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# Planning Statement

Change Of Use from two barns to holiday lets (Use Class C1). Restorative works to barns.

on behalf of

Katie Worrall

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Hixham Hall, Hixham Road, Furneux, Pelham Buntinford

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This Planning Statement has been prepared by Andrew Martin – Planning (AM-P) on behalf of Katie Worrall. This planning application seeks planning permission for a change of use from two storage barns (J and K) to holiday lets (Use Class C1). Proposals also include restorative works to the barns and the insertion of new and enlarged windows, rooflights and external doors. Proposals are part of a farm diversification project. The barns form part of a wider farmstead at Hixham Hall, Hixham Road, Furneux Pelham.
- 1.2. The application is submitted with the following supporting plans and documents:
- Application Forms (including Landowner Certificate);
  - Site Location Plan (Drawing Ref: HH-PL-21);
  - Existing Block Plan (Drawing Ref: HH-PL-22);
  - Proposed Block Plan (Drawing Ref: HH-PL-23);
  - Barn K existing ground floor plan and roof plans (Drawing Ref: HH-PL-27);
  - Barn J existing ground floor plan and roof plans (Drawing Ref: HH-PL-26);
  - Barn K existing ground floor plan, roof and ceiling plans with demolition (Drawing Ref: HH-PL-29);
  - Barn J existing ground floor plan, roof and ceiling plans with demolition (Drawing Ref: HH-PL-28);
  - Barn J existing elevations (Drawing Ref: HH-PL-30);
  - Barn K existing elevations (Drawing Ref: HH-PL-31);
  - Barn K proposed ground floor, first floor and roof plans (Drawing Ref: HH-PL-33);
  - Barn J proposed ground floor and roof plans (Drawing Ref: HH-PL-32);
  - Barn J proposed elevations (Drawing Refs: HH-PL-34);
  - Barn K proposed elevations (Drawing Refs: HH-PL-35);
  - Barn J existing and proposed sections – coloured (Drawing Refs: HH-PL-36);
  - Barn K existing and proposed sections – coloured (Drawing Refs: HH-PL-37);
  - Barn J proposed elevations – coloured (Drawing Refs: HH-PL-38);
  - Barn K proposed elevations – coloured (Drawing Refs: HH-PL-39);
  - Planning Statement (Prepared by Andrew Martin Planning);
  - Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Prepared by Temple);
  - East Herts Biodiversity Questionnaire;
  - Great Crested Newts and Bat Survey and Assessment (Prepared by Babec Ltd); and
  - Design and Access and Heritage Statement (Prepared by Abi Ford Design).



### THE APPLICATION SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 1.3 Hixham Hall is a farmstead which is located approximately 1.2 miles south east of Furneux Pelham (Drawing Ref: HH-PL-21) on the south side of Hixham Road. The site is located in within a beautiful rural historic setting, in the heart of the Hertfordshire countryside.
- 1.4 The planning application relates specifically to barns J and K, which form part of a wider farmstead. To the immediate south of the barns is Hixham Hall farmhouse. Hixham Hall farmhouse is Grade II listed (List Entry Number: 1101898) and dates from the 18th century range with 19th century additions. The house is brick and timber with a tiled roof and central gutter. To the east are a Grade II listed barn (List Entry: 1176523) and granary (List Entry: 1101899), both Grade II listed (labelled buildings: D and E). The oldest barns (labelled buildings: A, E, F, G, H, I, J, K) date from the 17th century and are timber framed and weather-boarded, with half-hipped tiled roofs and brick plinths. Larger, newer barns (labeled buildings: B, C, D) sit at the end of the yard closest to the lane. These more recent additions and are constructed out of steel frames and concrete blockwork with corrugated metal cladding and roofs.
- 1.5 With specific reference to barns J and K, which the application directly relates, these are not individually listed but are curtilage listed. With barn I and Hixham Hall farmhouse the built form creates a small courtyard. The buildings are not currently used for agricultural purposes and have not been used for such purposes in living memory. Both barns are currently used for storage.
- 1.6 Hixham Hall is a working farm. The wider farm is 317 ha in size and is mainly farmed for arable crops.
- 1.7 The proposed change of use to holiday lets is part of a diversification of the farm's business. As will be set out, in order to secure the farms long term future viability it needs to diversify the uses on the site to generate other sources of income.
- 1.8 In planning terms, the site is located in an Area Beyond the Green Belt. It is also located within an Area of Archeological Significance. Located within close proximity of the site is a Wildlife Site – Meadow South of Hixham Hall. The site is located within Flood Zone 1.
- 1.9 The site is well connected to the PROW and cycle network. Paths 18 and 19 run through the farm and connect into the wider network which links the site to the surrounding towns and villages.

### THE NEED FOR FARM DIVERSIFICATION

- 1.10 Hixham Hall is part of a 317 ha farm including 79 ha of which is owned and 237 ha of which is rented. Andrew Collins was a tenant farmer and worked tirelessly to enable the purchase of the farm at Hixham



Hall. The farm business therefore has to cover rent on the proportion of the rented land and mortgage costs on the owned land.

