



WREYLAND
RURAL PLANNING CONSULTANTS

PLANNING STATEMENT

Woodoaks Farm, Denham Way Rickmansworth, WD3 9XQ | October 2023

Full Planning Application for Temporary Permission (3 years) for the retention of an existing commercial enterprise at Woodoaks Farm (The Tea Shack) together with associated operational development and outside seating to serve The Tea Shack and Creative Juices.



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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Statement is submitted in support of a Full Planning Application for Temporary Permission (3 years) for the retention of an existing commercial enterprise at Woodoaks Farm (The Tea Shack) together with its associated operational development and outside seating which will also serves Creative Juices.
- 1.2 It is recognised that the current location of The Tea Shack and the associated operational development is unregularised and, in normal circumstances, would most likely not be granted a permanent permission owing principally to the site's location within the Green Belt, which would most likely render the current position as 'inappropriate' in accordance with, inter alia, Paragraph 149 of the National Planning Policy Framework. Over the last eighteen months, the Soil Association Land Trust (The Applicant) have engaged in extensive discussions with the Local Authority in order to bring forward a fully integrated, whole site plan which at its core seeks to retain agriculture as the core use of Woodoaks Farm, supported by the creation of a vibrant food and farming hub that provides for the growth of nourishing food to the local community, the restoration of the landscape and biodiversity, and the retention of the farm's 19th century yard to be a place where small scale local enterprise can thrive. The Soil Association Land Trust seeks to achieve these objectives within the context of the existing built environment principally through the sustainable re-use of the farm's existing buildings.
- 1.3 An indicative timetable to achieve the Soil Association's objectives was provided at Section 9.0 of the Woodoaks Masterplan 2.0 submitted to the Local Authority in November 2022 in support of a request for Pre-Application Advice. Since this time the Soil Association's Land Trust's vision for the site has progressively been taken forward, with permission from the Local Authority already having been granted under permissions 22/1162/FUL and 23/0048/FUL for a series of polytunnels to support the farm's new independent growers, while 23/1154/FUL is currently under review by the Local Authority which seeks to change the use of the Grade II Listed Black Barn to use for and by the community. Meanwhile the use of part of the farmyard by Creative Juices as a microbrewery and tap-room continues to perform well despite the economic struggles of running a microbrewery through and after the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.4 The Tea Shack remains unregularised and internal discussions are at an advanced stage between the Soil Association Land Trust and other stakeholders as to the optimum way in which the enterprise can be retained at Woodoaks. As stated in the Masterplan, the objective is integration into the existing yard through the re-use of buildings which would allow The Tea Shack and Creative Juices to be relocated (subject to permission) to a more permanent position within the next three years.

- 1.5 At this stage, however, the final siting of The Tea Shack and Creative Juices has not been confirmed. Accordingly it is requested that a Temporary Permission be granted to regularise the currently unlawful development in the interests of good planning, and secondly to allow a final and defined grace period upon or before the termination of which the businesses can be fully integrated into a well-thought-out final development plan which will secure the future of Woodoaks Farm and the many objectives the Soil Association Land Trust wish to achieve.
- 1.6 The associated operational development requested with this temporary application also includes the area of outdoor seating used by both The Tea Shack and Creative Juices.
- 1.7 This statement has been compiled by Tim Barker BSc (Hons) MSc MRICS FAAV ABIAC. Tim is the Director of Wreyland Rural Planning – a Planning Consultancy accredited by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors specialising in rural and agricultural development. Tim is a Chartered Rural Surveyor, Fellow of the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers and Associate Member of the British Institute of Agricultural Consultants. Tim also holds Undergraduate and Postgraduate qualifications from the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester.

