



# PLANNING SUPPORTING STATEMENT

on behalf of Common Farm Limited

Proposed replacement dwelling

on Ridgeway Farm, Witchford

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For and on behalf of Brown & Co.

*Brown & Co is a leading provider of agency, professional and consultancy services across the whole range of rural, commercial, residential, and agricultural markets.*

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Reference: 22/039693

## 1. INTRODUCTION

**1.1** This Planning Statement has been prepared by Brown & Co to support a full planning application submitted on behalf of Common Farm Limited for the erection of a replacement dwelling at Ridgeway Farm, Sedge Way, Witchford.

**1.2** The purpose of this statement is to set out the background to the applicant's proposals and the key planning issues raised by them. The statement is structured as follows:

- **Section 1:** introduction
- **Section 2:** describes the physical characteristics of the site and its surroundings;
- **Section 3:** outlines the proposed development;
- **Section 4:** describes the planning history of the site;
- **Section 5:** summarises the relevant national and local planning policy context;
- **Section 6:** provides a planning assessment of the key considerations raised by the proposal; and
- **Section 7:** sets out in brief our overall conclusions on the proposal.

**1.3** This Statement should be read in conjunction with the following application documents submitted as part of the application:

- Application form;
- Drawing No. 22.039693.001 Rev. C—Site Location Plan;
- Drawing No. 22.039693.002 Rev. C—Existing Site Plan;
- Drawing No. 22.039693.010—Existing Survey;
- Drawing No. 22.039693.102 Rev. C—Proposed Site Plan;
- Drawing No. 22.039693.106—Proposed Floor Plans;
- Drawing No. 22.039693.110—Proposed Elevations; and
- Ecological Impact Assessment by Green Environmental Consultants.

## 2. SITE & SURROUNDINGS

**2.1** The application site comprises the farmhouse at Ridgeway Farm, Witchford. The dwelling, located to the south eastern edge of the main farm yard, is orientated with principal elevation to the south west and rear garden to the north east. The dwelling is constructed of buff brick, under a slate roof. A chimney sits roughly centrally within the hipped roof.

**2.2** The main house is arranged over two storeys, with living spaces to the ground floor, and three bedrooms and a shower room to the first floor. A large single storey element is located to the rear of the dwelling, comprising an enclosed lean-to area utilised as a conservatory-cum-storage area, constructed of uPVC atop a brick plinth. A further brick built, dual-pitched, building is located beyond this providing a series of storage spaces with direct access from the lean-to.

**2.3** To the south west of the site is a former stable block, orientated with doors facing northwards. To the north east lays an agricultural building (which benefits from planning permission for conversion to a dwelling by way of Class Q permitted development rights), a further open-sided agricultural building lays beyond this to the north. Access to the site is by way of the existing drive from Sedge Way, and is shared with the wider yard.

**2.4** The farm is located to the north of Sedge Way, surrounded by arable fields and grazing pasture. Common Farm is located a short distance north

west along Sedge Way, and Sedgeway Business Park a short distance southwards. Witchford village centre is located circa. 1.3 kilometres south east, to the south of the A142. Ely city centre is located circa. 4 kilometres eastwards.



Figure 1: Site location highlighted in red (source: Google Maps)

### 3. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

**3.1** It is proposed to demolish the existing dwelling and erect a replacement. The proposed new dwelling would be repositioned within the site so as to move it away from the trees on site and the adjacent power lines, and to take better advantage of views over the surrounding fields to Ely.

**3.2** The proposed dwelling would be positioned further to the north east compared with the existing, and orientated on a more pronounced north-east to south-west axis. It would be L-shaped in form, with projecting gable to the north eastern corner. Constructed of buff brick, with slate roof, the dwelling would emulate traditional farmhouse forms and detailing, including brick plinth and oak canopy porch.

**3.3** The dwelling would provide main habitable accommodation at ground floor and four bedrooms at first floor. The eaves height would be the same as the existing, however it is proposed to increase the ridge height by a small amount (38cm) in order to provide enhanced head height. Overall, the floor area would be circa. 29% larger than the current dwelling, providing an additional 41.4 squared metres.

**3.4** Access to the site would be by way of the existing driveway from Sedge Way. Parking would be provided to the front of the dwelling, with sufficient space for vehicles to turn. Landscaping would be provided throughout, including new mixed

native species planting, and fencing to demarcate site boundaries.