- 1.11 In the recent past the farm has undergone substantial change in response to turbulent and uncertain economic environment. Tough cost cutting measures have been taken including selling machinery and having to make redundancies to reduce fixed overhead costs. In addition, the farm now employs an agricultural contractor to perform farming operations on a variable cost basis having reduced the fixed costs. Land has also been sold in order to reduce borrowing and interest costs and set the business up to be more resilient. Every individual cost has been scrutinised in an effort to reduce overall costs.
- 1.12 The UK farming, along with most others industries in the UK, has facing an uncertain future with significant challenges ahead. In particular, due to the fluctuating commodity prices, which includes the wheat price rising and quickly falling and continued increases in the costs of all significant agricultural inputs such as fertiliser, fuel and chemicals the farm's financial pressures are only likely to become more challenging. For example, liquid fertiliser was approximately £225 per tonne in 2021 but is now approximately £695 per tonne, which has resulted in a staggering cashflow impact per load of fertiliser from approximately £6,600 to now approximately £20,000. To further compound problems, Brexit has meant that farm subsidies called the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) are currently being phased out. The farm's BPS receipt in 2020 was approximately £78k. By 2028 this subsidy will be £0. This income often makes the difference between profit and loss. Therefore, the farm needs other sources of income to cover rising costs and reduction in subsidies. Sources of income are available through Government environmental schemes, but the value of these are a fraction of the current BPS and is often only enough to cover the costs associated with the scheme having very little impact on cashflow / profitability. Given this, farm diversification is the only real option to generate additional income and ensure the farm's future financial viability.
- 1.13 East Hertfordshire's is a great place to visit. It is located less than an hour's journey from central London and Cambridge and within half an hour of Stansted Airport. Within the district there are five historic towns, with markets and it contains stunning countryside, in which Hixham Hall is located. The district includes an abundance of wildlife and offer excellent cycling and walking routes in the area. There are a number of good quality pubs and restaurants for tourism to visit.
- 1.14 In economic terms, tourism in East Herts attracted 4.25 million visits and brought £275m to the district according to latest figures. Independent research commissioned by Visit Herts revealed an impressive picture across the county, with strong visitor numbers, a high volume of day trips and overnight stays. East Herts had 4m day trips and 250,000 longer visits in 2017. The average length of longer visits was 5.5 days. Tourism supports 5,164 jobs in the district, with the industry now accounting for 7% of East Herts' total employment.



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- 1.15 With the increase in staycations during Covid and the likelihood that this will continue as a lower cost alternative to foreign holidays during the cost of living crisis and increased awareness of the environmental impact of air travel, given that Hixham Hall is located in the heart of the beautiful East Herts countryside, it is obvious that the farm can offer tourist accommodation as part of a diversification of uses to capitalise on its unique location.



**2.0 PLANNING HISTORY**

2.1. A review of the planning history for the site identified the following relevant applications:

Application Ref	Proposal	Decision
3/22/2439/LBC	Change of use from 2 barns to residential dwelling houses. Restorative works to barns. Insertion of windows, rooflights and external doors. Construction of first floor to 1 barn.	Approved
3/22/2438/FUL	Change of use from 2 barns to residential dwelling houses. Restorative works to barns. Insertion of windows, rooflights and external doors. Construction of first floor to 1 barn.	Refused
3/22/0663/FUL	Change of use and conversion of barn to one four bedroom dwelling. Insertion of new windows, roof lights and openings.	Approved with conditions
3/22/0665/LBC	Change of use and conversion of barn to one four bedroom dwelling. Insertion of new windows, roof lights and openings.	Approved with conditions
3/18/0967/AGPN	Proposed agricultural building: Length 60.0 metres, Breadth 15.0 metres, Eaves height 7.0, Ridge height 8.0 metres.	Prior Approval Not Required



### 3.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts, then determination must be made in accordance with the plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 3.2 In this case the development plan comprises development management policies in the adopted East Harts Local Plan (2018).

#### NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 3.3 Revised in July 2021, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, as set out in paragraph 7.
- 3.4 Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives as identified in paragraph 8. These are economic, social and environmental. These dimensions set out the following roles for the planning system to perform:
- 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;
  - 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
  - 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.
- 3.5 Paragraph 11 of the NPPF states that plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This means, for decision taking, approving development proposals that





accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or, where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole. Footnote 8 confirms that policies are rendered out-of-date where the local authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply (plus appropriate buffer) of deliverable housing sites or where housing delivery has fallen below 75% of the housing requirement over the last three years.