2.0 Site location and context

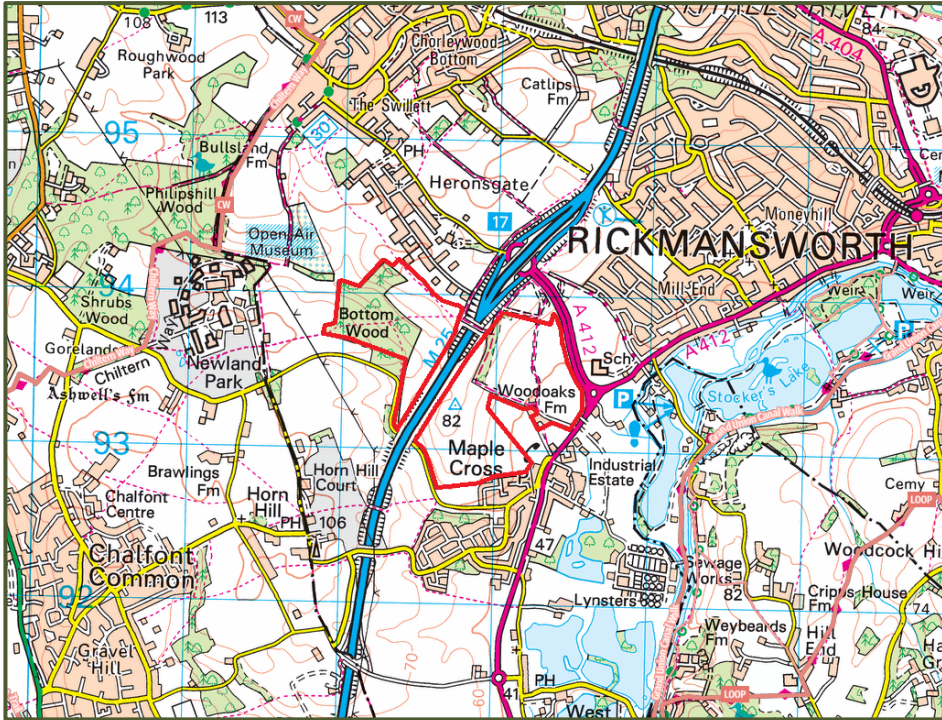


Figure 1 – OS extract showing Woodoak's regional location

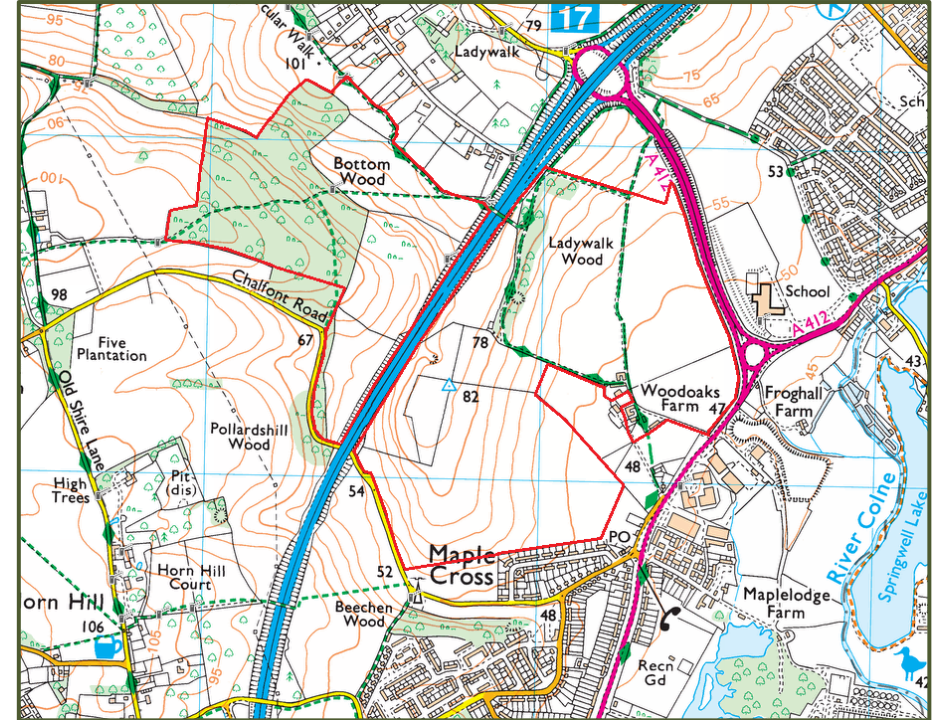


Figure 2 – OS extract showing overview of farm layout

- 2.1 Woodoaks Farm comprises approximately 300 acres of arable, pastureland and woodland. A farmyard situated within the eastern section of the farm comprises a range of mid-twentieth century and traditional farm buildings, together with a traditional farmhouse and an existing commercial brewery enterprise which marked the farms first step towards integrating a full farm-diversification program which is currently being developed by the Applicants, the Soil Association Land Trust (The Trust).
- 2.2 Under The Trust's management since 2020, farming continues at Woodoaks in association with the Whitby family as well as two independent market gardeners and remains the farm's primary focus and ethos. Integrated into the overarching agricultural use The Trust has developed a holistic vision which includes the creation of a landscape where people and nature can flourish together and to restore beautiful countryside where

people can establish bonds with nature and food production together with the sustainable re-use of a traditional range of farm buildings to accommodate small-scale local enterprises.

