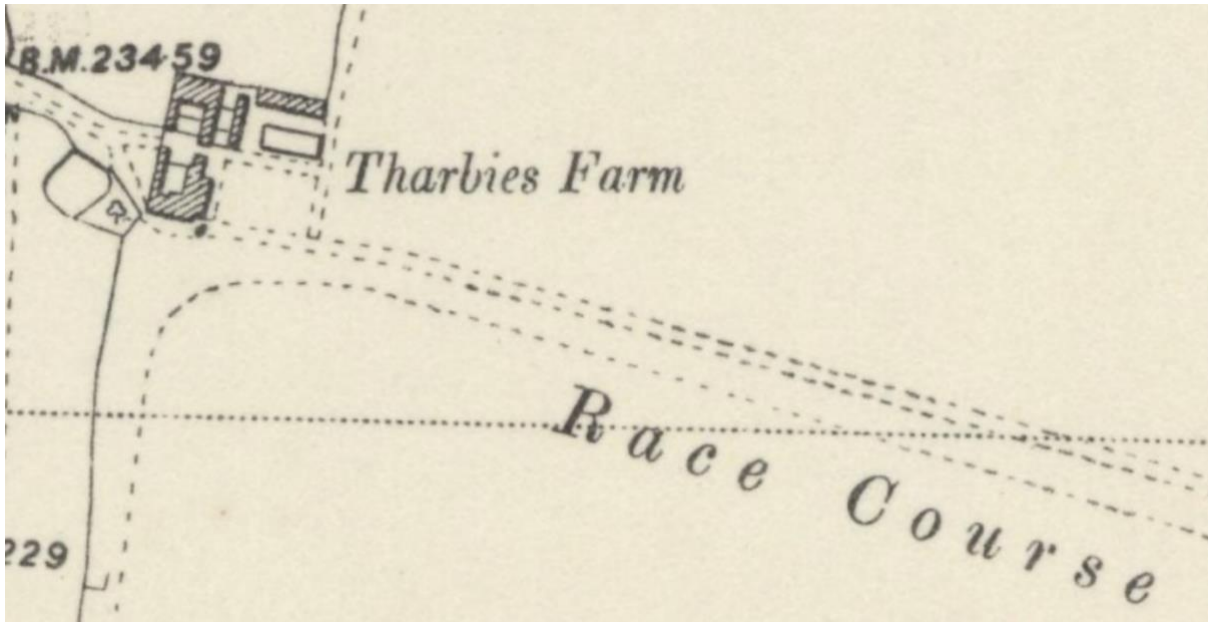


**Supporting Statement for the Heritage Conversion  
of Tharbies Farm, Rook End, High Wych,  
Sawbridgeworth, CM21 0LL**



**Application for the demolition of the modern indoor cricket school building, and the conversion of one listed barn and three curtilage listed barns to residential use, creating six new dwellings with associated garaging, parking and residential amenity space**

Prepared by Ashdown Developments Ltd

February 2023

**To Include Design & Access Statement, and Planning Statement**

## Background & Summary

In 2019/20 pre-application advice was sought for an alternative scheme under S/19/0372/PREAPP. The scheme was for the redevelopment of three barns, with additional new builds and cart lodges, creating up to eight dwellings. The scheme was not supported due to concerns about greenbelt policy, remote location, and the scale of redevelopment. Further discussions with the pre-app planning officer, James Langsmead, concluded that the heritage conversion elements could be supported in principle, but any new build stand-alone elements would require enabling development.

Further Heritage investigation uncovered that the site did not develop as an agricultural farmstead as first assumed. The Grade II listed South Barn, and the non-designated heritage North Barn were originally in agricultural use, but the site was primarily developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century as stabling for thoroughbred horses, with an associated racecourse. Two further curtilage listed barns still exist from this phase of development. The site was then subsequently converted back to agricultural use in the late twentieth century with the addition of substantial further built form.

The scheme being presented removes the modern built form, including the indoor cricket school building, and redevelops the four barns that are listed or curtilage listed. The proposal reverts the farmstead back to its historic site plan of the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The scheme now overcomes the concerns raised in the pre-application advice. The scheme can now be supported by greenbelt policy as it only includes the re-use and extension/alteration of existing heritage structures, and creates more openness. It also overcomes the unsustainable location objection as it satisfies two of the exceptions that allow for the development of isolated homes in the countryside under paragraph 80 of the NPPF 2021: (1) The development now represents the optimal viable use of all four heritage assets on site, and (2) re-uses redundant buildings. The scheme also removes significant modern built mass and returns the site plan to its historic footprint, enhancing the setting of the heritage assets and improving the character and appearance of the site.

## Design & Access

### Description of the Proposal

The scheme seeks to demolish the existing cricket school, along with other modern built elements, and repurpose the four listed or curtilage listed buildings to residential use. The farmstead is reverted back to its historic site plan of the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century, creating more openness and enhancing the setting of the heritage assets. The proposed scheme provides one 5 bedroom house, three 4 bedroom houses, and two 3 bedroom houses, along with garaging, parking, and residential amenity space.

### Location & Description of site

The application site lies in the hamlet of Rook End, a remote rural location west of the town of Sawbridgeworth and to the east of the hamlet of Allens Green. It is accessed from unnamed single track lanes to the north, south and west of site. Public footpath High Wych 042 runs through the site connecting the proposed development to Sawbridgeworth by foot. This distance is approximately 1km and provides the closest access to services, schools and public transport.