- 3.6 Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way and decision makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development, as set out in paragraph 38.
- 3.7 Paragraph 81 states that decisions should help 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, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.
- 3.8 Paragraph 84, seeks to specifically support a prosperous rural economy. It specially states that planning 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
- 3.9 Paragraph 85 states that planning policies and 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. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport).
- 3.10 Whilst assessing specific applications for development, paragraph 110 states that it should be ensured that:
- a) appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes can be – or have been – taken up, given the type of development and its location;
  - b) safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users;



- c) the design of streets, parking areas, other transport elements and the content of associated standards reflects current national guidance, including the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code; and
  - d) any significant impacts from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree.
- 3.11 Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe, in accordance with paragraph 111.
- 3.12 Paragraph 126 states “good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people”.
- 3.13 Paragraph 167 states that when determining any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere. Where appropriate, applications should be supported by a site-specific flood-risk assessment.
- 3.14 Planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural local environment, in accordance with paragraph 170. This should be done by minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures; and preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability.
- 3.15 Paragraph 194 states that local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected and require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation, where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest. Adequate site investigation information prepared by a competent person should inform these assessments.
- 3.16 Paragraph 199 states that when considering the impact of a Proposed Development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Paragraph 202 states that “Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a



designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use”.

### EAST HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT PLAN

- 3.17 The East Hertfordshire District Plan was adopted in October 2018. The most relevant policies in the Local Plan relating to the proposed development are set out.
- 3.18 The Council seeks to support a vibrant local economy that responds to the needs of businesses. The Local Plan notes the importance of recognising and responding to the rural economy. The Local Plan’s vision includes emphasis on sustainable economic development to meet employment needs both within the towns and in the rural areas. The vision recognises the importance of supporting the requirements of existing and new businesses, including agricultural businesses, rural crafts and skills. It also notes the need to protect and enhance the district’s rich heritage of historic buildings.
- 3.19 A key Strategic Objective is to foster entrepreneurial endeavor through supporting rural diversification.
- 3.20 Policy INT1 III. advises that where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision then the Council will grant permission unless material considerations indicate otherwise, taking into account whether a) any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole; or b) specific policies in the NPPF indicate that development should be restricted.
- 3.21 Policy DPS2 outlines a hierarchy of development locations which ensures that development takes place in the most sustainable locations.
- 3.22 Policy TRA1 advises that development proposals should primarily be located in places which enable sustainable journeys to be made to key services and facilities. Policy TRA2 states that development proposals should ensure that safe and suitable access can be achieved for all users. Policy TRA3 states that vehicle parking provision associated with development proposals will be assessed on a site-specific basis and should take into account the provisions of the District Council’s currently adopted Supplementary Planning Document ‘Vehicle Parking Provision at New Development’.
- 3.23 The Local Plan states that rural areas are highly valued by residents and visitors alike. In accordance with policy GBR 2, in order to maintain the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt, the following types of development will be permitted, provided that they are compatible with the character and appearance of the rural area:



- (a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- (b) facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, including equine development in accordance with CFLR6 (Equine Development), and for cemeteries;
- (c) new employment generating uses where they are sustainably located, in accordance with Policy ED2 (Rural Economy);
- (d) the replacement, extension or alteration of a building, provided the size, scale, mass, form, siting, design and materials of construction are appropriate to the character, appearance and setting of the site and/or surrounding areas;
- (e) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings) in sustainable locations, where appropriate to the character, appearance and setting of the site and/or surrounding area;
- (f) rural exception housing in accordance with Policy HOU4 (Rural Exception Affordable Housing Sites);
- (g) accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in accordance with Policy HOU9 (Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople) or Non-Nomadic Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, in accordance with Policy HOU10 (New Park Home Sites for Non-Nomadic Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople);
- (h) development identified in an adopted Neighbourhood Plan.

3.24 The Local Plan recognises that the district has the most significant rural economic profile in the county, with more than 400 agricultural holdings occupying more than 34,000 hectares. It also notes that many of these businesses have diversified and have a second income stream. The Local Plan highlights that some diversification schemes, such as those that create visitor attractions, result in the intensification of the rural area can also act as a means of connecting visitors to the countryside, thereby supporting rural jobs and skills. Policy ED2 supports economic growth in rural areas and supports the sustainable growth and expansion of existing businesses in the rural areas. Such proposals will be supported in principle where they are appropriately and sustainably located and do not conflict with other policies within this Plan.

- I. Proposals that consist of a change of use of agricultural or employment generating use in the rural area to other employment generating uses will be supported in principle subject to other policies within this Plan.
- II. Where the proposal results in the loss of an agricultural or employment use in a rural area or a change of use to a non-employment generating use, evidence will be required to demonstrate that:



- (a) the current agricultural or employment use is no longer needed or viable;
- (b) that improvements to the site/premises would not make alternative employment generating uses viable;
- (c) the retention of the employment generating use is unable to be facilitated by the partial conversion to a non-employment generating use;
- (d) the building is of permanent and substantial construction.

III. Proposals for the diversification of farms will be supported in principle where:

- (a) they secure the viability of the agricultural practice of the farm;
- (b) they contribute to the maintenance of biodiversity or landscape interests;
- (c) they support the engagement of communities with land management, food production and rural crafts and the development of local produce markets;
- (d) the diversification remains a subsidiary of the overall agricultural activity of the holding;
- (e) any resultant retail or commercial use does not have an adverse impact on the viability of existing nearby rural or village shops or community facilities.