2.3 This proposal for a temporary permission is part of The Trust's vision for Woodoaks, which as previously discussed seeks:

- *To create a vibrant food and farming hub that provides local communities with a diverse range of healthy organic foods in a nature friendly environment.*
- *To create a landscape where people and nature can flourish together, restoring beautiful countryside where people can establish new bonds with nature and food production.*
- *To be a place where small scale local enterprise can thrive, selling directly to local consumers and re-connecting the community with the food they eat and the land where it is grown. It will provide opportunities for people to learn, enjoy and get involved.*
- *To be a place which strives to achieve net zero, reduces reliance on fossil fuels and builds climate resilience.*

2.4 The retention of the Tea Shack is an integral part of this vision.

3.0 Site Masterplan and existing discussions with the Local Planning Authority

3.1 In November 2022, Masterplan V2 was submitted to the Local Planning Authority which showed how Woodoaks Farm would be taken forward. This is summarised within figures 3 and 4 below:



Figure 3 – Identifying current uses of the main buildings and their uses

1. 'The Black Barn' Grade II Listed timber building (agricultural)
2. Modern Farmyard with grain storage (agricultural)
3. Dwelling with associated gardens & outbuildings retained by Sally Findlay and not under control by the Land Trust
4. Range of late Victorian and 20th century farm buildings currently in agricultural use though now not suitable for modern agricultural practice
5. Creative Juices – commercial brewing company with taproom
6. Agricultural yard used for storage and maneuvering of machinery
7. Modern Dutch Barn used for storage of preserved fodder.

3.2 The Masterplan focuses on the change of use of use of building 1 (currently under consideration by the LPA), and the change of use of the buildings in Area 4. The Tea Shack and Creative Juices are anticipated to be relocated into the main hub of buildings at Area 4.

