

# PLANNING STATEMENT

December 2023

## Barn Conversions at Denver House, Acton Burnell, Shropshire SY5 7PQ.

### Introduction

This application seeks full planning permission for a small group of conversions from existing agricultural and ex-retail premises to residential dwellings in rural Shropshire. The completed project will create four new dwellings.

A pre-application request was made and received and this has been referred to throughout, PREAPP/22/00599.

Denver House is a traditional brick built farmhouse located near to Acton Burnell. The Site Plan 805.14 clearly shows the layout and scale of this property and the proposed conversions of the agricultural buildings associated with it. Two of the units will be within the existing U shaped courtyard barns to the south of Denver House. These barns have provenance going back to the late 19th century. The third unit will be the conversion of, and extension to, the existing old butchers shop, which is much more recent, probably from the 1950s. The fourth unit will be the conversion of the larger Dutch Barn, with the smaller one proposed to be converted into a separate carport and utility room. Both these latter structures are likely to have been built sometime during the late 19th century.

### Design

This application seeks to restore the courtyard barns, named Lower Barn (Barn 1) and Top Barn (Barn 2), to their former glory and renovate them into two useful residential properties. The Top Barn will have a lounge, kitchen, study and dining room plus two bedrooms and a bathroom, all on one floor. A modest extension into the existing courtyard will be required for this property. It is proposed that the elevation towards the courtyard should be glazed with a delicate framing, which will create a sense of space and openness. As recommended in the pre-application guidance:

*“The agent has suggested that a glazed external linear access extension along the west building courtyard elevation would provide improved layout and access and reduce change to that range’s historic fabric... Framing to the extension should be light in touch”.*

This glazed wall would also provide private access entry into the Top Barn and there will be a further entry door to the north elevation.

The Lower Barn will have a kitchen, dining room and sitting room downstairs with two bedrooms and a bathroom on the upper floor. Entry access into the Lower Barn would be equally private, into the sitting room from the south elevation courtyard area.

This scheme pays homage to the original shape of the now derelict barns, whilst creating valuable, smaller scale residential homes in demand in rural Shropshire.

In terms of the amenity space for each new dwelling, this will be limited but sufficient in an open, countryside setting which itself offers many opportunities for outdoors recreation. The sunken courtyard feature will be shared between the two properties.

Close to the barns, the former butchers shop is a nondescript building of *low architectural merit* and this proposal includes converting and extending this into a neat bungalow style dwelling suitable for a retired couple or small family. The renovation will include cladding the walls in wood, which will greatly enhance the aesthetics of the building and help it to integrate into the overall rustic, country ambiance. Inside the old shop will be a lobby leading into a W.C. and utility room, an open plan kitchen / dining / sitting room, a study, two bedrooms and a bathroom. Glazed doors to the rear will offer views over the nearby fields.

As befits the beauty and special heritage of Dutch barns, this proposal is to create a very attractive and desirable country residence whilst respecting the integrity of the structure. The footprints, style and major architectural features of the barns will be retained and respected. In the larger of the two, Dutch Barn 1 on the the Site Plan, the ground floor will have a hallway W.C. and two bedrooms. Upstairs will be an open plan kitchen, sitting and dining space with views towards the Stretton Hills. There will also be a separate Lounge. The walls will be infilled with sympathetic materials in the shape of wooden cladding, whilst the integral ironwork and structures will be retained, restored and enhanced. Dutch Barn 2, already lower in height than the Dutch Barn 1, will be slightly lowered to one storey and will house a car port for vehicles and a utility room.

## **Planning Policy**

There are a number of national and local planning policies relevant to this application. Pre-application guidance provided references to the most important ones to impact this proposal.

Regarding the Top and Lower barns (the U shape barn structure), the pre-application report stated:

*There is no in principle objection to the proposed conversion of the traditional barn range to the rear of the dwelling for residential use in order to enable the long-term preservation of the non-designated heritage asset and the scheme”.*

However, the applicants are advised that a Structural Survey particularly focused on the western sides of the barns would be required to establish the extent of rebuilding needed. Such a report is included with this application.

Regarding the old butchers shop, due to its fairly recent provenance, this is not considered an important heritage asset, however pre application advice stated:

*“The existing building does sit comfortably within the existing building group with its brick exterior and mainly traditional linear form and modest appearance. Opening up of blocked up windows and reversal of alterations to the front gable end would likely improve its overall appearance”.*

With this guidance in mind, the proposal is to open the building to more light and air with increased windows and glazed doors to the east. Its rather modest, restrained design will be retained to the west elevation that faces the farmhouse and barns. Due to its siting, the butchers shop has good access from the west, where there will be space for a small courtyard garden, a driveway and parking.

