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Planning Statement

Wyreside Hall- The Complete Leisure Experience

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CLIENT	Mr Hinde
PROJECT TITLE:	Wyreside Master Plan – Brook Lodge
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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement has been prepared by GA Associates on behalf of Wyreside Hall Ltd (the Applicant) to support a resubmission seeking redevelopment of the former Brook Lodge fisheries site, following refusal Ref 23/00439/FULMAJ. The redevelopment will include sitting of 9 lodges which will be managed and controlled as part of the Wyreside Hall Master Plan. The amended scheme includes a notable reduction in lodges, down from 16 and also resisting and reconfiguration of the layout to better utilise natural planting onsite.
- 1.2 The applicants are seeking to create one of the most comprehensive rural retreats in Lancashire, through the reuse and enhancement of previously developed sites. This unique opportunity to bring together extant assets, in combination within the flagship Wyreside Hall Hotel, has been made possible by years of private investment.
- 1.3 The following elements of the wider Wyreside Hall project have been granted planning:

- **Wyreside Hall – Ref: 11/00839/FULMAJ** - *Change of use of building to hotel (C1), single storey lounge extension to existing building with glazed link to single/two storey extension to form function room, additional guest bedrooms and leisure complex. Conversion of buildings to form five dwellings, formation of car park, erection of pavilion and alterations to vehicular access. – APPROVED*

The fulcrum of the Master Plan is the restoration and development of Wyreside Hall, one of the most classically beautiful buildings in Lancashire. Grade II listed and with centuries of history, it overlooks the River Wyre and is surrounded by 100 acres of Lancashire countryside. The reinvigoration of the Hall has been delivered by the enthusiasm of the owners who are working towards establishing a world-renowned leisure operation and events venue. For the owners it has been a passion project, ensuring that Wyreside Hall Hotel is stylish and elegant, whilst still retaining its reputation as one of Lancashire's historical houses. The Hotel has gained a reputation for offering a luxury wedding and events venue despite the recent pandemic which caused a postponement to large gatherings.*

As mentioned, the owners have provided considerable financial investment with a view to reinstating the building following the grant of planning, transforming the site into a Country House Hotel with 52 bedrooms, leisure facilities including a swimming pool, spa, tennis courts and restaurant. There are also five self-catering cottages (in the old coach house).

- **Redevelopment of Taylors Farm Equestrian Centre – Ref: 23/00438/FULMAJ – provision of bed and breakfast guest accommodation with facilities, function rooms and reception and creation of new access. – APPROVED**

Taylors Farm has a granted consent and will see the redevelopment of a former equestrian centre to provide bed and breakfast accommodation linked with bespoke equestrian experiences for guests within the wider Master Plan area. The aim of the site is to provide a difference in the type of accommodation that Wyreside can offer, while also providing overspill accommodation for event guests. The Bespoke equestrian experiences are a key dimension for the business given the aim to provide a 5 visitor experience that is unrivalled within Wyre.*

- **Rivendell Trough Road – Ref: 17/00585/FUL - External alterations and conversion of an agricultural building to provide 4no. holiday cottages with alterations to the existing access track - APPROVED**

Rivendell provides 4 high end holiday cottages that have been designed specifically to provide family accommodation for wedding/ event guests. They can also operate independently to provide accommodation for general Wyreside guests linked to the wider tourism offer within the Master Plan area.

- 1.4 The Master Plan will combine together the three now approve locations and Brook Lodge via the creation of new nature trails and horse trekking routes, with the main focal point being the Wyreside Hall Hotel. The Plan seeks to increase the robustness of the enterprise, delivering a broader range of accommodation at differing price points and increasing the scope of activities that will combine to support the collective ‘Wyreside Business’. Improving the commercial viability of the wider business is a critical consideration to allow the continued investment that has seen the restoration of the Grade II* listed manor house.

2.0 The Site Location & Background.

2.1 The Wyreside Master Plan is strategically located in rural Lancashire within Wyre, predominantly on the fringes of the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Forest of Bowland is recognised as a regional tourist destination. The main hub of the agglomeration is located a 10-minute drive from the M6 motorway (junction 33), affording good connectivity north and south. The closest train station is at Lancaster, which is 7-miles away, with connections to London, Manchester (including the airport), Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, and the Lake District. It is located a 30-minute drive from the Port of Heysham with connections to the Isle of Man.