The site comprises a group of former agricultural buildings which were previously associated with Tharbies Farm but are now divorced from the land, and used as an indoor cricket school, with a series of redundant storage barns. One additional barn outside of the red line has previously been converted to three dwellings (approved under Class Q), and one further modern barn removed to create associated residential parking and amenity land. The current arrangement of barns can be seen in Figure 1.



*Fig. 1 Aerial View of Tharbies Farmyard 2022*

The indoor cricket school building was erected without planning permission or listed building consent in 2008 and links the historic North barn, that forms the reception area to the cricket school, to the listed South barn. The South barn is crudely attached to the cricket school building, although it cannot be accessed from the cricket school itself. The South Barn is a Grade II listed building the list description for which states:

SOUTH BARN AT THARBIES FARM AT SOUTH END OF RANGE NEAREST ROAD.

Barn, C17. Tall timber framed weatherboarded facing S. Steep pitched roof, half-hipped at ends. Projecting central porch with half-hipped roof and overhanging gable. Clasped purlin roof structure with collars and inclined queen struts. Long curved braces from posts to tie beams. Roof now covered in slates. Modern building extending to N not of special interest.

Since listing the slates have been lost and replaced with corrugated iron sheeting. The building is unused and unoccupied and is now in a declining condition, although its internal oak frame with inclined Queen Strut Truss's is in remarkable condition given its years of neglect. The Barn sits on the East Herts Heritage at Risk Register and is associated with 3 outstanding Enforcement Notices.

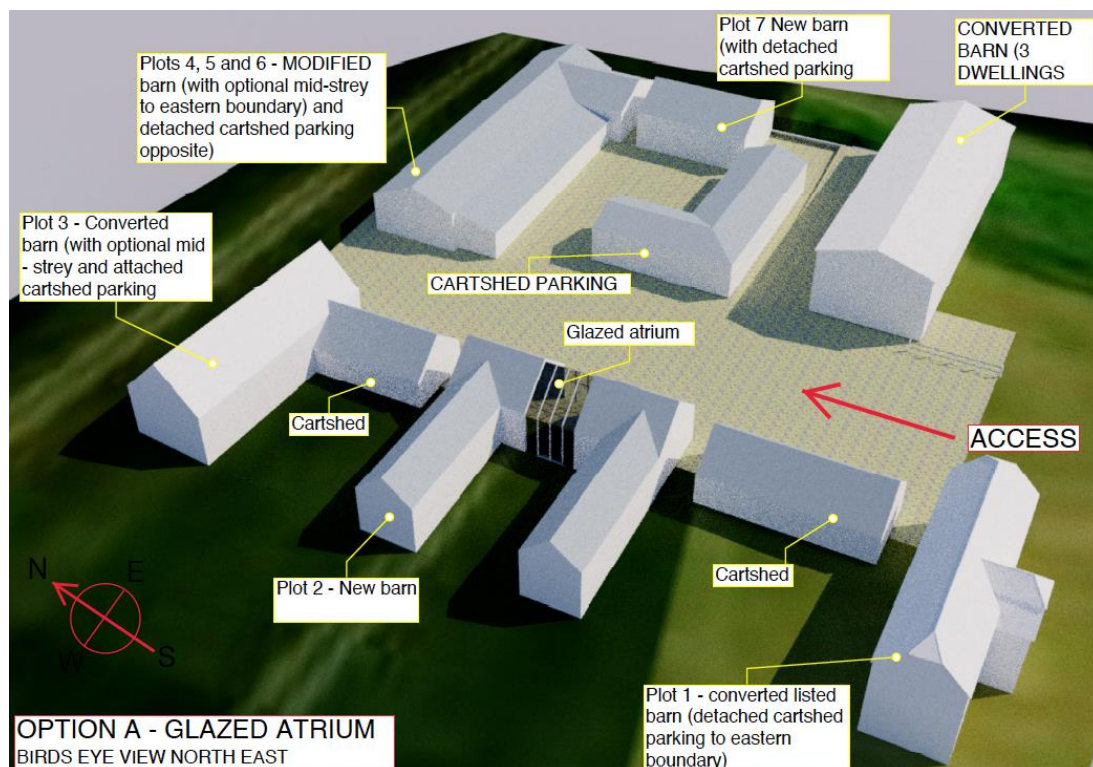
From a planning perspective, the site is Brownfield, in the Metropolitan Green Belt, and Isolated as per para 80 of the NPPF (2021): The term 'isolated' is not defined by the framework, although its meaning has been the subject of four recent judgements. The most recent case law in 2021 (City & Country Bramshill Ltd v Secretary of State for Housing Communities & Local Government) confirms that the definition of 'isolated' in the NPPF is 'isolated from any settlement as defined by the adopted District Plan' as opposed to 'isolated from other properties'. James Langsmead correctly acknowledged this definition in the pre-app response when discussing sustainability, saying "Whilst the site is technically a Brownfield site, it is isolated from any nearby designated Group I / II village and there are very few nearby isolated homes in this location".

## Design Evolution

Early design options were developed following Historic England's National Farmstead Assessment Framework, March 2015 (<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/national-farmstead-assessment-framework/>); and the most recent guidance, Advice Note 9 October 2017, for the adaptive re-use of Historic Farm Buildings (<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/adaptive-reuse-traditional-farm-buildings-advice-note-9/>). This guidance highlights the important contribution that traditional farmsteads and farm buildings make to the rural English landscape. It emphasises that the successful adaptive re-use of any farmstead depends upon understanding its significance, its relationship to the wider landscape setting, and its sensitivity and capacity for change.