Figure 2—Proposed site layout (Drawing No. 22.039693.102 Rev. C)

## 4. PLANNING HISTORY

**4.1** Planning permission for the erection of a replacement dwelling was sought in 2022, however the application was subsequently withdrawn due to concerns over the scale of the existing residential curtilage and associated drawing of the red line (planning application reference 22/01123/FUL).

**4.2** This application has sought to address those concerns, namely through a reduction in the red line boundary, to more closely correspond with OS map data, and the subsequent repositioning of the proposed dwelling. The overall scale and appearance of the proposed dwelling has remained the same.

**4.3** Planning permission has been obtained for the conversion of the adjacent former machinery store to a single dwelling by way of Class Q permitted development rights (LPA Reference 22/00745/ARN).

**4.4** The approved dwelling would be orientated with principal elevation to the south, and main windows and doors to that and the northern elevation. The windows and doors to the eastern elevation would serve a utility room, kitchen, bedroom and associated en-suite. The dwelling would be served by way of the access for the existing dwelling.

## 5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

**5.1** Planning law requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan is, therefore, the starting point for the assessment of all planning proposals.

**5.2** The Government's planning policies, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), are also a significant material consideration in deciding planning applications.

### Development plan policies

**5.3** For the purposes of this application, the Development Plan currently comprises the:

- East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 (the 'Local Plan');
- Second Review of the Local Plan (2020); and
- Witchford Neighbourhood Plan 2019–2031 (2020).

**5.4** During 2016-2017 the Council prepared a draft new Local Plan for the period 2016-2036. The Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for examination in February 2018. Following the examination of the Local Plan and receipt of the Inspector's suggested modifications, the Council withdrew the Plan in February 2019. As a result,

the 2015 Local Plan remains the adopted development plan for the District. Policies of relevance are set out in the box overleaf.

### Emerging policy

**5.5** East Cambridgeshire District Council is currently undertaking a Single Issue Local Plan Review, focussing solely upon Policy GROWTH1 and housing requirement in the district. The Review was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for Examination in July 2022.

### National Planning Policy Framework

**5.6** The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies and how these are expected to be applied, and advises that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Three objectives of sustainable development are identified: economic, social and environmental.

**5.7** The economic objective includes ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth. The social objective includes supporting healthy communities by creating high quality environments with accessible local services. The environmental objective includes protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environments.

**5.8** At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in

### Local Plan policies

**Policy GROWTH 2: Locational strategy**—which states that outside of development envelopes development will be strictly controlled and limited to a number of defined exceptions, including where it involves the extension and replacement of dwellings in the countryside.

**Policy GROWTH 5: Presumption in favour of sustainable development** - which states that planning application which accord with policies should be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

**Policy HOU8: Extension and replacement of dwellings in the countryside**—which states that proposals will be supported where they are in keeping with the character and appearance of the dwelling and its surroundings, and would not result in adverse impacts.

**Policy ENV1: Landscape and settlement character**—which requires development to be sensitive to the surrounding landscape character and create positive relationships.

**Policy ENV2: Design**—which states that development should be designed to a high standard and should have proper regard to local context.

**Policy ENV4: Energy and water efficiency and renewable energy in construction**—which states that development should aim for reduced or net zero carbon, and utilise sustainable construction methods.

**Policy ENV7: Biodiversity and geology**—which requires development to protect and conserve biodiversity and maximise opportunities for enhancement.

**Policy EVN8: Flood risk**—which requires all development to contribute to overall flood reduction.

**Policy ENV9: Pollution**—which requires development to minimise emissions and other forms of pollution.

**Policy COM7: Transport Impact**—which requires development to provide safe access to the highway.

**Policy COM8: Parking provision**—which states that development should provide adequate levels of car and bicycle parking.

### Neighbourhood Plan policies

**Policy WNP SS1: A spatial strategy for Witchford**—which states that outside the development envelope development will be restricted to a small number of exceptions.

**Policy WNP LC1: Landscape and settlement character**—which requires development to be sensitive to local character as set out within the Witchford Landscape Appraisal.

**Policy WNP GI3: Development and biodiversity**—which states that development should avoid impacts and provide net gains .