Brook Lodge *'Leisure Fishery & Holiday Chalets' - Redevelopment to restore recreational fishery for guest within the Wyreside Masterplan Area and change of use of land to allow siting of 9 holiday lodges;*

2.2 The site historically operated as a successful fish hatchery and fishery, before an infrastructure failure on-site decimated fish stocks and ultimately ended commercial operations. Following the incident, Brook Lodge has remained dormant however the existing infrastructure and commercial engineered appearance of the site is still evident. The Master Plan seeks to restore the site and utilise the existing pond features offering leisure fishing opportunities for clients and also delivering additional self-catering lodge accommodation. The site is located within a designated countryside area, 200 meters inside the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

3.0 Planning Policy

3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 sets out the duties of decision makers in the determination of planning applications and states:

'If regard is to be had to the Development Plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.'

3.2 The Development Plan in this instance consists of the Wyre Local Plan 2011–2031 (the Local Plan), with key policies including:

- SP2 (Sustainable Development)
- SP4 (Countryside Areas)
- SP5 (Forest of Bowland AONB)
- EP8 (Rural Economy)
- EP9 (Holiday Accommodation)

3.3 The National Planning Policy Framework is also a significant material consideration in the determination of this application.

4.0 Principal of Development

4.1 Brook Lodge is not specifically designated for any use in the Local Plan, and despite being located within a designated countryside area and the Forest of Bowland, has operated and is characterised as a commercial fishery and fish hatchery.

The economy and supporting rural communities

4.2 One of the strategic objectives identified in Chapter 2 of the Local Plan is to diversify and grow the local economy and it is recognised that visitor expenditure makes a significant contribution within Wyre. In 2015, there was over 4.6 million tourism visits to Wyre, an increase of 1.2 per cent from the previous year. This equates to 7 per cent of all tourism visits to Lancashire. A total of £330.449 million was generated within the local economy through visitor and tourism business expenditure, an increase of 1.1 per cent from the previous year. In terms of the number of jobs provided by differing sectors *'Accommodation, Food Services and Recreation'* was the fourth highest contributor out of the 13 sectors surveyed (Wyre Employment Land Study Update, 2015)

4.3 The justification text to local Plan policy EP8 affirms that rural areas are an important resource for tourism in the Borough and the rural economy is important to the overall economy in Wyre and to employment in the Borough. Policy EP8 aims to contribute towards maintaining a healthy rural economy pledging that **'sustainable development which enhances the diversity of recreational opportunities and visitor attractions in rural areas will be supported'**. Policy EP9 Tourism confirms that the rural economy is an important

element of the local economy in Wyre and **'holiday accommodation is an important element of the tourism industry'**. The application at Brook Lodge seeks specifically to broaden opportunities for guests and ensure the Wyreside Hall Master Plan can accommodate all needs, including individuals who would not wish to stay within a large 5* hotel. This would be targeted at young families or individuals with specific care needs who would benefit from bespoke accommodation.

- 4.4 Policy EP8 provides broad support for recreational opportunities and visitor attractions in rural areas and doesn't seek to provide a prescriptive or exhaustive list. Ultimately the policy and justification text acknowledge the significant contribution that tourism makes to the borough's economy and seek to broaden the range of attractions. This includes building upon the rural tourism economy which the policy refers to as being **'significant'** but recognising opportunities exist to create enhancements through diversification. Accordingly, whilst the plan does not specifically acknowledge the importance of fisheries in the same vein as equestrian development, it is reasonable to balance that such a use would be included within *'visitor attractions'* as recognised under policy EP8.
- 4.5 Policy EP9 provides direct support for the creation of new holiday accommodation outside of settlement boundaries, as an expansion to an existing enterprise, as is the case here linked to the Wyreside Hall Master Plan. The 'Taylors Farm' application Ref:23/00438/FULMAJ was considered directly as an expansion of the Wyreside Hall Master Plan and this site was located geographically further from the Main Hotel.
- 4.6 Tourism is expected to grow by 3.8% per annum through to 2025, faster than the overall UK economy, with Britain forecast to have a tourism industry worth over £257 billion by 2025 (just under 10% of UK GDP). It is also forecasted to support almost 3.8 million jobs by 2025 (11% of total UK jobs).
- 4.7 In summary therefore, the Local Plan and supporting evidence base identifies the diversification and development of the local economy as a strategic objective, with leisure, culture and tourism making up an important industry in Wyre. That plan seeks to facilitate businesses building upon the rural tourism economy, delivering more attractions and developing greater links to existing established destinations such as the AONB.

