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Clara Loveland
Development Management
Three Rivers District Council

Dear Clara

**Planning application for the demolition of the existing marquee and construction of single storey pavilion building together with the conversion and extension of the potting shed into toilet facilities, and laying of ancillary hardstanding.
Land at Micklefield Hall Farm, Sarratt, WD3 6AQ**

I have been asked to submit a planning application for the construction of a new pavilion building, the conversion of the potting shed and the laying of hardstanding at Micklefield Hall Farm.

As part of the application, I enclose the following documents:

- A Heritage, Design and Access Statement,
- A Location, drawing number PL200C,
- Site plan, drawing number PL201A,
- Existing pavilion plans, drawing number PL202A,
- Proposed Site Plan, drawing number PL203A,
- Proposed Pavilion Floorplans, PL 204A,
- Proposed Pavilion Elevations, drawing number PL205A,
- Existing and Proposed Outbuilding, drawing number PL206B,
and
- 3D views, drawing number PL207.

I also set out the support for this proposal, including the Energy Statement, in this letter, and this will cover the following sections:

- the proposal,
- the refused scheme reference 22/1952/FUL,

- pre-application advice reference 23/ 1020/PREAPP,
- the relevant national and local policies,
- the evolution of the proposal,
- heritage assessment,
- green belt assessment, and
- conclusion

The Proposal

The proposal is for a timber agricultural style building to replace the existing marquee building. Its footprint is the same as that being replaced, measuring 15 metres in length and 12 metres in width. It is designed with a simple shallow hipped roof and is a maximum height of 5.0 metres. The orientation of the building will be similar to the marquee, but will be slightly angled towards the main part of the neighbouring listed building.

It is to be constructed with a small brick plinth and finished with timber walls. It will have a slate roof, and the end elevations are designed with typical openings for a barn-like building with windows set in from the sides. The side elevation will have two window openings and these will also have timber doors attached to cover the windows when not in use.

The Table below sets out the measurements of the existing marquee, the pavilion refused planning permission, and the current proposed building. It also provides a percentage comparison with the marquee.

Measurement	Existing	Refused	% Difference Refused	Proposal	% Difference Proposal
Max. Width	12m	15m	25%	12m	0%
Max. Depth	15m	12m	-25%	15m	0%
Total Floor Space	180sqm	180sqm	0%	180sqm	0%
Overall Height	4.6m	5.2	13%	5.0	8%

The only difference between the existing and proposed scheme is the height, and this will result in an 8% increase over that of the marquee.

The proposal also includes the conversion and a small extension to the adjacent potting shed. This is presently derelict but will be used to provide WC facilities, in the form of a disabled toilet, a unisex one, and a baby changing facility. The extension, in effect, pulls

the front wall of the building forward by its own width, and this elevation will be constructed from the reclaimed materials, and will have the same appearance as before. Presently the land around the marquee is laid to grass, but with the construction of this building, it is necessary to provide hardstanding. This will link the building to the other important indoor and outdoor parts of the wedding venue. It will also allow for ease of access for people with access difficulties, and provide a level and firm surface around the immediate edge of the building, and towards the proposed toilet.

The intention of the applicant is to use the replacement building in the same manner as the marquee. It will be ancillary to and used in connection with the main wedding venue. It will be used by wedding parties when the weather is inclement and gathering outdoor before or during the event is not a pleasant option. There is no intention to use the building independently from the converted listed barn.

The Refused Scheme

This scheme follows a previously refused one, reference 22/1952/FUL. The proposal was for a predominantly glazed pavilion to replace the marquee. It would have had the same footprint as the marquee, but was orientated through 90 degrees, with an overall height of 5.2 metres. The proposed materials were glazing, timber and zinc.

The scheme was refused for the following reason:

“ The proposed replacement pavilion building by virtue of its overly modern and unsympathetic design with little regard to the agrarian and rural character of the site coupled with its orientation and proximity to the adjacent Grade II listed building would appear as an incongruous form of development which would have an unacceptable adverse impact on the character and appearance of the site, wider area and the setting of the adjacent Grade II listed buildings. The collective impacts when considered against paragraph 202 of the NPPF 2021 would amount to less than substantial harm. Whilst recognising the limited architectural and historical significance of the marquee, its current impact on the character of the area and its impact upon the setting of the adjacent Grade II listed buildings coupled with the benefits from having a permanent building on site would not outweigh the harm created from the replacement pavilion building. No other public benefits are considered to exist which would outweigh the identified harm. The replacement pavilion would therefore fail to accord with Policies CP1 and CP12 of the Core Strategy (adopted October 2011), Policy DM3 of the Development Management Policies document LDD (adopted July 2013) and the NPPF (2021)”



The above view shows the front of the refused scheme for the pavilion. Glazing was proposed for the full width of the principal elevations and the roofing was proposed to be finished with zinc sheeting.