The Dutch barns present a challenge in terms of design, as reported by the Planning Officer, who stated they are:

*particularly very open structures are not normally suitable for conversion and filling in their open structure form with a new solid building for residential purposes is not considered to be conducive to respecting their inherent traditional character, appearance, form and siting relevant to this site and the amount of new building required to facilitate conversion does not accord with relevant policies”.*

The pre application advice continued, suggesting:

*It might also be possible to propose the removal of these structures from the site subject to full recording”.*

The owner and agent feel it would be a far more sustainable and appropriate solution to apply for conversion, rather than removal of these heritage buildings and have therefore proposed sympathetic schemes to both the large and small Dutch barns which will retain their attractive impact on the topography of the area and preserve them for future generations.

There was some scepticism in the preapplication report regarding the feasibility of conversion of Dutch barns as noted above. However, there are numerous examples of such conversions being successful, including many in Shropshire. These are some examples:

Close to home, a building company, Ecoply, was contracted to create and install a curved roof on a barn conversion in Shifnal.

<https://ecoply.co.uk/curved-dutch-barn-conversion-shrewsbury/>

(Website accessed October 2023)

At Kimbolton, near Leominster, a beautiful Dutch barn conversion, similar to what is proposed here, is now a successful 5 star holiday let.

<https://www.sykescottages.co.uk/cottage/Herefordshire-Grantsfield/The-Dutch-Barn-974771.html>

(Website accessed October 2023)

A similar design has been built at the Hayloft in Wroxeter.

<https://www.vrbo.com/8187147ha>

(Website accessed October 2023)

OM Architecture in Shrewsbury created a spectacular conversion of a black Dutch barn into a five bedroom residential home.

<https://om-architecture.co.uk/casestudy/the-grain-barn-shropshire/>

(Website accessed October 2023)

Recently a Dutch barn conversion has been listed as a holiday let on the Wales / Shropshire border just south of Whitchurch.

[https://www.airbnb.co.nz/rooms/881667871724648461?source\\_impression\\_id=p3\\_1698064093\\_Ofi4snhM9G5o0UG1](https://www.airbnb.co.nz/rooms/881667871724648461?source_impression_id=p3_1698064093_Ofi4snhM9G5o0UG1)

(Website accessed October 2023)

A Dutch barn conversion in Buckinghamshire won the award for “best conversion” in 2018. The before and after photographs show what can be achieved in this specialist architectural project.

[https://www.ianslater.com/case\\_study\\_dutch\\_barn.php](https://www.ianslater.com/case_study_dutch_barn.php)

(Website accessed October 2023)

A similar project in Warwickshire was completed by Lloyd Thomas Architects and achieved a contemporary, stunning build.

<https://www.lloyd-thomas.co.uk/project/dutch-barn-warwickshire/>

(Website accessed October 2023)

In 2019 a Dutch barn in Knowle near Solihull, was converted by Touchstone Projects into two dwellings.

<https://www.touchstoneprojects.co.uk/category/projects/>

(Website accessed October 2023)

To summarise, there is no shortage of examples of good practice in sympathetically and creatively converting Dutch barns both locally and nationally.

To complete this application for planning permission, detailed relevant reports were commissioned and obtained from Ecologists, Flood Risk Assessors and Heritage Impact Assessors. A summary of their results is below and the full reports are included with this application. Structural Surveys relevant to the application were undertaken and the report is also included in the application.

## **Ecology**

The ecologists established that there are no sites of international or national conservation significance within 1 km of the site. There are no sites of local conservation significance within 500 m of the site.

The area would be considered part of a wildlife corridor by Shropshire Environmental Network, although it is not a core site.

The ecologists warned against pollution of the waterway that runs beside the site and advised putting in protective measures during construction. They noted that no trees or shrubs need be removed to develop the site.

They further reported that there are no ponds within 250 m of the site and therefore no threat to greater crested newts. There was no evidence of badgers or otters in the vicinity however, the ecologists believed that *“the stream is likely to be used by small numbers of otters (commuting) on an occasional basis”* and that such otters would be familiar with *“general disturbances and smells associated with regular human activity”*. They did not believe specific measures needed to be taken regarding travelling otters because the stone walls around the stream would provide a barrier against transmitted light. Lighting restrictions which will need to be put in place for bats would also provide adequate mitigation for otters.

Regarding bats, four separate bat surveys were undertaken by experienced and qualified experts. These were undertaken at different times of the day, evening and night using equipment including thermal imaging cameras. In the U shaped barns (Lower Barn and Top Barn) designated Building A in the report, they found evidence of Brown Long-eared bats, Common Pipistrelle bats, a single Whiskered bat and a single Soprano Pipistrelle bat. In the vicinity of the building, possibly just gleaning or passing by, they recorded a Noctule bat and a

Lesser Horseshoe bat. No bats of any kind were noted in Building B in the report (the old butchers shop).

Regarding the two Dutch barns (Buildings C and D in the report), *“Neither building has the potential to support roosting bats”*.

The ecologists concluded that works to the U shaped barns, Lower Barn and top Barn could result in the disturbance, killing and injuring of small numbers of Brown Long-eared bats (six adults), Common Pipistrelle bats (four to six adults), the lone Soprano Pipistrelle bat and the single Whiskered bat. Several day roosts would be destroyed. These species have a *“low level of conservation significance”* as the bats will likely have alternative day roosts nearby.