3.25 The Local Plan states that the tourism industry and visitors to the district play a vital role in the East Herts economy. It notes that tourism in East Herts is a by-product of the high quality environment of its countryside. It is therefore important that the provision of facilities which cater for the needs of visitors do not detract or harm the very environment that attracts them. Policy ED5 states that

- I. New tourism enterprises and extensions to existing tourism enterprises will be supported in principle where the facility meets identified needs which are not met by existing facilities, are appropriately located and do not conflict with other policies within this Plan.

3.26 Policy DES4 – Design of Development, part I requires that all development proposals, including alternations and extensions to existing buildings, must be of a high standard of design and layout to reflect and promote local distinctiveness. In particular proposals need to respecting or improving upon the character of the site and the surrounding area, in terms of its scale, height, massing (volume, shape), orientation, siting, layout, density, building materials (colour, texture), landscaping, environmental assets, and design features, having due regard to the design opportunities and constraints of a site.

3.27 Policy HA1 of the District Plan outlines that development proposals should preserve and enhance the historic environment and that development which would lead to substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset will not be permitted unless public benefits outweigh the harm. Policy HA7 relates to listed buildings and outlines that the Council will seek opportunities to sustain and enhance the



significance of listed buildings and that proposals that affect the setting of a listed building will only be permitted where the setting of the building is preserved.

- 3.28 Policy CC1 and CC2 seeks that all new developments should demonstrate how carbon dioxide emissions will be minimised across the development site, taking account of all levels of the energy hierarchy. Achieving standards above and beyond the requirements of Building Regulations is encouraged.
- 3.29 Policies NE2 and NE3 of the District Plan relate to biodiversity. These policies require that a net gain in biodiversity is provided, taking into account a biodiversity metric, and to take into account the mitigation hierarchy of avoidance, mitigation and compensation as set out in the NPPF. Proposals are required to demonstrate how they improve biodiversity value of the site.



## 4.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1. The proposed development seeks a change of use of barns J and K to self-catered holiday lets (Use Class C1) as part of a diversification of uses on the farm. Proposals include restorative works to barns, the insertion of windows, rooflights and external doors. Proposals in relation to barn K include the construction of a new internal first floor.
- 4.2. Proposals include the sensitive restoration of the barns and seeks to retain the existing aesthetic. The timber cladding and roof tiles will be renovated and replaced where required. The historic fabric will be repaired with suitable materials using traditional techniques. Doors will be retained and reused as external shutters.
- 4.3. Barn J is designed as a 2 no. bed single storey holiday home with a central entrance hall. The front entrance is located on the northern elevation, with the insertion of a new glazed door with stepped access. The internal areas include a cloakroom, utility and a passageway leading to two double bedrooms and the bathroom in the eastern wing of the property. In the western wing is an open plan room accommodating a kitchen-diner and living area, including all the necessary facilities be enable occupants to be self-catered (Drawing Ref: HH-PL-32). The vaulted ceiling and roof trusses will be retained and exposed. New and enlarged windows are proposed in front, rear and eastern elevations to improve daylight in internal areas. Timbers from an existing partition will be retained to create a screen between the kitchen-diner and living area. Glazed double doors in the western elevation from the living room lead directly to an external communal amenity patio area (Drawing Refs: HH-PL-34).
- 4.4. Barn K is designed as a 2no. bed two storey holiday home. The west elevation becomes the front entrance, with an enlarged glazed opening into a tall space with vaulted ceiling and a staircase. On the ground floor, the internal areas include an open-plan room accommodating a kitchen-diner (including all the necessary facilities be enable occupants to be self-catered) and living area, utility room and downstairs toilet. Three new roof lights and new window on flanking elevations provide improved internal daylight. On the first floor, the staircase leads up to two double bedrooms and a bathroom. This floor is created by removing the non-original roof structure and replacing it with triangular structural bracing timbers (Drawing Ref: HH-PL-33). Daylight and views are provided upstairs by new and enlarged windows on the flanking elevations. A new glazed door is located on the northern elevation which leads to a communal amenity patio area (Drawing Refs: HH-PL-35).
- 4.5. The courtyard area between barns K, J, I and Hixham Hall also provide further external shared/communal amenity space for occupants of both barns.



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- 4.6. Barns J and K will be accessed by a new driveway that leads to two separate parking areas relating to each holiday home. This will ensure that vehicular access will be separate to the main farm. Each holiday home will be provided with two parking spaces. Proposals include the provision for electric charging points. Each holiday home will be provided with safe and secure cycle parking. Bin storage has been sensitively incorporated into the site layout. Hard and soft landscaping is proposed to enhance the scheme (Drawing Refs: HH-PL-23).





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## 5.0 KEY PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

### Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

- 5.1. Paragraph 11 of the Revised NPPF sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development and states that where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, planning permission should be granted unless policies in the Framework provide a clear reason for refusing the application or any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. Footnote 7 states that out-of-date policies includes scenarios where the LPA cannot demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites. As Footnote 6 sets out, the policies referred to are those in this Framework that include Green Belt and designated heritage assets. The Council cannot demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. Therefore, the presumption in favour of sustainable development (aka 'the tilted balance') is triggered.