Pre-Application Advice

During the previous application, the Case Officer advised the applicant to use the Council's pre-application planning advice service. This would provide an opportunity to discuss the proposal with both the Case Officer and the Conservation Officer. This discussion took place in the form of a very useful site meeting.

The pre-application proposal initially took the form of a clay tiled building with a Dutch Gable roof. During the meeting, Officers expressed concern about prominence and impact of the gable roof on both Green Belt and Heritage grounds. Given its height, the proposed building would be viewed as materially larger in the Green Belt than the building it was proposed to replace, and therefore it would constitute inappropriate development, which by definition, is harmful to the Green Belt. Its height would also be readily visible from the surrounding site, and would thereby detract from the setting of the neighbouring listed buildings. This would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the neighbouring listed buildings.

Two further options were discussed, a simple clay tile roofed option and one with a slate tile finish. These were submitted in plan form following the meeting.

The principle alterations when compared to the refused scheme include the re-orientation of the building, a reduction on the amount of glazing proposed for the rear and front elevations, an alteration of materials and a change to the roof form.

The feedback from Officers was that the height of the clay tiled roof remained a concern on both Green Belt and Heritage grounds, and therefore this has not been pursued as part of the current application.

The use of a slate roof allowed the height of the proposed building to be reduced such that it was more in keeping with that of the existing building.

In commenting about the slate roof scheme, the Conservation Officer stated “ *The proposed slate roof pavilion would be a similar height to the existing marquee; the shallow roof form would ensure that the pavilion would not be widely visible within the site. The proposed elevation treatment would be acceptable from a conservation perspective. The pavilion with the slate roof would preserve the significance of the designated heritage assets*” .

The Case Officer commented in respect of the Green Belt assessment that “ *I do not consider that the proposed building would be materially larger than the one it replaces*” . She continued by confirming “ *that there would be no harm to openness nor would the development conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt*” .

The Case Officer also noted slates “ *are found within the immediate vicinity of the building and are reflective of the agrarian and rural character of the site*”, and the height of the proposed building, at 5.0 metres, would be an “ *appropriate*” one that ensured the building would “ *not be overly visible across the wider site*” .

Overall, the Case Officer and Conservation Officer were supportive of the slate roof finished scheme submitted for and commented on under the pre-application response letter, dated 17th August 2023.

Relevant National and Local Plan Policies

The previous application was refused because of concerns about the impact on the nearby listed buildings. The policies listed in the reason for refusal are **Policies CP1 and CP12** of the Core Strategy and **Policy DM3** of the DM Policies document. The site also lies in the Green Belt and relevant policies include **Policy CP11** and **Policy DM2**. Other issues that were addressed at the pre-application stage include the impact on the amenities of neighbours, the impact on trees and landscape, highways and parking, and wildlife and biodiversity. It should be noted that none of these issues formed a reason for refusal when the earlier application was determined, and the Case Officer did not raise them as being problematic during the course of the pre-application enquiry.

Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy seeks to promote buildings of a high enduring design quality that respect local distinctiveness and **Policy CP12** relates to design and states that in seeking a high standard of design, the Council will expect development proposals to

“ have regard to the local context and conserve or enhance the character, amenities and quality of an area”.

Policy DM3 of the Development Management Policies notes that 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.

Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy sets out that there is a general presumption against inappropriate development that would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt, or which would conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

Policy DM2 of the Development Management Policies relates to development within the Green Belt and the Case Officer flagged up sections (a) and (d) as the relevant parts when assessing this proposal for a replacement building.

Section (a) refers to new buildings and states *“ within the Green Belt, except in very special circumstances, approval will not be given for new buildings other than those specified in national policy and other relevant guidance.”* In this case, the NPPF allows replacement buildings provided they are of the same use and not materially larger than the building being replaced.

Section (d) refers to ancillary buildings, and states *“ the Council will only support the provision of ancillary buildings in the Green Belt where it can be demonstrated that the development would:*

- i) be of a scale and design clearly subordinate to the dwelling and of a height and bulk such that the building would not adversely affect the openness of the Green Belt*
- ii) be sited in an appropriate location that would not be prominent in the landscape and would not result in the spread of urbanising development*
- iii) avoid features normally associated with the use of a building as a dwelling such as dormer windows”.*

The current proposal includes the conversion and extension of a potting shed that lies in close proximity to the proposed replacement building. As such, **Policy DM2 (f)** is also relevant and states:

“ The Council will only support applications for the re-use/conversion of buildings in the Green Belt where:

- i) *the form, bulk and general design of the building is in keeping with the surroundings*
- ii) *any proposal by way of alterations/extensions, parking/turning areas, modifications to access or landscaping does not have a significant adverse effect on the openness of the Green Belt and does not appear excessively prominent*
- iii) *the scale of the proposed use is not likely to have a detrimental effect on the locality (e.g. by noise, smell or bringing heavy traffic into narrow lanes or involving uses not appropriate to the Green Belt or areas of open land)*
- iv) *the building is suitable for reuse/conversion without extensive alteration, rebuilding and or extension*
- v) *proposals do not include open or agricultural land to provide new gardens/amenity space or include doors giving access from buildings directly onto such land* .