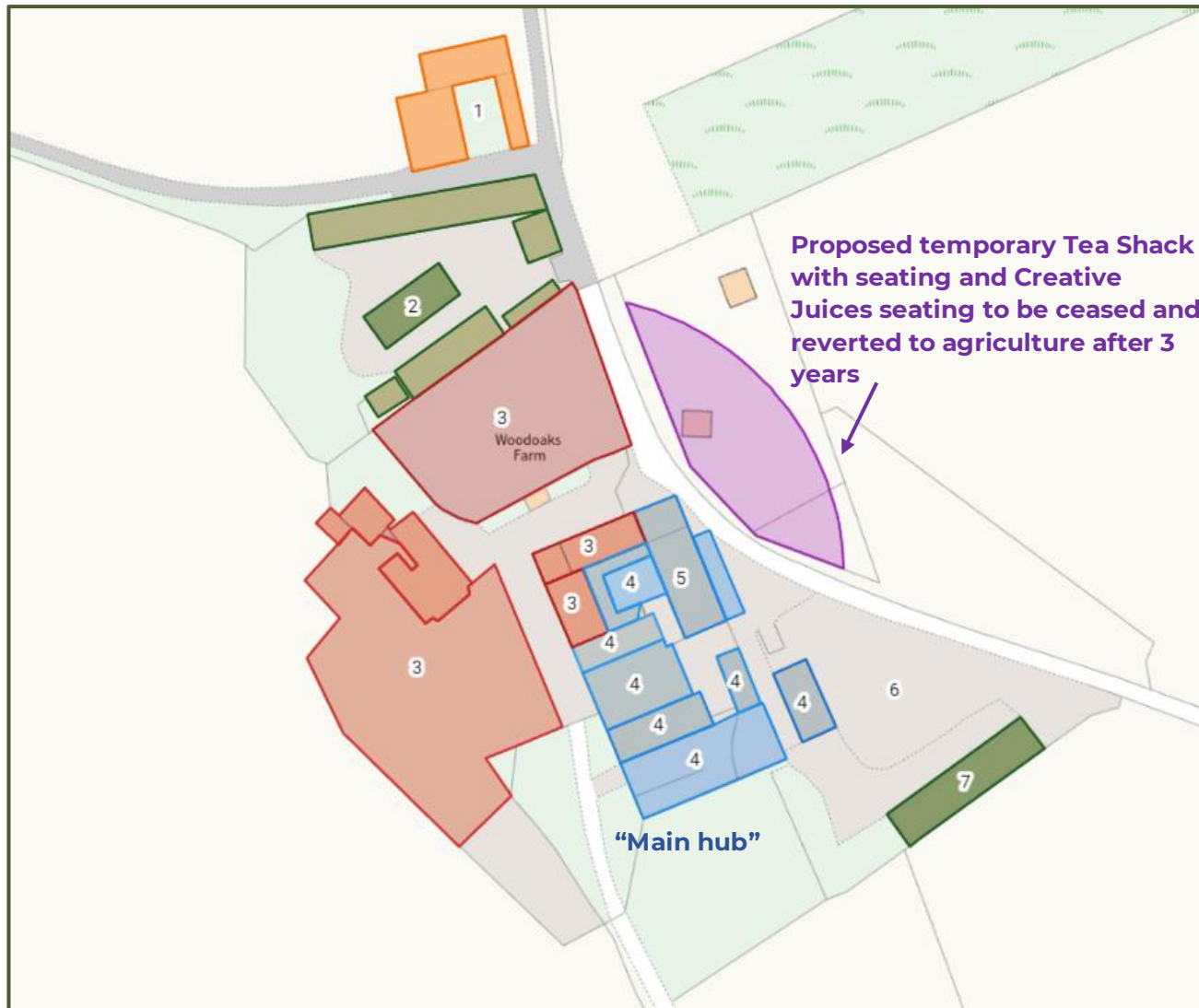


Figure 4 – Proposed uses of the main buildings and associated areas

1. The Black Barn - change of use from agriculture to community, education assembly and leisure uses (including weddings, musical events, supper clubs, Christmas fayres etc) to fund its ongoing maintenance. Likely specific use classes would be F1(a), F1(b), with additional sui generis uses.
2. The Northern Yard retained as agricultural yard to serve existing farming operations.
3. Retained In domestic use
4. Change of use (to include inter alia public courtyard area, education uses, farmers market, bakery & kitchen, café with seating, brewery seating, retail and equestrian. It into this area that The Tea Shack is intended to be re-located.
5. Retained brewery use
6. Car parking
7. Retained in agricultural use

3.3 The Local Authority commented on the proposals with Masterplan 2 positively, commenting in terms of the Tea Shack and Brewery seating area that; *“Given that it may be some time until the masterplan proposal which includes the re-location of the Tea Shack and brewery seating is submitted to the LPA, it is suggested that a separate planning application comes forward for the existing uses with the view to this being a temporary planning permission on the basis that their relocation is to come forward within a full application at a later date.”*

3.4 A summary of the LPA's advice in terms of a planning strategy was provided as follows:

1. *Separate planning application (and LBC if internal/external alterations are required) to come forward for the proposed change of use of the Listed Barn and associated land.*
2. *Separate planning application to come forward for the existing tea shack and brewery seating areas – seeking temporary permission.*
3. *Full planning application for the main hub to come forward (this could include a phasing scheme).*

3.5 Phase 1 of the LPA's advisory strategy has already been commenced (23/1154/FUL) and is currently awaiting determination. This proposal is made in accordance with point 2 of the recommended strategy.

3.6 The purpose of this application for Temporary Planning Permission is to facilitate the retention of both businesses until the Masterplan can be finalised and full permission for the businesses' relocation agreed with the Local Authority.