The key update in Historic England's Advice Note 9 is that Historic England now encourage residential re-use as an optimum viable use; where as previously other forms of development such as commercial or leisure would be favoured. The policy guidance demands a holistic approach to the development encompassing restoration, re-adaption, and the rebuild of modern elements to improve openness and restore the settings and special interest of historic buildings.

Pre-application advice was sought in 2019/20 for an earlier scheme. That scheme involved the demolition of the modern cricket school and its replacement with new traditionally designed buildings on the same footprint; the conversion of the North and South barns to single dwellings; the remodelling of the existing barn to the north east corner and its conversion into residential units; and the demolition of the barrel vaulted Dutch barn and its replacement with a new barn of reduced scale, together with detached cart sheds.



*Fig. 2 Early Design that was presented for pre-application advice*

The pre-application advice did not support this approach with concerns about new buildings being built in the Green Belt, the unsustainable location of the site, and the scale of development. Further discussions with the planning officer, James Langsmead, concluded that the heritage conversion elements could be supported in principle, but any independent new build elements would require an enabling development scheme.

Further Heritage investigation of the site uncovered an alternative design approach that would overcome the planning concerns and avoid enabling development, which should only be seen as a last resort. The discovery of an article from the Sawbridgeworth Local History Society highlighted that Tharbies Farm had evolved through the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a thoroughbred stable yard, not an agricultural farmyard.

Tharbies Farm was acquired by a prominent local family, the Barnard's in 1844. William Barnard was a wealthy maltster who acquired a number of local farms around Sawbridgeworth and High Wych. The stabling at Tharbies Farm appears to have been driven by his son, Sir Edmund Broughton Barnard (1856-1930), who was a prominent local politician and horse trainer. He was awarded an OBE in 1920, followed by a knighthood in 1928 'For Valuable Services to Local Government'. It was reported that at the end of the 19th century Sir Edmund had between 100 and 150 racehorses stabled at Tharbies, and had his own private racecourse built for training purposes, shown clearly to the south east of the farmstead on the 1923 OS map, figure 3.

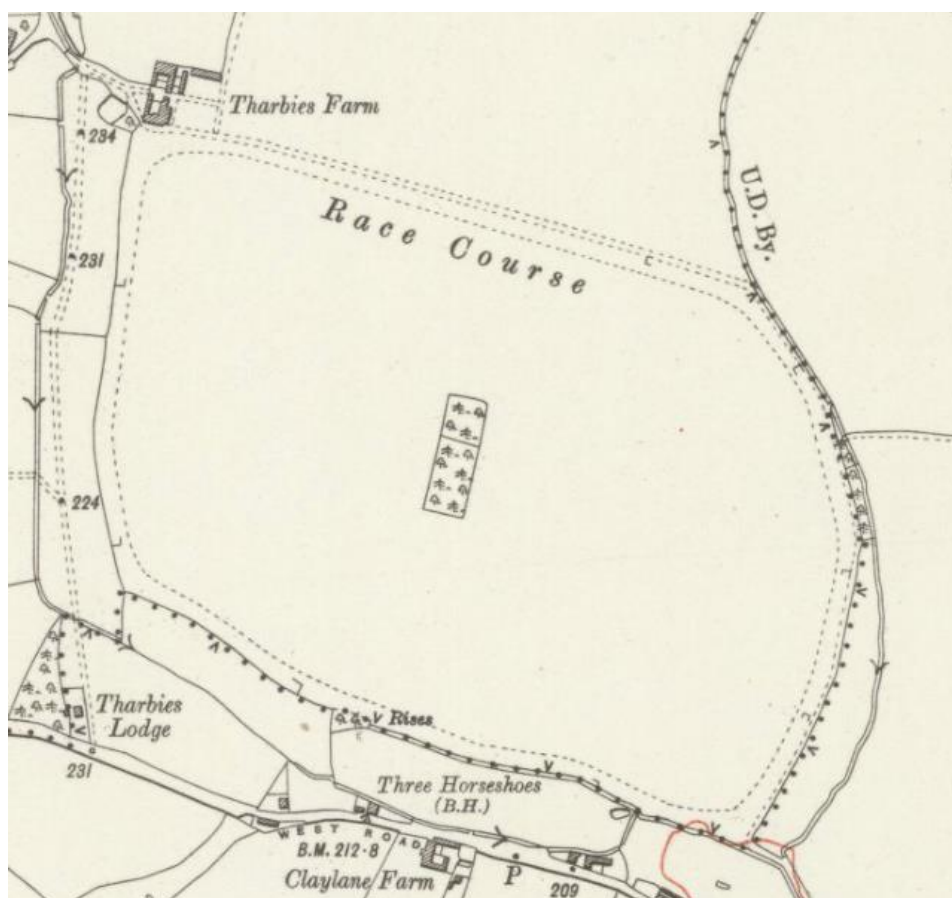


Fig. 3 Race Course on 1923 OS map. Note Tharbies Farm in the north west corner.

Historical maps chart the development of Tharbies through Sir Edmund's lifetime. Figure 4 is the Tythe map from 1839 showing just the North and South barns. Figure 5 is the OS Map from 1921 showing the series of stabling blocks that had been developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Figure 6 is reproduced as it shows all the buildings on the 1946 OS map that would be considered to be curtilage listed. These include the two historic barns, the stable block ranges attached to them, the independent stable blocks to the north east corner, and the barrel vaulted Dutch Barn.