**Policy WNP H3: Housing design**—which requires development to achieve high quality design and a good standard of amenity, and should complement and enhance local distinctiveness.

favour of sustainable development. For decision-taking, the presumption in favour means approving developments that accord with the development plan without delay, and where there are no relevant development plan policies or the most important policies for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, or policies in the Framework to protect areas or assets of particular importance provide a clear reason for refusing an application.

**5.9** Other guiding principles set out in the NPPF of particular note in relation to the development proposed include that planning should:

- conserve the natural environment and heritage assets;
- achieve well-designed places; and
- Support the transition to a low carbon future.

### **National Planning Practice Guidance**

**5.10** The Government's Planning Practice Guidance provides a web-based resource of national planning guidance covering a wide range of topics. Of particular relevance to this application is the guidance set in the sections of the NPPG relating to design, and the natural environment.

### Principle of development

**6.1** The application site comprises a dwelling and associated residential curtilage at Ridgeway Farm. Located to the north of Sedge Way, it is separated from the main built form of Witchford and lays outside of the defined development envelope for the village.

**6.2** Local Plan Policy GROWTH2, and Neighbourhood Plan Policy SS1, state that outside of the defined settlement envelopes, development is to be strictly controlled in order to protect the countryside and the setting of settlements. Development is therefore limited by the former to a defined number of exceptions, including the erection of replacement dwellings, where there would be no significant adverse impacts upon the character of the countryside and other policies are satisfied.

**6.3** Local Plan Policy HOU8 sets out those criteria whereby proposals for the erection of a replacement dwelling would be considered acceptable, including:

- The replacement dwelling is of a scale and design which is sensitive to its countryside setting, with its height being similar to that of the original dwelling. If an alternative height is proposed, the applicant will be expected to demonstrate that the scheme exhibits exceptionally high quality of design and

enhances the character and appearance of the locality;

- The proposal is within the existing curtilage;
- The residential use of the dwelling has not been abandoned;
- Proposals accord with Policy ENV 2 on design and other relevant Local Plan policies; and
- Proposals have regard to maximising carbon neutrality.

**6.4** The proposed dwelling has been carefully designed so as to reflect the existing dwelling, and traditional farmhouse forms found in the area. Materials would be in keeping with the existing dwelling, and local vernacular. Though the proposed dwelling would be of larger scale than the existing, this would not represent a significant increase, totalling 41.4 squared metres (circa. 29%).

**6.5** At present the existing dwelling has a large ground floor area as a result of the adjoining lean-to and outbuildings, which represent an unsympathetic addition to the main dwelling. However, the main habitable rooms are cramped and poorly laid out, with compact bedrooms and bathroom provided at first floor, likely as the result of the subdivision of two much larger rooms. The proposed dwelling would provide a more a more

balanced and useable floor area, more suited to modern day living and in keeping with modern space standards.

**6.6** The eaves height of the replacement dwelling would be the same as the existing, but the ridge height would be increased slightly in order to provide additional space at first floor. The increase would be a small at 380mm, and would not significantly increase the prominence of the dwelling. The roof would retain a shallow pitch, thereby reducing its prominence and ensuring that the dwelling would not have a top-heavy appearance.

**6.7** It is proposed to relocate and reorientate the dwelling within the plot, so as to provide enhanced separation from the trees, hedging, and power line to the southern boundary, as well as allowing for enhanced views over the surrounding fields. Though this would result in the dwelling being positioned largely outside of the footprint of the existing, it would be located within the existing curtilage. As such, it would not encroach in to the open countryside beyond. The dwelling would also be well screened by existing vegetation to the southern and western boundaries, and by the existing buildings to the north west.

**6.8** Consequently, views of the proposed dwelling would largely be achievable only from the north and east, where it would be viewed in the context of the



other buildings within the wider site.

**6.9** The dwelling is currently empty, and has been for a short period of time, however it is clear that the residential use has not been abandoned and that it has not been the applicant's intention to do so. Indeed, the applicant is still paying Council Tax for the property, and has undertaken significant work across the site to clear it following its purchase, The building is in reasonable condition, and is capable of being occupied without the need for significant work.

**6.10** As discussed below, it is considered that the proposed dwelling would accord with the provisions of Local Plan Policy ENV2, and all other relevant local and neighbourhood plan policies. The proposed dwelling would be constructed using sustainable methods, ensuring high levels of energy efficiency, and incorporating renewable energy sources. As such it would represent a significant improvement compared with the existing.

