

## **ALTERNATIVE USES STATEMENT**

Produced by Ms S Moore

Following withdrawal of application ref DC/22/1971/FUL and case officer guidance for resubmission, this Supplemental Alternative Uses Statement includes justification by the applicant that Policy DM28 in accordance with Policy DM33 has been fully explored to the satisfaction of the local planning authority and can be discounted.

Policy DM28 States:-

*Residential Use of Redundant Buildings in the Countryside provides that proposals for the conversion of **redundant or disused** barns or other buildings in the countryside into dwellings will be permitted where:*

- a. **alternative uses for employment/economic development, tourist accommodation, recreation and community facilities, in accordance with Policy DM33, have been fully explored to the satisfaction of the local planning authority and can be discounted;***
- b. the building is structurally sound and capable of conversion without the need for extension, significant alteration or reconstruction;*
- c. the proposal is a high quality design and the method of conversion retains the character and historic interest of the building. In the case of barns the single open volume should be retained with minimal change to the external appearance;*
- d. the proposal would lead to an enhancement to the immediate setting of the building, and the creation of a residential curtilage and any associated domestic paraphernalia would not have a harmful effect on the character of the site or setting of the building, any wider group of buildings, or the surrounding area.*

Policy DM33 states:

*Re-Use or Replacement of Buildings in the Countryside provides that the re-use, conversion and alteration or extension of buildings in the countryside for the following uses will be permitted where proposals comply with other policies in this and other adopted Local Plans:*

- i. employment (defined for the purposes of this policy as uses within Classes B1 and, where appropriate, B2 general industrial, and limited small scale or ancillary storage), where it can be demonstrated that such uses would not create significant levels of traffic, particularly lorries, on rural roads;*
- ii. tourist accommodation;*
- iii. recreational uses including riding stables, livery, and sports pavilions;*
- iv. community facilities;*
- v. **residential use, where justified, in accordance with Policy DM28.***

*In addition to other policies in the Plan, proposals for the re-use, conversion and alteration or extension of buildings must also satisfy the following criteria:*

- a. the building is structurally sound and capable of conversion without the need for significant extension or alteration or reconstruction;*
- b. any proposed alterations to the building, its proposed use, its associated operational area, the provision of any services, and/or any amenity space or outbuildings, would not harm its appearance or adversely affect the setting of the building in the rural locality;*
- c. the nature and intensity of the proposed use would be compatible with its rural location. Proposals for employment uses will be required to provide a sustainability assessment (which may include a Travel Plan designed to maximise the opportunities to reduce the need to travel by private car);*
- d. proposals which would be likely to create a significant number of jobs should be well located in relation to towns and villages or be reasonably accessible by public transport;*
- e. in the case of tourist accommodation there is no creation or installation of private curtilages and domestic paraphernalia which would have a harmful effect on the character of the site or the surrounding area;*
- f. it will not lead to unacceptable levels or types of traffic or problems of road safety or amenity and will not require highway improvements which will harm the character of rural roads in the area; and*
- g. any extension must be subservient in scale, footprint and design to the host building. Furthermore, in exceptional circumstances and notwithstanding criterion a. above, it may be appropriate to permit the replacement of a building where:*
- h. the replacement building will result in a more acceptable and sustainable development than might be achieved through conversion;*
- i. the replacement building would restore the visual, architectural or historical coherence of a group of buildings where this would otherwise be lost.*

The planning officer advised in his email dated 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023 that the main issue to address is DM 28 paragraph a.

- a. alternative uses for employment/economic development, tourist accommodation, recreation and community facilities, in accordance with Policy DM33, have been fully explored to the satisfaction of the local planning authority and can be discounted;***

Taking each of those alternative use options in turn:

#### **Employment/economic development.**

The applicants have owned and operated the business, from scratch for 30 years. They invested their own capital 25 years ago in creating a clubhouse which had until that time existed in an on-site prefabricated 1950's chalet. Moving into the purpose-built building created extra job opportunities, albeit seasonal and part time. The golf course itself would only ever need two part time members of green keeping staff to keep it maintained, making substantial employment opportunities unviable.

The Clubhouse has been marketed for small events and included a meeting room facility. There have been the occasional wake and party but with Fire Regulations allowing for a maximum of 54 persons including staff the appeal has been limited and there are other similar or larger options close by. Despite marketing, the meeting room was not a success. There were a few bookings, but Clare is too far from the major road network to appeal to larger organisations and the room could only accommodate 14 seated. The golf course has been marketed for Society Days and as a Team Building venue but a short 9-hole golf course does not have the appeal or the catering facilities associated with an 18 hole course and take up has been limited.