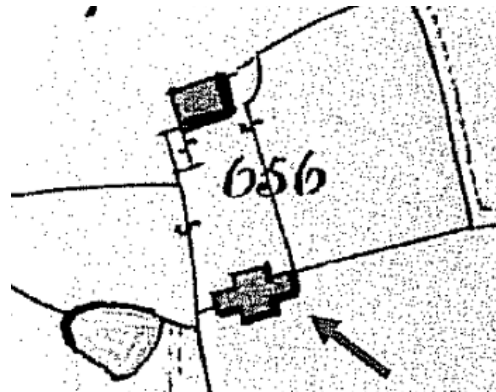


Fig. 4 Extract from 1839 Tythe Map showing the listed barn marked with an arrow and the non-designated heritage barn to the north. Note that there are no other structures on site.

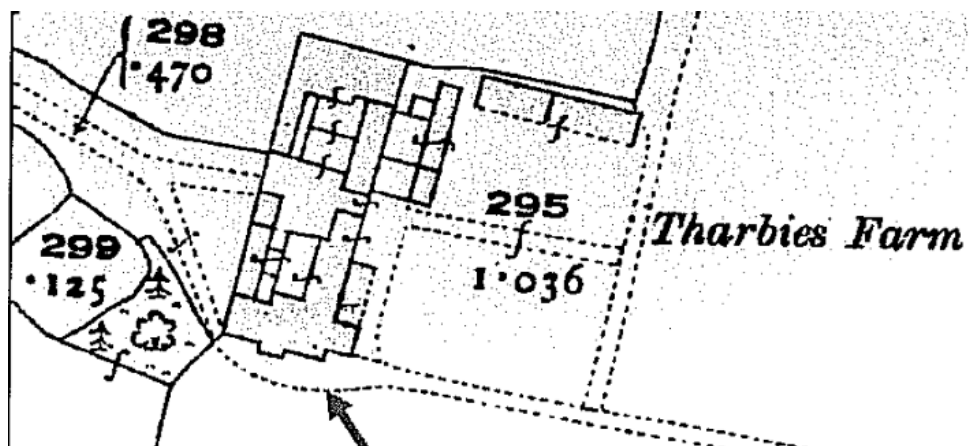


Fig. 5 Extract from the 1921 OS map showing the significant ranges of stables attached to and independent of the historical barns. The listed barn is marked with an arrow.

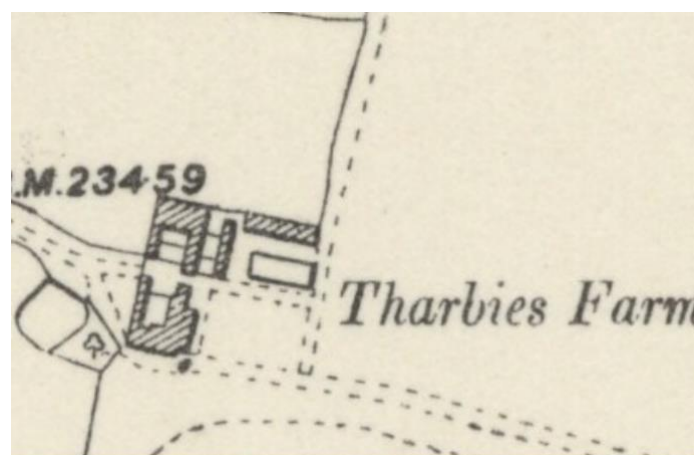
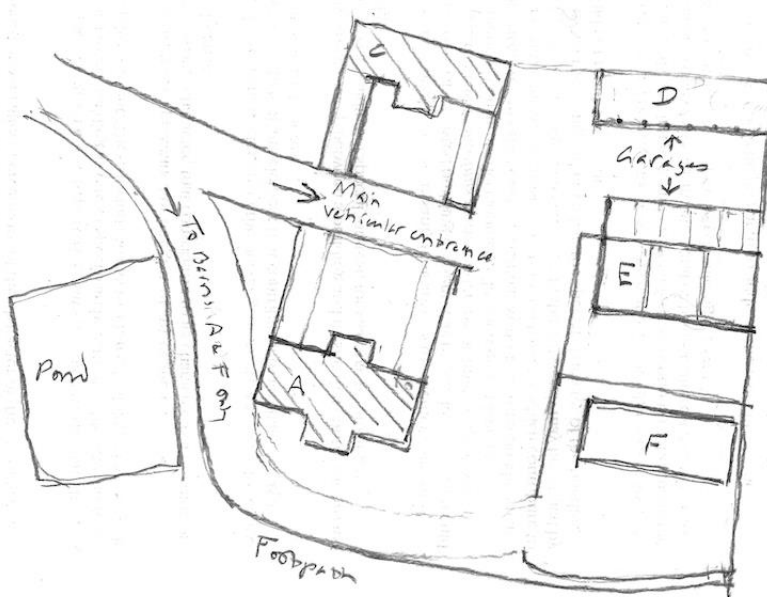


Fig. 6 Extract from the 1946 OS map showing all curtilage listed buildings

AHP (Architectural History Practice) were appointed in 2021 to assist with a significance assessment of the heritage assets in the light of the additional information uncovered about the farmstead evolution. The findings are detailed in the accompanying Heritage Statement. In summary, the Grade II listed South Barn comes first in the heritage hierarchy, followed by the historic North barn. Below that is the north eastern stable block with its original cast iron supporting columns. Below that, but still with significance is the barrel vaulted Dutch barn. Our conclusion was that all four of these heritage assets deserved preservation within a lower density scheme, with the removal of modern built form.