**6.11** Overall, the proposals would deliver a dwelling of high quality design, sensitive to the countryside setting. It is therefore considered that the proposed development would accord with the provisions of Local Plan Policies GROWTH2, HOU8, and ENV4, and Neighbourhood Plan Policy WNP SS1. As such, in accordance with the provisions of Local Plan Policy GROWTH5 the application should be approved without delay.

## Effects on local character

**6.12** It is a core principle of the NPPF that planning should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Consistent with this, Local Plan Policy ENV1, and Neighbourhood Plan Policy WNP LC1 require new development to be sympathetic to the landscape character of its surroundings, with consideration given to the Witchford Landscape Appraisal. Careful consideration has been given therefore to the likely effects of the development on local character.

**6.13** The application site is located within the West Fen Landscape Character Area, as defined within the Witchford Landscape Appraisal (2018). Located to the north of the village, the area is characterised by low lying open agricultural land, views to surrounding landscapes, isolated farmhouses, and exceptional views to Ely Cathedral along West Fen Road.

**6.14** Key sensitivities of the area are noted as the memorable views of Ely Cathedral, a rising surrounding landform which forms an important landscape backdrop, and a need to retain the rural character of Sedge Way through protection of pastures, hedgerows, and rural buildings and features.

**6.15** The proposed development would create a replacement dwelling within the curtilage of the existing. Though of a larger scale and height, and re-located and re-orientated within the site, the proposed dwelling would not be significantly larger, or appear more prominent or dominant within the local landscape. Indeed, the proposed dwelling would be contained entirely within the existing residential curtilage and would not encroach in to the open countryside beyond.

**6.16** The application site is well screened from wider views to the south by existing boundary vegetation, and the hedging and trees along Sedge Way. To the west, the application site is screened by way of the existing buildings, and boundary hedging and trees present beyond. As such, views of the site are obtainable only from the north and would be filtered by vegetation to the surrounding field boundaries.

**6.17** A public right of way (FP12) traverses the adjacent fields to the north and west. The proposed development would be visible to those utilising the footpath, however the existing dwelling is currently visible. The proposed replacement dwelling would not be significantly larger or taller, or positioned more prominently within the site, it would also be viewed in the context of the surrounding buildings. Given the intervening distance, and vegetation, it is not considered that the proposals would appear prominent or dominant within wider

landscape views there, and would not adversely impact upon the wider rural landscape.

**6.18** The proposed dwelling would be of traditional appearance, constructed of buff brick and slate. A mix of traditional and modern detailing, including brick plinth, bay window, chimney, oak porch, and timber cladding would create visual interest and break up the massing of the building. It has been sensitively designed so as to emulate the character and appearance of isolated farmhouses present in the surrounding area.

**6.19** The proposed position within the site would allow for enhanced views over the surrounding landscape, and to Ely Cathedral, whilst ensuring that it would not become a prominent feature. It would further allow for enhanced separation from the boundary vegetation along Sedge Way, so as to protect root and canopy spreads, and conserve the rural character of the road.

**6.20** Overall, the proposed development would enhance the character and appearance of the site through high quality, sensitive design, and the use of vernacular materials to create a dwelling which would reflect local rural forms whilst providing enhanced living space in accordance with modern standards.

**6.21** The proposals would therefore comply with the provisions of Local Plan Policies GROWTH2, HOU8,

ENV1, ENV2, Neighbourhood Plan Policies WNP LC1 and WNP H3, and Section 15 of the NPPF.

### Amenity

**6.22** The proposed development has been designed so as to ensure that future residents of the dwelling, and that recently approved to the west, would be afforded suitable private amenity. The distance of separation, orientation, and scale of the proposed dwelling would prevent adverse overshadowing or overbearing impacts from arising for the residents of either dwelling.

**6.23** The orientation, distance of separation, and proposed arrangement of windows would prevent issues of overlooking arising. The proposed dwelling would be afforded suitable private amenity space commensurate with its size. The proposed L-shaped form would effectively create a private courtyard to the rear of the dwelling, screened from wider views.