### Principle of Development

- 5.2. The proposed development is to provide holiday lets as part of farm diversification. The barns are located within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. Policy GBR2 seeks to maintain this area. Policy GBR2 allows some forms of development provided within this area. Policy GBR2(d) states that the alteration of a building is permitted provided the size, scale, mass, form, siting, design and materials of construction are appropriate to the character, appearance and setting of the site and/or surrounding areas. Further, policy GBR2 (e) states that limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use, may be permitted in sustainable locations, where considered appropriate to the character, appearance and setting of the site and/or surrounding area. It is noted that the change of use of an existing building is not included as one of the exceptions to development within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. The policy is to be silent on this.



- 5.3. The Local Plan supports Policy ED5 supports new tourism enterprises. The Local Plan specifically notes that the countryside is a key attraction for tourism and visitors in the district. Further, policy ED2 supports economic growth in rural areas and in particular sustainable growth and expansion of existing businesses in the rural areas, subject to certain criteria. It is considered that the site is a suitable location for holiday lets as they are ideally located within the heart of the East Herts countryside where tourists are most likely to want to visit. While it is recognised that the site is somewhat remote, paragraph 105 of the NPPF, notes sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, which should be taken into account when considering proposals. The farmstead forms part rural East Herts and is located in beautiful surroundings and setting. It is considered an idyllic location for an 'escape', with high quality tourist accommodation perfectly located to access, experience and enjoy the district's natural beauty. The area is considered an attractive location for walkers/ramblers/cyclists or horse riding (Hixham Hall is also an active livery). The site is well connected to the existing public foot and cycle route network and bridle ways which enables visitors to easily access the surroundings area and local villages. The proposals include appropriate cycle storage facilities. The proposed holiday lets will be self-catered, providing appropriate cooking and food storage facilities on site reducing visitors need to travel for food and convenience goods. Proposals also include electric charging points to further enhance its sustainability credentials. The proposed use will provide additional income to secure the future viability of the farm. As is set out in paragraphs 5.26 – 5.39, proposals will contribute to the maintenance of biodiversity and landscape interests. The diversification is clearly subsidiary to the overall agricultural activity of the farm. The proposed use will not have any adverse effect on the viability of existing nearby rural services and facilities, to the contrary, it will help to support them.
- 5.4. The landowner advises that the barns have not been in use for agricultural purposes in living memory. The barns are currently used for storage purposes. It is understood that historically barn J was used as stables and later as a farm workshop and it is unclear what barn K was historically used for. The buildings do not contribute towards the running of the farm. The proposed development does not directly result in a loss of agricultural use.



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- 5.5. As is common across all farms in the UK, historic barns on farmsteads are not fit for modern day farming methods/requirements. As is the case at Hixham Hall, as a result of changes in general farming practice, the barns have become largely redundant and utilised for low key storage. Barns K and J are too small in size and the buildings openings are too narrow and low for them to be used for storing and processing crops or storing modern farm vehicles and machinery. In relation to barn J, the openings are not at ground level and require step access, further undermining their suitability. Further, they do not meet farming regulations for stacking and sorting harvested crops. To reiterate, the barns are not in agricultural use and do not contribute towards the running of the farm (and haven't done for many years). Given the historic nature of the buildings and the requirements of modern day farming, it is difficult to see how the barns can be improved to make farming/employment use viable. It should be noted here that the proposed holiday let uses will generate a greater number of employment opportunities (two jobs) than the existing storage use.
- 5.6. As is recognised by a range of planning guidance including, 'Adapting Traditional Farm Buildings – Best Practice Guidance for Adaptive Reuse (Historic England, 2017)', it is inevitably, without an economic use, many barns will suffer decay. The proposed use offers the opportunity to make better use of the buildings which no longer have a viable agricultural use and revitalise the buildings whilst generating additional income for the farm and its future viability
- 5.7. As such the proposal is considered to comply with policies GBR2, ED2 and ED5.



### Design and Heritage Impact

- 5.8. The application site is adjacent to curtilage listed in relation to adjoining Hixham Hall. Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 outlines that in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any special architectural or historic interest. Policy HA1 states that development proposals should preserve and enhance the historic environment and that development which would lead to substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset will not be permitted unless public benefits outweigh the harm. Policy HA7 relates to listed buildings and outlines that the Council will seek opportunities to sustain and enhance the significance of listed buildings and that proposals that affect the setting of a listed building will only be permitted where the setting of the building is preserved.
- 5.9. A Design and Access and Heritage Statement sets out the historical development of the site and Farmstead, including details of the site's listings and an assessment of the site's heritage significance.
- 5.10. The Design and Access and Heritage Statement assesses that in terms of historical value "Hixham Hall farm is an example of a small, traditional farmstead in the local vernacular. The barn buildings remain largely unchanged (except for repairs and maintenance) from their construction in the 17th century. By the composition of a collection of buildings we can imagine an active small farmstead. However, there is little evidence to suggest how the barns were each used".
- 5.11. In terms of historical value, "according to the Domesday Book it is known that the Owner in 1086 was the Bishop of London. The Lord in 1086 was William Ranulf, the Overlord in 1066 was Esger the constable. There are no other notable associations".
- 5.12. In terms of aesthetic value "Barns J and K are typical, small multi-purpose farm buildings. The construction is timber frame, weatherboard cladding, plain tiled roofs and brick plinths. The barns sit in a square formation with Hixham Hall and Barn I, creating a small courtyard. The barns have period farm aesthetic and vernacular materials. Elevations facing into the courtyard have more existing openings than the rest of the elevations, showing the interaction and collaboration of the timber barn buildings in their original use."
- 5.13. In terms of communal value, the barns are "part of the local collective memory. They are close to a public footpath and as such will feature as local landmarks, in the same way as does the lane, footpath, gates and old trees. The composition of the grouping of small buildings and views between will have the greater significance than the details of the individual buildings".