AHP suggested a scheme in Figure 7 that re-used the four listed/curtilage listed buildings (labelled A, C, D & E). This scheme allowed for the re-introduction of single storey rear ranges to the two heritage barns (buildings A & C), converting them into single dwellings. The main site access was reinstated through the middle, as per the historic mapping, opening up views to the east and the silhouette of the Dutch barn (building E). The northern stable block (building D) was converted to garages restoring its original open-fronted character. The Dutch barn is converted to three units with the lean-to wing on the north side rebuilt as part of the garage court. Building F in Figure 7 is the Class Q conversion and outside of the red line.



AD 13.1.21

Fig. 7 Heritage driven scheme suggested by Andrew Derrick, Architectural History Practice

This approach has several merits. It is a truly conservation led scheme including only re-use, alteration/extensions which are all permitted in the Green Belt. A scheme of this nature also overcomes previous planning concerns around location as the whole scheme satisfies exceptions in NPPF para 80 that allows isolated homes in the countryside. The introduction of the rear ranges to the historic barns, echoing the previously attached stable wings, also allows for a very light touch conversion of the two historic barns. The pre-application scheme included first floors in these buildings, but the introduction of rear ranges allows the



historic buildings to remain more open as the ranges can accommodate bedrooms and other residential ancillary functions.

The scheme also had some technical hurdles, in particular getting adequate light into the Dutch Barn Conversion, given the retention of its north wing, and limitations to windows on the south elevation given the separation distance to the converted class Q development. After several iterations, a successful scheme has been designed that overcomes these issues.



*Fig. 8 Design evolution of Dutch Barn with garage courtyard to the north*

### **Proposed Scheme Design**

The listed South Barn and the North barn are proposed to be converted as per the AHP scheme. The listed South barn will be converted into a detached property with its historic single storey rear ranges re-instated. The modern makeshift doors to the existing midstreys will be removed and the opening will be glazed. The existing ventilation gaps will also be glazed. Only one additional window will be incorporated into the rear elevation of the listed barn for egress purposes, but this can be achieved without the loss of any historic beams. The addition of rear ranges will not cause any harm to the historic fabric as the lower northern elevation of the South barn has already been replaced with modern fletton bricks. Two door openings will be created in these brick walls to access the re-instated wings. The central opening to the north elevation, that is currently boarded over, will be opened up and glazed to form access to the inner courtyard. A self-supported mezzanine will be incorporated into the western bay of the Barn, but the remainder of the listed Barn will remain open exposing the main beams and roof trusses. The surrounding curtilage will be left open and landscaped. This property will be sold with further land and the natural farm pond to the southwest, which forms part of its historical setting.

The North Barn will be conserved in a similar way to the listed barn creating a similar detached property with exposed beams and roof trusses, and an inner private courtyard. The North barn appears to have been created from two independent three bay barns that have been rebuilt as one 6 bay barn. As such it does not have the height or internal elegance of the South Barn, and its internal proportions feel unbalanced. Independent mezzanines are therefore proposed in the east and west bays to bring better spatial balance to the central 4 bays that will remain open. A midstorey is proposed to be reinstated on the south elevation, which will act as a link to the reinstated rear ranges. Four historic ventilation gaps, that are currently boarded over, will be exposed and glazed. There is no requirement for any new window openings in this barn, so there will be no loss of historic fabric. This property will have landscaped curtilage to its north, east and west sides, as well as its private inner courtyard. The northern curtilage will be limited to the current extent that is landscaped so as not to encroach upon the open countryside. This property will be sold with the 2 acre paddock which abuts its northern boundary, strengthening the properties rural character.

The 7 bay cast iron stable block will be converted to covered parking and one dwelling. The four western bays of the stable block will be exposed and restored as covered parking, reinstating the original open-fronted character of the stable block, with its cast iron columns shown to full advantage. There is evidence of original brackets on the southern row of columns that would have supported a rain/weather canopy. The canopy will be re-instated on the four open bays for historical context.

The remaining three bays will be converted into a single storey dwelling with open plan living areas in the original stable block. The columns and steel trusses will be exposed internally where possible. The existing building has a series of roof lights down its length. These will be echoed in the conversion with simple roof lights in the northern elevation, which is not on public view.

The Dutch barn will have the majority of its modern wings removed and will be converted into a row of three dwellings. In general, the design of this barn will be more contemporary, noting its lower historical significance; but its agricultural nature will remain with its barrel-vaulted roof, and inserted irregular/barn like window openings. The dwellings are orientated so that their principle elevation faces into the covered parking courtyard, with enclosed amenity space to the south. The rear elevation has been designed with 'hidden windows' to first floor habitable rooms, with projecting bays that only have glazing to the sides. This design prevents overlooking, introduces some shadow and depth to the south elevation and shades the ground floor doors from summer sun. Overlooking at ground floor is mitigated by the existing 6 foot high fence between the class Q development, and will be further minimised with planting.

Externally, the scheme has been designed with open landscaped frontages and enclosed rear gardens/inner courtyards. The landscaping is simple so as not to be too residential, but introduce a level of softness to the design. Fencing will include traditional estate fencing, and post and rail to the surrounding countryside. Hardstanding and parking areas will have a gravel finish to informalise the surface. The red line has been drawn quite tightly around the previously developed land so as not to encroach upon the open countryside.

