into account when considering this proposal.

Design and Layout

- 6.10 Saved policy CN01 sets out the criteria that the Council expects all new development to meet in terms of their design and layout.

- 6.11 Paragraph 126 of the NPPF (2021) identifies that *“The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process”*.
- 6.12 Policy CS15 also provides criteria relating to design as part of a list of sustainable development aims, and the stated policies above (CS17 and the NPPF) all identify the impacts of such proposals as important considerations.
- 6.13 Good design is not about just the appearance of buildings and structures but also about how developments relate to their surroundings and the benefits that they deliver to a site. The proposed shepherd huts are minimalistic in their design and would sit comfortably in their setting, being located well away from the road and against the backdrop of hedging which would help to settle them into the landscape. They would sit on the land rather than intrude into it and are of a scale and form that would not be visually prominent.
- 6.14 As such, the proposal complies with policy CN01 and the respective elements of policy CS15 and CS17 also.

Residential Amenity

- 6.15 The proposed shepherd huts are sited some distance from both the host dwelling and other residential properties, whereby the impacts on residential amenity would not be such that would weigh against this proposal.
- 6.19 The proposal is, therefore, acceptable in terms of its impacts on residential amenity.

Highway Safety

- 6.20 The proposal would use the existing access and utilise an existing parking area, both of which can be seen clearly on the aerial image below.



- 6.21 According to www.crashmap.co.uk there have been no accidents recorded in the immediate vicinity of the site. Access to the site is along a road that is not conducive to high speeds such that the access is sited in a position where vehicles passing the site will not be travelling fast. This demonstrates that the new development can be accommodated without giving rise to highway safety issues.
- 6.22 The proposal is, therefore, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 110 of the NPPF, which identifies that in assessing specific applications for development it should be ensured that safe and suitable access can be achieved for all users.

Land Contamination

- 6.23 Submitted with this application is a Groundsure Report which demonstrates that the land is not known to be, or likely to be, contaminated.
- 6.24 The proposal is therefore in accordance with paragraph 183 of the NPPF which states that planning policies and decisions should ensure that a site is suitable for its proposed use taking account of ground conditions and any risks arising from land instability and contamination.

Flood Risk and Drainage

- 6.25 The site is located within Flood Zone 1 and given the small scale nature of the proposal, the proposal would not post a flood risk or have a detrimental impact on any drainage matters.
- 6.26 As such, the proposal raises no flooding or drainage issues.

Landscape Impacts

- 6.27 The proposal would not give rise to specific landscape impacts beyond a localised change in the appearance of the site. The ANP does not identify the site as falling within a valued landscape or affecting a protected view. As such, the landscape here is not offered special protection in the terms envisaged by policy ASSN7.
- 6.28 The proposed changes would not be visible from the road given the scale and the existing mature trees/hedgerow which boarder the site. Any longer views of the site from public viewpoints would be seen in the context of the hedgerows, menage and paddock fencing that exists here, such that the shepherds huts would not give rise to any detriment to the character of the landscape.

Ecology and Biodiversity

- 6.29 Regulation 9(5) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (Implemented 1st April 2010) provides that all "competent authorities" (public bodies) to "have regard to the

Habitats Directive in the exercise of its functions”. Guidance on the conservation of protected species is given in ODPM Circular 06/2005. At Paragraph 99 the Circular advises that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent to which they might be affected by the proposed development, must be established before planning permission is granted.

6.30 The applicant recognises these obligations and has commissioned a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal to support this application. The applicant relies upon the findings of this report to demonstrate that there are no ecological impacts that would warrant refusal of this planning application.

6.31 Furthermore, there is scope to bring about biodiversity enhancements on the site such as to provide a net gain across the site.

Sustainable Development (Three Objectives)

6.32 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF sets out three objectives to achieving sustainable development;

“a) an economic objective – to 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; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;

b) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being; and

c) an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy”.

- 6.33 The proposal is considered to encompass all three of these objectives.
- 6.34 From an economic aspect, the creation of new holiday lets in the form of shepherd huts would provide clear and demonstrable economic benefits resulting from the delivery of much needed tourism accommodation. Users of the units would contribute to the local economy through the purchase of goods, the utilisation of nearby facilities and services and involvement in community activity. The benefits to the rural economy resulting from tourism are embedded in national policy and repeated in local policies such that this cannot be contested. It is, therefore, considered that the economic objective of sustainable development is met by this proposal.
- 6.35 The social benefits of delivering high-quality tourist accommodation are clear, offering high quality and peaceful alternative holiday accommodation in the countryside. The health and wellbeing benefits resulting from the availability of these units are such that demonstrate that the social objective is also delivered.
- 6.36 Notwithstanding that a proposal in this location would contribute to enhancing and maintaining services in this village and neighbouring areas, the PPG advises that *“all settlements can play a role in delivering sustainable development in rural areas”*. The site demonstrates good access to opportunities to walk and cycle in the local area and where occupants of the holiday lets will support local businesses in the village through increased expenditure.
- 6.37 There is no detriment resulting to important environmental aspects such as flooding, contamination, landscape impacts or biodiversity, and it can be seen that the proposal is also environmentally sustainable in this regard.
- 6.32 As such, it is felt that the proposal demonstrates a cohesive approach to sustainability that meets with the aspirations of the NPPF and is in line with the way in which the dimensions of sustainable development are applied by Planning Inspectors and Planning Officers alike.

7.0 Planning Balance

- 7.1 The proposal seeks permission for the change of use of the land for the siting of five shepherd huts for use as holiday lets.
- 7.2 In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The consideration is, therefore, whether the development accords with the development plan and, if not, whether there are material considerations that would indicate a decision should be taken contrary to the development plan.
- 7.3 The development plan includes the Babergh Core Strategy (2014) and the saved policies in the Babergh Local Plan Alteration No.2 (2006). Supporting these, and forming part of the development plan also, is the Assington Neighbourhood Plan.
- 7.4 In accordance with paragraph 84 of the NPPF and policy CS17 of the Core Strategy, there can be no 'in-principle' objection to the proposed use. Furthermore, the ANP does not comment on such uses such that the ANP also does not preclude such development in this village.
- 7.4 The material considerations that are relative to the determination of this application have been satisfactorily addressed (including design and layout, highway safety, biodiversity, land contamination and residential amenity) such that they have been found to comply with the provisions of the NPPF and the relevant development plan policies.
- 7.5 The site is well located and would deliver significant economic benefits through a varied accommodation offer that would give those looking to holiday in this area options in terms of the nature of their holiday. The direct and indirect employment resulting from this use, and the associated spend in the local economy from such occupation, would weigh in favour of the proposal. However, the proposal is of a scale that would sit quietly in its surroundings and provides low-key development in terms of its external impacts and impact on the environment.

7.6 The proposal has been considered in the light of the presumption in favour of sustainable development and is found to be a sustainable development. For all of the above reasons, the LPA is thereby requested to support this proposal.