Bat mitigation measures should be undertaken and these include:

Works to Building A will need to be carried out under a European Protected Species Mitigation Licence. This is to be obtained after planning permission has been granted. This means a named ecologist will be required on site to deal with any bat disturbance.

Certain measures will be needed at the ridge tiles of the roof to ensure bats can access suitable cavities inside. Two new ridge tile roots and two bat bricks should be integrated into the wall masonry. A dedicated loft space suitable for Brown Long-eared bats must be included in the U shaped barns. The ecologists also suggested such a loft might be more appropriately sited in the old butchers shop.

The ecologists advised that careful consideration should be given to lighting schemes. At present there is no plan to include external lighting in this scheme.

Part of the ecologists’ research included how birds might be affected by this project. *“All four buildings contained evidence of bird nesting activity...including House Sparrow, Swallow, House Martin (under the eaves of Building B), Wren, Blackbird, Robin, Tit and Feral Pigeon”*. To mitigate any negative impacts on these birds, the report advised providing replacement nesting sites and restricting timing to non nesting periods. The nesting season is March 1st to August 31st and the ecologists advise that construction should take place between September and March 1st when birds are unlikely to be nesting. The provision of new nesting boxes and cups for House Martin, House Sparrow and Starling was recommended.

### **Drainage and Flood Risk**

Pre application guidance requested a simple Flood Risk Assessment and this was commissioned from an expert company. Their detailed report is included with this application but a summary may prove helpful.

The site is within Flood Zone 3 therefore a Flood Risk Assessment is required according to the National Planning Policy Framework.

The U shaped barns; Top Barn and Lower Barn, are located in Flood Zone 1. The old butchers shop is partly located in Flood Zone 1 with a small section in Flood Zone 2. Dutch Barn 1 is located in Flood Zones 2 and 3 (Definitions of the different Flood Zones can be found in 2.4 of the report). As Dutch Barn 2 is scheduled as a storage and parking area, no recommendations were reported.

There are two potential flood source risks; fluvial and pluvial, therefore the report recommends overall flood resilient design.

The proposed development for the U shaped barns is *“considered to be at low risk of both pluvial and fluvial flooding ...as such mitigation measures are not recommended”*.

The old butchers shop is considered to be at low to moderate risk of flooding from pluvial and fluvial. The report advises “finished floor levels (FFLs) are recommended to be raised 300mm above the 1 in 100 year surface water flood risk calculated level of 109.61m AOD”.

Dutch Barn 1 merited a more detailed recommendation. It is considered to be “at high risk of flooding from pluvial and fluvial”. Finished floor levels for this structure are recommended to be raised at least 0.6m above the topographical level of 109.38m AOD that is 109.98m AOD. Furthermore, additional flood resistance measures in the form of a flood door or flood barrier are recommended at this building. Such measures would mitigate up to a flood level of 110.58m AOD which is greater than the 1 in 1000 surface water event by 0.46m.

### **Heritage Impact Assessment**

Preapplication guidance requested a detailed HIA and a report has been included with this application. The notable design of the inner courtyard had a vital importance during the winter months; as a midden for animals kept inside. As an entity the group of agricultural buildings represents a “*visual display of Shropshire farm buildings evolving over a 150-year period*”. This is a further rationale for retaining and renovating the site.

### **Access**

Preapplication guidance reiterated the importance of safe access from the roadway to all new developments and the requirement for suitable parking spaces for vehicles. Site Plan 805.14 shows a detailed scheme for access into the development and parking facilities for each of the properties. The plan also shows that there is ample space for wheelie bins for each of the units, within the courtyard, next to the butchers shop and between Dutch barn 2 and the boundary.

The site will be accessed from the Frodesley to Acton Burnell road through the existing gateway. Denver House itself will retain the current parking spaces alongside the retaining wall. Two / three vehicle parking spaces will be created within the courtyard of the U shaped barns and a further space along the east wall. The old butchers shop will have two spaces at the front and one at the side. The Dutch barn will have three spaces; two undercover in the smaller Dutch barn and one to its rear.

This means that each property will have a minimum of two vehicle parking spaces plus turning areas.

### **Conclusion**

This application adheres to the valuable preapplication guidance offered by Shropshire Council’s Area Planning team. It includes Structural Surveys, a Flood Risk Assessment, a Heritage Impact Assessment report, an Ecology report that includes bats and other wildlife and which refers to the Shropshire Environmental Network, an Access and Parking scheme, a site plan and detailed drawings of the proposed dwellings.

Examples of successful and well regarded conversions of Dutch barns, both locally and nationally, support the application.

Small scale, easily maintained modern homes in the countryside are in high demand. The sensitive conversion of existing agricultural buildings, which will otherwise simply deteriorate, is a rational and realistic part of the solution to the crisis of homelessness in the U.K. Shropshire is not immune from the pressure of lack of homes and the creation of four well insulated, comfortable houses in a practical and popular location should be welcomed.