## Access & Parking

The site is accessed via a private driveway from Rook End. This existing vehicular access to the site would remain unchanged and, in terms of traffic generation, the proposal would result in significantly fewer trips to and from the site than currently takes place in association with the cricket school. During peak times, the cricket schools car park of thirty spaces is full and it generates up to two hundred traffic movements a day.

On the basis that each proposed property will average two cars, we would anticipate the residential scheme will generate 4-5 traffic movements per day per household in this location, so 24-30 movements in total. That constitutes a reduction in traffic of over 85% on the surrounding single track rural roads, which will provide a significant improvement in road safety and transport sustainability.

The original entrance to the farmyard through the two historic barns will be re-instated as per historical mapping. This allows the current southerly access track around the listed barn to be closed, enhancing the setting of this barn, and improving its residential amenity. The principal elevation of the listed barn with its original midstrey will now be to open to the countryside and it will not be impacted by traffic passing within a few metres of it.

Car Parking will be provided that meets the requirement of the Councils updated vehicle parking standards, as well as additional visitor parking. The two detached historic barns will be provided with three covered spaces within the rebuilt rear ranges. The other properties will each be provided with one covered space in the converted stable block, with additional allocated spaces. Additional visitor spaces will be provided, and there is also scope within the site to accommodate further informal visitor parking. Each garage will be oversized to accommodate cycle storage and electric car charging points.

Public footpath High Wych 042 runs through the site connecting it to Sawbridgeworth by foot, providing the closest access to services, schools and public transport.

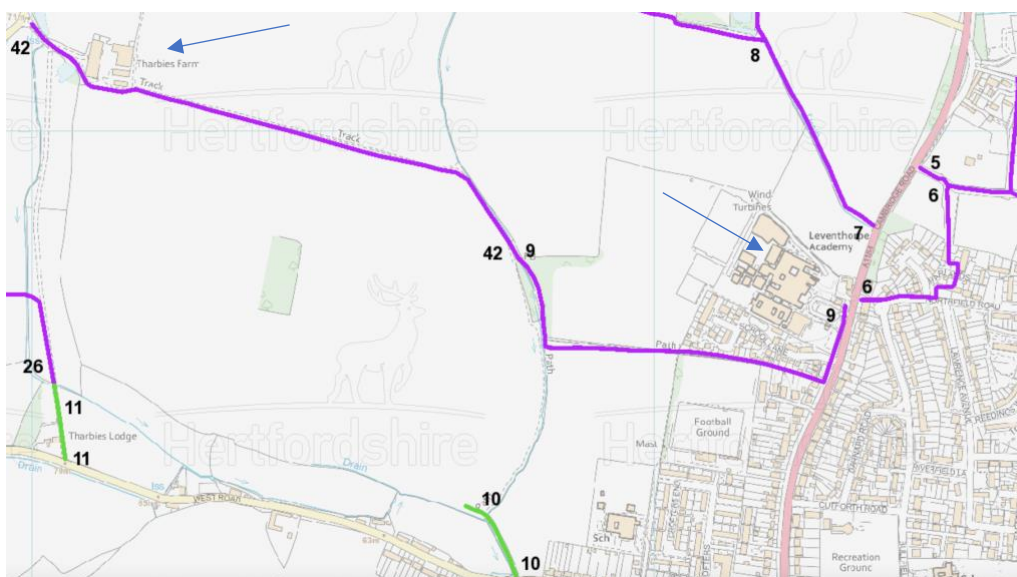


Fig 9. Extract from the definitive map showing Footpath 042 connecting the site to Sawbridgeworth. Tharbies & Leventhorpe School are marked with arrows.

“PPG:13 Transport’ guidance, although superseded, provides a useful indication of walking distances that are considered acceptable. The guidance suggests that walking likely replaces trips that are often taken by car if the distance is less than 2km. The Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation’s “Planning for Walking (2015)’ document states that people will choose to walk if the length of their journey is less than one mile (1.6km). The Institute of Highways and Transportation’s document ‘Guidelines for Providing Journeys on Foot (2000)’ provides alternative maximum walking distances, that include commuting to work and school at 2km, and 1.2km elsewhere.

Although the location of the Tharbies is remote by road, the presence of the footpath network means that it is only 1km from the edge of the settlement of Sawbridgeworth by foot, with Leventhorpe School and Leisure Centre approximately 1.2km away. National guidance on maximum distances would suggest this as a sustainable walking distance. As such, we are proposing to upgrade the surface of the footpath through the site, and also remove the restrictive kissing gates on footpath High Wych 042 that are outside of the red line but within our ownership.

The footpath route through the site will also require a small diversion given that the historical access through the barns is being re-instated, and the southern access route is being closed.

Residential bin lorries already enter the site to collect the refuse of the converted class Q barn. There is ample space for the vehicles to turn and then leave in forward gear. The plan to open up the historic access to the farmyard will allow superior access for these vehicles, as the access width will double. The scheme is designed with a central communal bin store to keep domestic bins out of sight.