Ancillary hardstanding forms part of the proposal. As confirmed in the recent appeal decision at the Old Dairy at Micklefield Hall Farm, reference, 22/1978/FUL, new hardstanding is classed as engineering works. The Development Plan is silent about this, but the NPPF notes that such operations can be an exception to inappropriate development. Engineering operations are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

Evolution of the Replacement Building

The reason for refusal and the Case Officer's Report are clear that the previously refused scheme was unacceptable because its design did not reflect the agrarian and rural character of the application site and its surroundings. The design of the replacement building has therefore been altered to embrace its setting whilst not dominating any of the nearby buildings. The site is located between the original group of farm buildings, now converted, and the modern complex of farm buildings, still in use for farming purposes. It can therefore be viewed as a transitional site within the wider group of buildings. It is also worth noting that the Case Officer's Report confirmed that "*the LPA agree the marquee is of little architectural or historic merit and encourage its removal*".

The existing farm buildings have a mix of materials. The historic ones incorporate brick, timber, tiles, and slates, while the modern ones are predominantly corrugated metal. The historic buildings have a variety of design detailing and include strong timber supports. The timber finished buildings also have brick plinths, and the lower ancillary buildings are generally finished with slate roofs.

The selection of photographs below show many of the built form characteristics found in the vicinity of the application site.



Given this, the approach to design a suitable replacement building was ensure its footprint retained a similar orientation to the marquee, thereby ensuring the openness around the building is not compromised by its orientation. The intention with the design was also to keep it simple, and, in doing so, give it an agrarian feel. This has been achieved by designing what is ultimately a timber framed barn with a shallow slate covered roof. Both the Conservation Officer and the Case Officer agreed this was the case during the pre-application enquiry. The glazed openings at both ends have been significantly reduced when compared to the previous scheme, and whilst there are ones shown on the sides, these are to covered up when not in use by timber screening.

The result is an agricultural building set within the wider farmyard of such buildings , but importantly, with a height of only 5.0 metres, it will not appear intrusive from the surrounding land. It reflects the agrarian and rural character of the area and it will not detract from the setting of the nearby listed buildings. Indeed, it will be viewed as an

ancillary farm building which complements and respects the setting of the nearby listed building. It will also facilitate the removal of a permanent building that is widely acknowledged to detract from the significance of the main listed building.

Heritage Assessment

The replacement building has been designed in conjunction with the help of the previous Case Officer and Conservation Officer. The current scheme is very similar to that commented on at the pre-application stage. Both Officers considered the proposal overcame the previous reason for refusal, and the building would have no harm on the significance of the setting of the listed buildings. The Heritage Statement provides the background, evolution and details of the proposal and taking this into account, supports the view that the proposal will not give rise to any harm as defined by the NPPF.

The proposal includes two further elements, namely the conversion of the potting shed and the laying of ancillary and complimentary hardstanding. The conversion includes a small forward extension. The remainder of the external part of the building will unaltered by the proposal. This approach ensures the historic integrity of the building will remain, and importantly, it provides the building with an appropriate, and sustainable use moving forward. There will be internal alterations through the sub-division of the building, but these are reversible and will not result in the long term damage to the historic fabric of the building. Indeed the alterations allow the important external elevations to remain revealed to the wider site, thereby not affecting its integrity or the setting of nearby listed buildings.

The hardstanding is both functional and reflects the semi-formal setting of the grounds. Presently, there are a mix of formal and less formal gardens and landscape areas that complement the setting of the listed buildings. The additional hardstanding will do likewise. It is intended to use natural riven stone.

Given the scale of the alterations to the potting shed and the design of the hardstanding, neither will have an adverse impact on the setting of the listed buildings. There will be no perceivable difference with the potting shed, and the hardstanding will be viewed ancillary and complementary to the whole built part of the estate.

Overall, the proposed building is of a high quality of design that has had regard to the context of the site, and therefore complies with the relevant design policies. Further, it will not challenge or undermine the setting of the nearby heritage assets. Indeed it will be viewed as enhancing the significance, character and setting of the heritage assets and the surrounding historic environment. As such, there is no harm to the significance of the

neighbouring listed buildings and the proposal complies with the heritage related policies of the Development Plan and the provisions of the NPPF

Green Belt Assessment

There are three elements to the proposal. The replacement building, the conversion and extension of the potting shed, and the laying of hardstanding, ancillary to the replacement building.