- 5.14. It should be noted that other than the proposed use, the detailed design, layout and proposed restoration of the barns are essentially that same as what was proposed under planning application 3/22/2438/FUL, and granted listed building consent 3/22/0665/LBC. The same fenestration changes are proposed to both buildings, with changes to window and door openings. Whilst fenestration changes are proposed, the buildings would remain of a similar appearance, and retain the agricultural character existing. A new driveway serving both properties is proposed from the western side of the site, utilising an existing track serving Hixham Hall. Hardstanding areas are also proposed externally for both properties, forming seating and garden areas. It was noted that the Council's Conservation Officer advised that they accepted the principle of conversion and that the proposed design was a successful adaptive reuse of the barns, with historic features retained, and new openings sensitively located. It was advised that the internal subdivision of the barns into rooms did compromise the character of the space, but acknowledged the heritage benefits to bringing the barns back into a sustainable long-term use.
- 5.15. Given this, it is assessed that the proposed development does not harm the setting of the neighbouring listed Hixham Hall, but would result in less than substantial harm to the curtilage listed barns. However, this harm is outweighed by the public benefit of securing the long term retention of these redundant barns.
- 5.16. As such the proposal is considered to comply with policies HA1 and HA7.

### **Highways, Access and Parking**

- 5.17. Policy TRA2 states that development proposals should ensure that safe and suitable access can be achieved. Policy TRA3 states that vehicle parking provision should be in accordance with guidance. Each barn will have separate vehicular access from Hixham Hall Road. No works are required to Hixham Hall Road. Each barn will provide 2no. car parking spaces and there is sufficient turning circles, in accordance with parking standards and guidance. EV charging (one per property) and cycle and bin storage are provided in proposals.
- 5.18. As such, the proposed development is in accordance with Policies TRA2 and TRA3

### **Neighbouring Amenity**

- 5.19. Policy DES4 of the District Plan relates to the design and impact on amenity. Proposals should seek to avoid significant adverse impacts on the amenity of adjoining occupiers and ensure they are not disturbed by noise, loss of light, loss of privacy and overshadowing.



- 5.20. As noted in the planning history, permission was secured (Ref: 3/22/0663/FUL) for the conversion of barn A to a residential dwelling. Hixham Hall farmhouse, is also a residential use in close proximity to barns K and J. It should be noted that proposals relating to barn A include the property being enclosed by a fence.
- 5.21. Whilst barn J does to a degree look directly at barn A, it has been designed such that the northern elevation adjacent this neighbouring barn A only contains a hall windows at ground floor level. Given that the angle at which the windows related to barn A and the existing fence enclosing barn A, it is considered that there are no privacy issues. Barn A does have a window in the upper floor of the western elevation. However, this would look directly onto the roof of barn J and is not at ground level meaning any occupant is unlikely to be able to see inside barn J (and visa versa). It is noted that the communal external amenity areas are located at the western end of barn J and not overlooked by barn A. As such it is not considered that the proposal would have an unacceptable impact in terms of privacy.
- 5.22. Hixham Hall is positioned to the south of barn J and south-east of barn K. Due to the angle of the properties and the separation between these it is not considered that the proposal would result in an unacceptable impact upon the living conditions of occupiers of Hixham Hall.
- 5.23. It should be noted that courtyard-facing windows provide views to the courtyard garden from both barns J and K. Glazed patio doors are proposed from each barn to an external communal amenity area to the North-West of the barns, which means there is not loss of privacy when occupants are using it
- 5.24. The proposed development is in accordance with policy DES4.

### **Archaeology**

- 5.25. The proposed development is for conversion and will not cause harm to any underground archaeological deposits and is in accordance with Policy HA3.

### **Ecology and Biodiversity**

- 5.26. The planning application is supported with a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) comprising a Phase 1 Habitat Survey which included a protected species assessment and ecological evaluation, and a Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) for bats of three barns (Barns A, J and K).