## Planning Considerations

### History of Site

The site is subject of a long and complicated planning history. The most relevant have been listed below:

#### **Planning Applications:**

*3/19/1548/FUL*

*Change of use of former agricultural site to residential parking and amenity land*

*Approved: 27 March 2020*

*3/18/2318/ARPN*

*Change of use of agricultural barn to 3 residential dwellings (Class C3).*

*Prior Approval Required & Approved: 17 December 2018*

*3/17/2755/ARPN*

*Change of use of agricultural building to Class C3 (3 no. dwellinghouses).*

*Prior Approval Required & Approved: 2 January 2018*

*3/11/1093/FP*

*Alterations to agricultural building for use as an indoor cricket school*

*Approved: 9 November 2012*

*3/11/1094/LB*

*Adaptation, alterations and extension of buildings for use as an indoor cricket school*

*Approved: 9 November 2012 subject to S.106*

*Legal Agreement: 25 May 2016*

*APP/J1915/C/09/2103165*

*Appeal against refusal of applications 3/08/2151/FP & 3/08/2152/LB with associated enforcement notices*

*Planning Appeals Dismissed: 3 February 2010*

*3/08/2151/FP & 3/08/2152/LB*

*Adaptation, alteration and extension of redundant agricultural buildings for use as an indoor cricket school*

*Refused: 25 February 2009*

#### **Enforcement History:**

*E/08/0021/A*

*The erection of an unauthorised industrial style link building and the unauthorised material change of use from agricultural to a cricket school.*

*Enforcement Notices served: 8 April 2009 - 3 Notices for Operational Development, Change of Use, and Listed Building Consent - The Listed Building Notice was quashed at appeal on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2010, but reissued on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2016 [Not complied with]*

Tharbies Farm buildings were bought by the cricket school owners in 2007. The indoor cricket school building was erected without planning permission or listed building consent. A retrospective planning application was subsequently refused, and in 2009 three Enforcement Notices were issued by EHDC for planning breaches. All three notices required the removal of the cricket school within six months which was not complied with.

The owners appealed the planning decisions and also the enforcement notices. The appeals were dismissed, but the Planning Inspector recognised that the indoor cricket centre was an important community asset and could be acceptable in the Green Belt. The remote location of the cricket facility was also discussed in the Inspectors decision letter; it was noted to be sustainably located, as alternative facilities were outside the District so would require further travel. There remained conflict with the design of the building and its impact upon the heritage assets, but it was agreed at the public enquiry that the Council would consider a further planning application that mitigated the outstanding design issues.

The subsequent planning application in 2011 included a series of work to the cricket school to soften its appearance and its impact upon the listed barn, and also a full renovation scheme of the listed barn to incorporate it within the cricket school. The planning application was approved in 2012, as was the listed building application, with renovation work to the listed building secured through a S.106 (agreed in 2016).

The remedial work was started by the cricket school owners. However, despite the cricket schools strong reputation, its remote location has led to constant underutilisation. As such, the cricket school has never generated the funds to complete the remedial works, including those to the listed barn.

The current applicants, Ashdown Developments Ltd, specialise in the restoration of period properties. They were approached by the Head Coach of the cricket school who was looking to relocate the cricket school to a more sustainable location to address the underutilisation. An agreement to relocate the cricket school has now been secured, subject to planning; and Ashdown Developments are seeking to re-purpose the heritage assets on site to secure their future.

### **Green Belt, Heritage & Sustainability**

The site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt and saved Policy GBR1 is relevant, which states that planning applications will be considered in line with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework. NPPF 2021 states in para 137 that the fundamental aim of the Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Para 138 goes on to say that the Green Belt serves 5 purposes:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas*
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another*
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment*
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns*
- e) to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land*

The NPPF makes it clear in para 149 that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be considered as inappropriate development. Para 147 states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The NPPF details some exceptions to this in para 149 along

with other appropriate forms of development within the Green Belt in para 150. Relevant to this application are the exceptions in Para 149 c & g along with Para 150 d & e:

*149. A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:*

*c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;*

*g) the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development*

*150. Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:*

*d) the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;*

*e) material changes in the use of land*

The submitted scheme fully satisfies the exceptions listed above - the proposal is a change of use to residential, encompassing the re-use/alteration/extension of buildings; or alternatively the complete redevelopment of previously developed land with enhanced openness. As such the proposal can be demonstrated to be appropriate development within the Green Belt. Furthermore, the scheme does not conflict with any of the 5 purposes of the Green Belt, whilst the removal of modern structures within the farmstead significantly improves openness, and enhances the setting of the heritage assets.

The footprint of the buildings is reduced by 60%, with mass reducing in the order of 50%. This enables the heritage assets to breathe and restores the former openness of the farmstead before the introduction of modern elements in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The landscape is designed with open frontages, internal courtyards and enclosed rear gardens to limit the introduction of residential paraphernalia to public view - any minor harm to openness introduced from residential use will be clearly outweighed by increased openness from the reduction in building mass.

If the Council still believe that there is conflict with any part of the Green Belt policy then we believe that any perceived harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations. In this case, we believe that a number of factors carry significant weight and that 'Very Special Circumstances' can be demonstrated:

1. The public benefit of the provision of the optimal viable use of all four listed/curtilage listed assets on site, three of which are currently vacant and in declining condition
2. The sensitive repair of the Grade II listed barn with no loss of historic fabric that will enable it to be removed from the Heritage at Risk Register

3. The removal of the unsympathetic cricket building that has been subject to enforcement proceedings for 13 years that are still unresolved.
4. An improvement to road safety and traffic sustainability by reducing traffic movements on single track rural lanes
5. The significant increase in openness to the Green Belt

NPPF para 190 states that LPA's should set out a strategy for the conservation of heritage assets, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. It is regrettable that the strategy to conserve the Grade II listed barn on site - through Enforcement Notices, the S.106, and the Heritage at Risk Register - has failed to achieve any purposeful heritage benefit in 13 years. The proposed scheme will not only place the listed heritage asset into optimal viable use but will also enhance its significance by restoring the farmstead to its historic plan. The proposed scheme goes further by restoring the three further curtilage listed buildings and bringing those into optimal viable use, improving the character and appearance of the site.