4.0 Proposed development

- 4.1 The Tea Shack and Creative Juices experienced positive and sustained growth during the Covid Pandemic. Their location within the purple area identified in Figure 3 above facilitated this growth during a period of unprecedented challenges. It is noted that this was not the case for many businesses of this kind.
- 4.2 As stated above, it is recognised that the long-term retention of the two enterprises within this area is contrary to policy, principally as it relates to inappropriate development within the Green Belt. Accordingly, Masterplan V2 seeks to integrate the two enterprises into the 'main hub.'
- 4.3 Prior to this being agreed, the proposed development seeks temporary permission for three years for The Tea Shack and Creative Juices to remain in their current positions to facilitate the transition of the businesses into the 'main hub' area without in the prejudicing the sustainability of the two enterprises or the livelihoods which they provide.
- 4.4 Notwithstanding that this application refers to a temporary permission, it is still recognised that retention of the openness of the Green Belt is a fundamental planning concept. Accordingly, the current areas occupied by the two enterprises have been substantially reduced to the minimum required to facilitate their continued operational viability during the temporary period. This reduction in area is comparable between figures 3 and 4 above.
- 4.5 Accordingly, this temporary permission makes the following changes to the site.
- Reduction in total site area currently used.
 - Removal of the unlawful 'pergola' structure
 - Closer association of proposed structures with exiting built form of the farmyard and arrest of dispersed development
- 4.6 The proposal proposes only the following items of operational development:
- Temporary retention of The Tea Shack structure together with a small kitchen extension

- Temporary retention of the 'stretch tent' which will be more closely associated with existing development
- Temporary retention of tables and chairs serving The Tea Shack and The Brewery.

4.7 The proposed site layout has been reduced from its current extent and will now be more closely associated with the existing farm buildings. As a result, during its temporary existence, it will still be seen against and integrated with the backdrop of the site's existing built form.

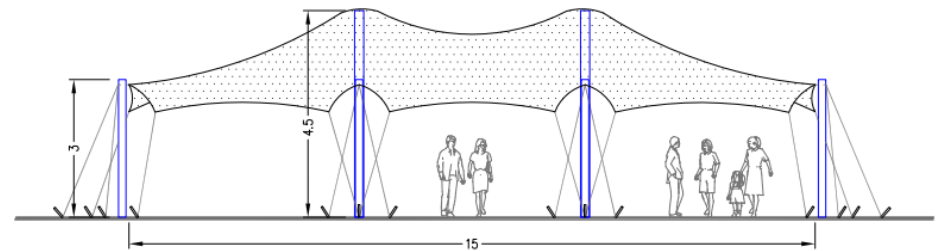


Figure 6 (above) - Proposed stretch tent elevations (not to scale - indicative only)



Figure 7 (above) Proposed Tea Shack principal (east) elevation (not to scale - indicative only)