- 5.27. The Appraisal found that the site is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory nature conservation designations. There are statutory designated sites within a 2km radius; these are Hillcollins Pit geological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Patmore Heath SSSI. The survey area and Site lies within the Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) for Patmore Heath SSSI. The nearest non-statutory designated site is a species-rich meadow (Meadow south of Hixham Hall) Local Wildlife Site (LWS) which lies adjacent to the garden at the south of Hixham Hall.
- 5.28. The Appraisal found that the heavily managed amenity grassland habitat present within the wider survey area are of low ecological value. The line of scattered trees bounding the private road to the north includes mature trees along the section of hedgerow, which have intrinsic ecological value and provide green infrastructure and connectivity in the form of wildlife corridors.
- 5.29. In relation to bats, the three barns surveyed (barns A, J and K) all had evidence of bat use, with barn K confirmed as supporting a roost. In order to ensure compliance with the relevant legislation, the appraisal stated that a further survey is required to ascertain the type of roost present in barn K, and if bats are using the other two barns (barn A and J) for roosting purposes.
- 5.30. In relation to great crested newts, the appraisal found that habitats with high potential to support great crested newts are present within the wider survey and site. There are two ponds within 500m of the survey area. In order to ensure compliance with the relevant legislation, the appraisal recommended that a further survey for great crested newts should be conducted during the appropriate season.
- 5.31. In relation to breeding birds, the appraisal confirmed that them as being present within the survey area. There was an unoccupied bird nest present in Barn K. The trees and hedgerows within the survey area and/or Site all have potential to support breeding birds and could be affected by the development. In order to ensure compliance with the relevant legislation, the appraisal stated that these habitats should be removed September to February inclusive which is outside of the main bird breeding season.
- 5.32. In relation to reptiles the appraisal found that there was a low potential for habitats to support reptiles within the survey and site area.
- 5.33. In relation to hedgehog, the appraisal found suitable habitats for hedgehogs. It stated that if habitat with suitability to support nesting or hibernating hedgehog is to be removed, precautionary measures should be implemented to avoid killing or injury. Measures should also be taken to continue accommodating this species on site post-development.



- 5.34. To follow the recommendations of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, a further great crested newt and bat survey and assessment was undertaken (prepared by Babec). The results of the great crested newt surveys indicate the likely absence of great crested newts from within the proposed development site. The proposed development should therefore be compliant with the relevant legislation and planning policy with respect to this species.
- 5.35. The results of the further bat surveys of Barn J indicate the presence of a barbastelle day roost (Roost A), two common pipistrelle day roosts (Roosts B and C) and a common pipistrelle night roost (Roost D). The barbastelle day roost (Roost A) is assessed to be of moderate conservation value, while all other roosts are assessed as being of low conservation value.
- 5.36. The results of the further bat surveys of Barn K indicate the presence of six common pipistrelle day roosts (Roosts A, F, G, H, I and J), one common pipistrelle night roost (Roost E), one brown long-eared night roost/ feeding perch (Roost B), a barbastelle day roost (Roost C) and a Natterer's bat day roost (Roost D). The barbastelle day roost (Roost C) and the Natterer's bat day roost (Roost D) are assessed to be of moderate conservation value, while all other roosts are assessed as being of low conservation value. However, mitigation techniques can be employed to avoid harm to individual bats and maintain the populations at a favourable conservation status. Licensing measures and a mitigation strategy are set out in the in section 6 of the great crested newt and bat survey and assessment document and these will be complied with (secured by planning condition).
- 5.37. Policy NE3 requires that a net gain in biodiversity is provided. Both the Phase 1 Habitat Survey and Great Crested Newt and bat survey and assessment provide recommendations to achieve this. Based on these recommendations, the proposed development will incorporate wildlife planting using native species and species recognised of wildlife value will be incorporate into the soft landscaping proposals. These will include nectar-rich and berry producing plants that will attract a range of insects, birds and mammals.
- 5.38. In relation to birds, Woodcrete bird boxes and nest boxes will be provided. In terms of bats, tree mounted bat boxes will be provided. In addition, a total of four additional gaps will be created under the roof tiles to allow bats to access the crevices between the roof tiles and bitumen felt lining.
- 5.39. It is considered that these measures offer good ecological enhancement measures that aim to maximise biodiversity benefits. The proposed development is in accordance with policies NE2 and NE3.





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### **Flood Risk**

- 5.40. The site is located within flood zone 1 and is small scale. The proposed development is considered to be one that would not cause increased flood risks within the vicinity. The proposed development is in accordance with Policy WAT1.

### **Climate Change and Water Resources**

- 5.41. Policies CC1 and CC2 states that all new development must demonstrate how the design, materials, construction and operation of the development would minimise overheating in the summer and reduce the need for heating in the winter, and integrate green infrastructure into the development and reduce carbon emissions
- 5.42. Given the sensitive nature of the conversion, in order to address the above policies, it is proposed that both barns will be insulated to comply with the new U-values introduced in June 2022 for Existing Building Extensions to ensure the heat loss through buildings elements such as walls, windows and roofs is kept to a minimum to reduce the need for heating in the winter and overheating in the summer. This will allow for the introduction of an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) to provide hot water and heating for each barn which is a key low carbon heating system to help decarbonise the heat in both holiday lets. The ASHP will be discreetly located behind the black timber weatherboarded Bike and Bin Storage away from any principal elevation.
- 5.43. Policy WAT4 states that development must minimise the use of mains water by incorporating water saving measures and equipment, incorporating the recycling of grey water and utilising natural filtration measures, and designing residential development so that mains water consumption meets a target of 110 litres or less per head per day. It is understood that the suitability worded planning condition can be attached to the planning permission to address this issue.
- 5.44. The proposed development is in accordance with policies CC1, CC2 and WAT4.