District Plan policies HA1, HA2 & HA7, for designated, non-designated heritage, and listed assets, also emphasises the requirement for the LPA to pursue opportunities that preserve or improve the historic environment. Policy HA1 IV also recognises the contribution to sustainable development that heritage conservation makes, as does the re-use of buildings with their embedded carbon footprint.

Policies DPS2 and TRA 1 are both overarching policies aimed to steer development to sustainable locations, to reduce the reliance on transport by vehicles. Neither policy forbids rural or isolated development, but it is the Councils desire is to promote development primarily under a hierarchy laid out in DPS2 emphasising urban areas and sustainable brownfield sites. The preamble to policy TRA1 in paragraph 18.2.3 of the District Plan quotes the NPPF: "different policies and measures will be required in different communities and opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary from urban to rural areas". Paragraph 18.2.3 qualifies this statement saying "Therefore, where new development is sited away from urban areas it is recognised that there may be reduced scope for passenger transport service and/or sustainable provision in some locations". The NPPF (2021) goes into more detail describing under paragraph 79 where rural housing should be allowed and the benefit it can provide; and then creates a list of exceptions under paragraph 80 where isolated homes can be approved. The proposed scheme satisfies two of the criteria under paragraph 80 so is not in conflict with national or local policy with regards to development in the countryside or transport sustainability:

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

*b) the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset;*

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



## Other Relevant Planning Issues

- Loss of Community Facilities – Policy CFLR8 of the adopted District Plan states that proposals that result in the loss of community uses will be refused unless (a) an assessment has been undertaken that shows that the facility is no longer needed in its current form; or (b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by enhanced provision in terms or quantity and/or quality in a suitable location.

The cricket school have a deal subject to planning to relocate to Jobbers Wood which is still in the Green Belt but in a far more sustainable location. If the planning at Jobbers Wood is refused then it can be demonstrated that the cricket school is not viable in its current location so would satisfy point (a). Alternatively, a fall-back position is that the outstanding enforcement notices could be complied with, removing the cricket school, to allow the heritage redevelopment of Tharbies, and bypassing Policy CFLR8.

- Archaeology – Tharbies Farm lies in an area that has evidence of occupation in Medieval, Roman, and Late Iron Age (Area of Archaeological Significance no. 309 East Herts District Plan). As the scheme is only for the re-use of buildings on existing footprints it is not anticipated that any archaeological remains will be disturbed.
- Species and Habitats – A bat survey accompanies the planning application to ensure that there are no adverse impacts on the protected species in accordance with policy NE3 of the adopted District Plan.
- Sustainable Construction, Energy & Water Use – The proposal is of the highest order of sustainable construction due to the re-use of buildings with their embedded carbon footprint.

The two historic timber barns will be insulated with natural breathable insulation (woodfibre/hemp/wool) all from sustainable sources. The limecrete floors will incorporate recycled foam glass aggregate as the insulating layer. The foundations and slab of the cricket school will also be re-used in the construction of the rear ranges, if practically possible. The steel from the demolition of modern structures will all be recycled. All lighting will be efficient LED lights. Water efficient taps and toilets will be used to be in compliance with the water consumption standard of 110 litres per person per day.

The conversions in the Dutch barn and stable block have been designed to be very energy efficient, superior to current building regs, and also heated by sustainable sources (heat pumps). The orientation of these four properties with limited windows facing south also allows them not to overheat in summer. Projecting bays at first floor in the Dutch Barn will also offer shading from the summer sun. All lights will be efficient LED lights. Water efficient taps and toilets will be used.

The proposal is therefore designed to meet the requirements of Local Plan Policies CC1, CC2 & WAT4.

- Biodiversity – The application will remove buildings/hardstanding and incorporate trees and soft landscaping to generate a significant net biodiversity gain.
- Affordable Housing – The application area is less than 0.5 hectares and less than 10 properties so only constitutes minor development. As such no affordable housing is required or proposed.
- Flood Risk - The site is located within Flood Zone 1 which supports this type of land use.

## **Conclusion**

The proposal is to demolish an unauthorised indoor cricket school and repurpose 4 heritage barns to residential use, creating six new dwellings. The scheme has evolved with conservation principles at its core. The proposed development will enhance the significance and setting of the heritage assets, and it has been demonstrated to be sustainable and appropriate development in the Green Belt.

In planning and heritage terms, the proposals now accord fully with the development plan and as such constitute sustainable development that should be approved without delay.

If the Council still believe that the proposal causes any harm to the Green Belt or the Historic Environment, there are a number of factors that constitute 'very special circumstances' or 'public benefit' that outweigh the harm caused and justify the development. Among these factors are bringing four heritage assets into optimal viable use; the sensitive repair of the Grade II listed barn that will enable it to be removed from the Heritage at Risk Register; the removal of the unauthorised and unsympathetic cricket building that has been subject to enforcement proceedings for 13 years that are still unresolved; an improvement in local road safety and transport sustainability; and a significant improvement in the openness of the Green Belt.