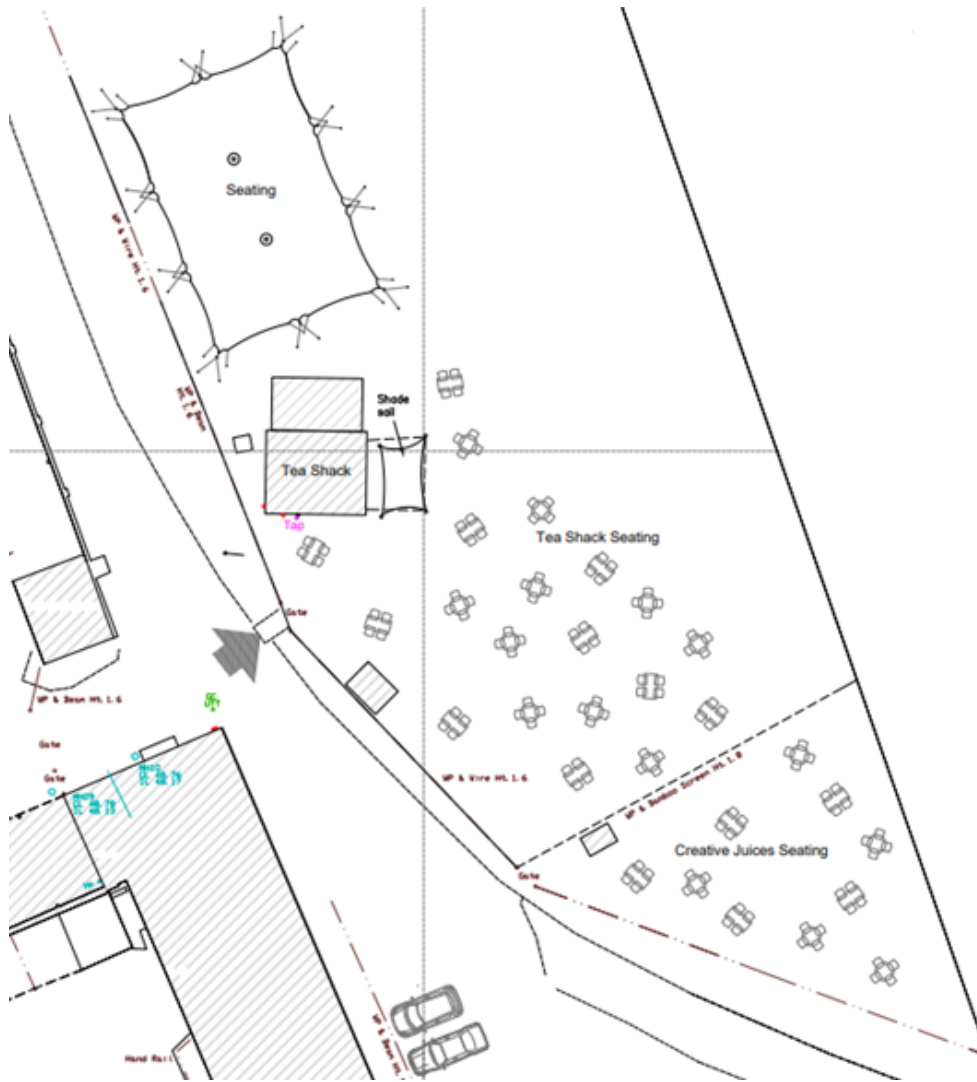


Figure 5 (above) - Proposed layout

5.0 Planning policy considerations

- 5.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore, in order to assess the acceptability of this proposal, it is necessary to assess it against the adopted development plan.
- 5.2 It is also necessary to consider any material considerations relevant to the development proposal, such as the national planning policy contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the national planning guidance contained within the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), as well as any locally adopted supplementary planning guidance (SPG) and documents (SPD).
- 5.3 At Woodoaks Farm, Local Policy is comprised of the Development Management Policies contained within the Local Development Document (LDD) together with the Core Strategy of 2011.
- 5.4 The PPG is also an important material consideration with Paragraph 014 Reference ID: 21a-014-20140306 familiarising the concept of temporary permissions in circumstances “*where appropriate to enable the temporary use of vacant land or buildings prior to any longer-term proposals coming forward (a ‘meanwhile’ use).*”
- 5.5 Notwithstanding the temporary nature of the application, consideration of the degree of concordance of the proposal with relevant policy is still relevant in order to avoid unnecessary prejudice to the landscape, neighbouring amenity and other considerations.

RELEVANT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT DOCUMENT POLICY

Policy DM2 Green Belt

- 5.6 Within the Green Belt it is recognised that only in ‘very special circumstances,’ approval will not be given for new buildings other than those specifically mentioned by the Local Authority and within the National Planning Policy Framework.

5.7 While not appropriate in terms of a permanent siting of the businesses in the proposed location, the Masterplan seeks the sustainable re-use of a Victorian range of farm buildings which, while not designated as a heritage asset, are of great importance to landscape and local character. Allied to this, the proposed uses focus upon the retention of farming at Woodoaks with a focus upon organic agriculture, the production and sale of affordable, locally grown nourishing food, the support of local business, public access and community uses. The Masterplan has been written in accordance with policy and with the protection of the Green Belt as a factor of paramount importance. The Local Authority also commented that, subject to their recommended amendments which will be enacted, Very Special Circumstances may exist.

5.8 Notwithstanding the proposed development's discordance with Policy DM2, this will be offset by the temporary nature of the application, its limited scale, low degree of permanence, and how the temporary proposal will in the very near future yield the benefits associated with the Masterplan.

Policy DM3 The Historic Built Environment

5.9 Applications will only be supported where they sustain, conserve and where appropriate enhance the significance, character and setting of the asset itself and the surrounding historic environment. The Council will preserve the District's Listed Buildings and will only support applications where:

- i) The extension/alteration would not adversely affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest both internally or externally or its wider setting.*
- ii) Any change of use would preserve its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest and ensure its continued use/viability. Applications involving the demolition of a Listed Building will only be granted in wholly exceptional circumstances.*

5.10 Though designated heritage assets are present on the farm, it is not considered that this temporary application is of prejudice to their setting or historic fabric.