### **Planning Balance**

- 5.45. The proposed development accords with the relevant policies within the Local Plan. However, if the Council assess the presumption in favour of sustainable development needs to be assessed the following planning balance exercise is provided. To be deemed "sustainable development" paragraph 8 in the NPPF indicates that three overarching planning objectives must be met – the economic objective, the social objective and the environmental objective.



### **Social**

- 5.46. The provision of 2no. new high quality holiday lets will make an important contribution to the tourism offer and level of accommodation in the district. They will attract new visitors and tourism to the district and help support the local rural economy.
- 5.47. The proposed development would be a sensitive barn conversion and a successful adaptive reuse of the barns, with historic features retained, and new openings sensitively located. There is significant heritage benefit to bringing the barns back into a sustainable long-term use.
- 5.48. Moderate weight should be given to these social benefits.

### **Economic**

- 5.49. The proposed change of use to holiday lets is part of a diversification of the farm's business. It will generate additional income and help to secure the farm's long-term future viability. The proposed development is part of a farm diversification and will enable the farm secure its long-term financial future and broaden its income stream.
- 5.50. The proposed development will make an important contribution to the rural economy by helping to attract visitors and tourist to the district. These visitors and tourists will also increase expenditure in the shops and services in the local area, thereby further enhancing economic activity.
- 5.51. Proposals will also create 2 new jobs providing local employment opportunities. This is more employment use than the existing storage use.
- 5.52. The proposed development will provide local employment opportunities during the conversion phase of the development. The delivery of the development requires a range of skills and expertise, which will provide a variety of employment opportunities while works are taking place onsite.
- 5.53. Significant weight should be given to these economic benefits.

### **Environmental**

- 5.54. Proposals have been sensitively designed to enhance the character of the area and protect the countryside.
- 5.55. In terms of a location, while it is accepted that the site is to a degree remote, the site is located in an idyllic location at the heart of the East Herts countryside which the Council recognise is a major draw



for visitors and tourism to the district. Therefore, the proposed holiday lets are located where they need to be to attract visitors and tourists. The site is well connected to the foot and cycle path network. The proposals include appropriate cycle storage facilities. The proposed holiday lets will be 'self-catered', providing appropriate cooking and food storage facilities reducing visitors need to travel. Proposals also include electric charging points to further enhance its sustainability credentials.

- 5.56. This is a low impact project that will have no impact on any designated sites or priority habitat. In terms of biodiversity, the site offers the opportunity to provide ecological enhancement. Ecological enhancements may include planting of native species and the inclusion of bird and bat boxes.
- 5.57. In order to reduce carbon emissions it is proposed that the barns will be heated (and hot water) by an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP).
- 5.58. The proposed development will not have any adverse impact on flood risk, contaminated land or air quality. All these effects are therefore considered neutral. Limited weight should be given to these environmental impacts.
- 5.59. Overall, it is considered that any adverse impacts of the proposed development do not demonstrably outweigh the benefits. Given this, it is considered that the proposed development should be approved accordingly.



## 6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The proposed development to holiday lets is part of a diversification of the farm's business. In order to secure the farm's long term future viability it needs to diversify the uses on the site to generate other sources of income. The farm is facing an uncertain future with an uncertain economy and significant reduction in farming subsidies. In economic terms, tourism is a key contributor to the East Herts economy and employs a significant number of people. Given the site's location at the heart of the East Herts countryside, it makes logical sense for the farm to diversify and contribute to tourism in the district. The existing barns are used for storage and are not in agricultural use and need to be better utilised.
- 6.2 The proposed development will result in a number of benefits. Diversification of the farm's business will generate additional income and help to secure the farm's long-term future viability. It will make an important contribution to the tourism offer and rural economy and attract new visitors and tourism to the district. It will create new jobs. Proposals have been sensitively designed to enhance the character of the area and protect the countryside. The proposed development would be a sensitive barn conversion and a successful adaptive reuse of the barns. There is significant heritage benefit to bringing the barns back into a sustainable long-term use. Proposals will also enhance biodiversity. While it is accepted that the site is to a degree remote, it is located in an idyllic location at the heart of the East Herts countryside which the Council recognise is a major draw for visitors and tourism to the district. Therefore, the proposed holiday lets are located where they can attract visitors and tourists. Paragraph 105 of the NPPF, notes sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, which should be taken into account when considering proposals.
- 6.3 As such, the proposed development is in accordance with relevant policies in of the East Herts District Plan (2018) and therefore should be approved without delay.