Officers have previously accepted at the pre-application stage that the replacement building is not materially larger than the existing one to be replaced. Little has changed between the pre-application stage and the application stage. The footprint is the same, the height is only 5.0 metres, the amount of window to the front and rear has been reduced since the previous planning application, and the orientation remains the same as that of the marquee. This all ensures the building is not materially larger than the marquee, as supported by the figures in the earlier Table. Further, the use of the building is the same as that of the marquee. It will be used as an alternative to outdoor gatherings when the weather is inclement, and will be used only in connection with the main use of the listed barn. This part of the proposal therefore complies with Green Belt policy.

Policy DM2 (f) also allows the conversion of buildings in the Green Belt subject to meeting certain criteria. In this case, the form and general design of the building is in keeping with the surrounds, the extension will not have a significant impact on the surrounding landscape, and will not appear excessively prominent, there are no issues with the scale of the proposed use, the building is suitable for re-use, and the use does not involve agricultural land being converted to gardens and the such like. This part of the proposal therefore complies with Green Belt policy set out in the Development Plan.

The new hardstanding is classed as engineering works, and such proposals are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. The amount and position of the hardstanding is such that it is clearly ancillary to the function of the wider site, linking the new building with both the indoor wedding venue, and the outdoor wedding venue. The hardstanding also connects to existing areas of hardstanding and is contained within the wider footprint of the built up site. It does not extend into the open countryside and does not add to any urban sprawl. It will remain open, unlike, for example, a parking area for cars. As such, the inclusion of limited hardstanding will preserve the openness of the Green Belt, and not conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt. This part of the proposal therefore complies with the Green Belt policy of the NPPF.

Other issues

With the previous planning application, the only reason for refusal related to heritage issues. There were no objections in respect of amenities, parking and highways, community facilities, trees, landscaping or biodiversity. This application includes the use of the potting shed and also additional hardstanding. It is therefore necessary to consider whether these elements introduce a new concern about any of the above issues.

Parking and highways, and the use of the community facility will not be affected by the revised scheme. In addition, the nearest trees are set well away from the replacement building (30 metres) and the new hardstanding, on the edge of the application site, such that they will not be affected by the proposal. The proposal has been designed to enhance biodiversity with the potential to include bat boxes. Proposed changes to the soft landscaping will also help with biodiversity gains.

The proposal provides an indication of the soft landscaping together with the proposed hardsurfaced landscaping. The soft landscaping will complement the existing vegetation while the hardsurfaced areas will allow for movement between the various parts of the site. This movement already occurs, but the hardstanding will allow for better access for those people with mobility and other difficulties. Neither element will have a detrimental effect on the amenities of neighbouring properties.

The changes to the proposal do not therefore introduce any new areas of concern since the determination of the previous application.

Energy Statement

Policy DM4 of the DMP sets out that development must produce at least 5% less carbon dioxide emissions than Building Regulations Part L (2013) requirements having regard to feasibility and viability. This may be achieved through a combination of energy efficiency measures, incorporation of on-site low carbon and renewable technologies, connection to a local, decentralised, and renewable low carbon energy supply.

The existing building has limited energy requirements with minimal lighting and standalone heating. Neither of these rely on the central energy grid system, and the lighting is supplied from solar energy generated from existing panels located on the farm buildings. The intention is to replicate this, but with more efficiency. The existing solar panels will continue to be used, and the new building will be designed with lighting that benefits from the solar energy. The heating will be via a wood burning stove. This means that the building will be served from a 100% local, decentralised energy supply. The Design and Access Statement sets out the details for this, and as noted there is also the

provision of battery storage. This approach is successful with the other existing buildings and for the business to be successful, needs to continue to be effective for all buildings including the replacement one.

This approach complies with **Policy DM4** of the Development Management Policies LDD.

Conclusion

The comments of the Council have been incorporated into the current scheme for the replacement building. Its size and design, together with its siting, and proposed materials ensure the building will not appear incongruous in the farmyard setting. No element of the proposal constitutes inappropriate development and the proposal will preserve the openness of the Green Belt. It also provides a good example of an agricultural styled building that can function harmoniously with the existing converted farm buildings to enhance the quality of the wedding venue, and also help maintain a viable community facility within the District.

Overall, the proposal complies with the relevant policies of the adopted Development Plan and the provisions of the NPPF. I trust you are able to support the application and grant planning permission.

If you need to discuss any element of the proposal, please contact me on my mobile number below.

Yours sincerely



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