Policy DM7 Landscape Character

- 5.11 Visual quality of the landscape is an important consideration. Woodoaks Farm occupies an important part of the peri-urban fringe being an open space providing linear public access close to large areas of urban development. The focus now upon organic agriculture at Woodoaks will further restore this area of the countryside. Amidst this, farmyard is considered to be an important feature in the landscape, being of Victorian construction and important to the context and history of the locale. Accordingly, the extent of the temporary permission has been reduced from its current scale, and more closely integrated and related to the existing yard. Accordingly, impact upon far reaching views and the openness of the Green Belt as a result of the temporary permission has been reduced and nucleated to arrest the previous dispersed nature of the uses arising from the extended seating area.

RELEVANT CORE STRATEGY POLICY

Policy CP1 – Sustainable Development

- 5.12 CP1 seeks, inter alia to make efficient use of land by guiding development onto previously developed land and incorporating mixed use development. The policy also seeks to protect and enhance the natural, built and historic environment, maintain high levels of employment by attracting job opportunities for local people and promoting public spaces of a high enduring design and quality which respects local distinctiveness.

Policy CP6 – Employment & Economic Development

- 5.13 CP6 supports development which sustains parts of the District as attractive areas for business location, provides an appropriate number of jobs to meet strategic requirements and promotes skills and learning of the local workforce. Also supported are the provision of small, medium and large business premises, as well as the support for economic development in rural areas where this would contribute to sustainable development objectives consistent in scale with the rural location and which would not result in harmful effects on the environment and local communities.
- 5.14 The Tea Shack employ 6 members of staff and Creative Juices employ 7 members of staff. Should the requested temporary period not be permitted, it is highly likely that these businesses will cease to employ the majority of their staff. However, with a 3-year permission, it is hoped that all of these jobs can be retained and the businesses will continue to grow sustainably into the future.

RELEVANT NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK POLICY

- 5.15 The NPPF supports the provision of a 'prosperous' rural economy. Paragraph 84 states that *"Planning policies and decisions should enable:*
- a) *The sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*
 - b) *The development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based businesses.*
 - c) *Sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside*
- 5.16 Paragraph 85 also 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).*
- 5.17 Paragraph 89 removes the need to apply the sequential test to rural commercial development.

OTHER AMENITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.18 The proposed temporary development is not proximate to any residences, is not overbearing or cramped and will not have any detriment to ecological assets. There are no identified heritage assets within its immediate vicinity and the site is not situated within a Flood Zone. With the exception of a short term limited and confined impact upon the openness of the Green Belt, there are no other identifiable areas of detriment which may be caused by the proposed temporary permission.

6.0 Discussion and conclusion

- 6.1 The concepts enshrined within Masterplan V2 focus upon the sustainable re-use of the existing farm buildings at Woodoaks Farm for a range of uses and have been found, subject to planning, to be in principle concordant with current planning policy and worth undertaking as a result of the direct and associated benefits which they will bring to the District, in terms of the continuation of farming at Woodoaks, the introduction of organic agriculture, the opening of public access, ecological benefits and the benefits associated with supporting small-scale local businesses.
- 6.2 The Tea Shack and Creative Juices are local businesses which are continuing despite considerable challenges; however it is accepted that The Tea Shack together with the seating associated with both enterprises is currently situated in the wrong place. The Soil Association Land Trust wish to retain the businesses and integrate them into the re-use of the existing farm buildings. The exact mechanism by which this will be achieved in conjunction with other uses is still be finalized. Therefore, it is respectfully requested that a temporary permission of 3 years be granted to ensure the continuation of both enterprises together with the service and jobs they provide while the wider plan for Woodoaks is finalized and further planning applications submitted.
- 6.3 It has been shown above in policies DM2, CP1, CP6 of the Local Plan and Paragraphs 84, 85 and 89 that local and national policy support economic development in rural areas and that the proposal will not result in any adverse impacts on local amenity or other landscape constraints. In addition, the impact upon the openness of the Green Belt has been kept to a minimum and certainly one that will not cause an unacceptable impact over such a short period. While this limited impact would not be acceptable in the long term, on balance, the positives that will result from the grant of the temporary permission will outweigh any detriment to landscape openness.
- 6.4 Accordingly, it is requested that in order to keep working towards the wider vision for Woodoaks, this temporary permission be granted so that the businesses can continue to trade and maintain their employed staff until a permanent site can be found for it within the next three years.



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