**6.24** Access to the dwelling would be shared with that for the adjacent dwelling, however as the proposals are for the erection of a replacement dwelling they would not result in an increase in traffic movements, or associated noise. Suitable separation would be provided between the parking and turning areas for each dwelling, and appropriate boundary treatments installed so as to further screen and separate the proposed

development.

**6.25** Consequently, it is considered that in these respects, the proposal would accord with Local Plan Policies HOU8 and ENV2, Neighbourhood Plan Policy WNP H3, and paragraph 130 of the NPPF.

### Access

**6.26** It is proposed to utilise the existing access to the site, shared with the recently approved dwelling to the west, from Sedge Way to the south. The access is wide enough to allow for two vehicles to pass, and there is suitable visibility in either direction along Sedge Way.

**6.27** Once past the Sedge Way Business Park, the road is single width for the entirety of the northern section. This section of the road serves only the existing dwelling, that recently approved to the west, and the neighbouring Common Farm, as such it is not subject to a significant number of traffic movements throughout the day.

**6.28** The proposed development would replace the existing dwelling, and so would not result in an increase in development in the area, or intensification of associated traffic. There are a number of informal passing spaces along Sedge Way, and the alignment is such that there is good visibility along its entirety. As such it is not considered that the proposed development would result in adverse impacts upon highway safety.



**6.29** The proposed dwelling would be afforded with suitable space for parking and manoeuvring, so as to ensure that vehicles could enter and egress in forward gear. Though residents of the proposed dwelling would be reliant upon private vehicles to access local services and facilities, this would be case with the existing dwelling too.

**6.30** It is therefore considered that safe and suitable access to the development could be achieved. The proposal would thus comply with Local Plan Policies COM7 and COM08, and Section 9 of the NPPF.

### Flood Risk

**6.31** The application site falls within Flood Zone 1 and is, therefore, at low risk of fluvial flooding. A large part of the site is shown to be at low risk of surface water flooding on the Environment Agency’s Flood Risk maps. The existing dwelling is located within the identified area, there are no other suitable locations for the proposed replacement dwelling without locating it outside of the existing residential curtilage, encroaching in to the open countryside, or adversely impacting upon the amenity of the neighbouring dwelling.

**6.32** It is considered that the risk could be mitigated and managed through flood resilient design measures, and the incorporation of sustainable drainage features. The proposed

development would replace the existing dwelling, and would not substantially increase the amount of built form at the site. A suitable drainage scheme could be secured through a suitably worded planning condition. On this basis, there would be no conflict therefore with Local Plan Policy ENV8, or Section 14 of the NPPF.

### Ecology

**6.33** The application is supported by, and should be read alongside, an Ecological Impact Assessment by Green Environmental Consultants. The report confirms that no evidence of protected or notable species were found, that the existing dwelling has low bat roost potential, and that habitats across the site were generally poor.

**6.34** It is therefore concluded that the proposed development would not result in adverse impacts upon protected species, or habitats. It is recommended that the proposed scheme incorporates bird and bat boxes in order to enhance biodiversity value. The applicant would be happy to introduce such measures, together with additional mixed native species planting to provide further enhancement and habitat connectivity.

**6.35** The proposed development would therefore comply with the provisions of Local Plan Policy ENV7, Neighbourhood Plan Policy WNP GI3, and Section 15 of the NPPF.



## 7. CONCLUSIONS

**7.1** Planning permission is sought for the erection of a replacement dwelling at Ridgeway Farm, Witchford. Planning policies generally support the principle of such development in the countryside where the development would not result in adverse impacts.

**7.2** The proposed dwelling has been carefully designed so as to reflect the character and appearance of the area, and to ensure that it would not become prominent within the landscape. The building would be contained within the existing curtilage, and would therefore not encroach in to the open countryside beyond. As a replacement dwelling, the building would broadly reflect the existing form present at site, and would be viewed in the context of the surrounding buildings.

**7.3** The scheme has been designed so as to prevent adverse amenity impacts arising. Access to the site would be by way of the existing, and suitable space would be provided for parking and turning vehicles. The site is generally of low ecological value, bird and bat boxes would be provided in order to secure biodiversity enhancements. Surface water flood risk would be addressed through a suitably designed sustainable drainage system.

**7.5** For these reasons, and those as set out above, the proposed development is considered to constitute sustainable development, for which the presumption in favour applies, and planning permission should be granted without delay.