Since going on the market nearly 2 years ago, there have been numerous viewings. Not one person suggested the asking price was excessive and not one person made an offer lower than the asking price. Everybody has loved it as a beautiful place but they couldn't make it work financially, the recurring problem for buyers being its size which limits its ability to upscale.

It was looked at to convert into offices which proceeded some way along the legal route but was shelved when similar sized, cheaper property was found to be readily available in the larger local towns and would not require any conversion investment.

In advice from Fenn Wrights, they confirm that the market is currently awash with commercial property with businesses closing especially in the retail and hospitality sectors. Indeed, even the finest local successful restaurant with rooms in neighbouring Cavendish has recently closed.

With nearby commercial towns like Haverhill, Sudbury and Bury St Edmunds and their associated infrastructure now offering cut price property for purchase or lease what appeal does this building have?

Catering and hospitality are having well publicised issues at the moment, both from a recruiting standpoint but also because people are spending less as a result of the cost of living crisis and having got out of the habit of eating out since Covid. When the property went to market it naturally attracted attention from those interested in developing it for hospitality, be it weddings or a restaurant. It quickly became apparent that it is too small in many ways and would require substantial investment to increase both the kitchen and the clubroom to provide enough covers to make it successful. These points along with the difficulty of getting finance for anything related to hospitality at the moment meant those interested in this economic alternative rarely went much further.

### **Tourist Accommodation**

By far the greatest number of viewings were made by those interested in closing the golf course and building holiday homes around the lake, for which it looks perfect. However, the site is on a flood plain and floods several times a year (3 times already this year). With the Environment Agency now pumping 102 million litres of water a day (increasing the river level by 12-18 inches) from the Great Ouse down to Hanningfield Reservoir as we are technically in drought, flooding occurs more often. Once the water comes into the golf

course it takes a week or more to clear depending on the river level which renders the site inhospitable for tourist accommodation.

One or two shepherds hut style accommodation could be sited between the Clubhouse and the road, but this provides little economic benefit.

Conversion to a hotel was looked at but was quickly discounted again on size and profitability in relation to the required investment.

In short Tourist Accommodation can be discounted.

### **Recreation**

Considering that the building is currently attached to a recreational activity it remains unable to sustain itself in this regard. Expanding the golf course is unfeasible to even a full size 9 hole course let alone an 18 hole due to its proximity to the river, residential properties, a footpath and the A1092. Even an adventure golf facility was considered but there are not enough 'chimney pots' close by to justify the investment. Clare already boasts a modern sports pavilion adjacent to the football pitches and offering fitness classes, and a bowling green with clubhouse and bar.

The premises could not be used for horse livery or stables.

### **Community facilities.**

As Chair of the Clare Business Association and an active member of the local community, the applicant Susan Moore is well placed to confirm that there is absolutely no need for any further community buildings in the town. Along with a library, The Combined Halls of Clare have the Town Hall for hire (accommodating up to 200 people) and the Old School which has 3 main halls plus a committee room and well-equipped kitchen. Further rooms are available for hire in local hostelries.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, our decision to list the property on the market before applying for change of use served as a thorough exploration of alternative economic and or employment uses. The evidence is clear that the Clubhouse, due to its size and nature, is not conducive to the returns that potential investors seek in today's economic climate.

Our sincere dedication to this property, while admirable is no longer sustainable. Over the past 30 years we, the applicants, have been 'guilty' of running the business at little or no profit and not taking anything for ourselves, for the sheer joy of owning it. Unfortunately, in this day and age of rising operational costs

including increased wages, pensions, regulatory costs, digital accountancy legislation, maintenance of the river, the huge increase costs of fuel and energy and general clubhouse costs (rates increase means another 80 rounds of golf required to cover it, insurance costs now almost 10% of turnover) no one is prepared to operate it in the same way.

One of the other observations of viewings however is that there is only a one bedroom flat available which did not suit those who had contemplated moving in with their families. By granting permission for the change of use to residential, the option is there for conversion in part or whole and the pool of those who could be interested is significantly increased.

We respectfully request the Council's consideration of our proposal which we believe aligns fully with the relevant planning policies.