4.8 The redevelopment of Brook Lodge is in line with the above in so far as it:

- Contribute towards diversifying and growing the local economy by maximising the potential of the visitor economy. The supporting business plan highlights how the proposals would create significant employment opportunities for the local community. This is in addition to the on-site spending.
- Contribute to the objective of strengthening the rural tourism sector by broadening the range of attractions available such as fishing. The Wyreside Master Plan will cultivate an appreciation of the natural environment offering opportunities to access areas of the countryside that would otherwise remain private.

4.9 The proposed application is therefore in general compliance with the Local Plan objectives of diversifying and growing the local visitor economy and broadening the range of attractions and leisure facilities, whilst providing valuable opportunities to enhance the provision of equine training.

Development in the Countryside

4.10 Local Plan policies SP4 (Countryside Areas) restrict development proposals outside settlement boundaries to a specific set of listed exemptions which includes outdoor leisure facilities and holiday accommodation. As previously highlighted, the exemptions are included to ensure that the plan can deliver on its overarching commitment to supporting the rural economy. Tourism development such as the Wyreside Master Plan is not therefore precluded in the countryside under the terms of the Local Plan and this is the precedent that has been set by the recent approval of Taylors Farm. It is noted that policy SP2 and EP8 have specific considerations that must be balance but the proposal forms an integral part of the Wyreside Hall Master Plan, which forms an expansion of an existing business which is appropriate in principle.

4.11 Furthermore, the nature of the proposal is such that it is not realistically deliverable within an alternative location, bearing in mind Brook Lodge is an appropriate brownfield sites in proximity of Wyreside Hall with extant fishing infrastructure. The location of the site, on a sequential basis, is fixed in this instance as the proposal centres around the Wyreside Hall Hotel as a nucleus which is the fulcrum of the Master Plan.

- 4.12 The Framework, in paragraph 88 under the heading *'supporting a prosperous rural economy'*, also confirms that 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. The framework also confirms that planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found beyond existing settlements.
- 4.13 In summary therefore, and irrespective of the fact Brook Lodge is the closest available brownfield site to Wyreside Hall Hotel, the location of the application site within the designated countryside and AONB does not in itself preclude leisure / tourism development in principle. Local Plan policy SP4 allows uses in the designated countryside which help to diversify the rural economy, including the expansion of existing businesses, whilst the Framework acknowledges the need to enable sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments in the rural area.

Access, Accessibility and Impact on Highway Network

- 4.14 Local Plan Policy SP2 requires that all development in Wyre should be sustainable and contribute to the continuation or creation of sustainable communities in terms of its location and accessibility. Part 4 of the policy sets out ways in which the Local Plan seeks to deliver sustainable communities. Amongst others, these considerations include a) facilitating economic growth, including in the rural areas, and f) ensuring accessible places and minimising the need to travel by car. In recognition of the significant contribution that tourism makes to the local economy, policies in the Local Plan allow for new holiday accommodation and leisure facilities in countryside areas. By allowing for such developments in areas which may not have easy access to services and facilities, or to a range of transport modes, there is implicit acceptance that there will be additional car journeys. In considering individual proposals, it is necessary to balance the objectives of Policy SP2, which may not always fully align.
- 4.15 The extent to which potential tourists are likely to access facilities outside the Master Plan area is very difficult to predict, but the aim of the proposal is to provide all facilities within one geographical location, linked by sustainable nature trails. This means it is less likely that

visitors will need to travel by car to destinations further afield, particularly if only staying for short periods.

- 4.16 Brook Lodge is the closest brownfield site to Wyreside Hall and the facilities within the Master Plan ensure that the additional accommodation isn't particularly remote. Furthermore, by supporting the diversification/ expansion of the existing business, the proposal will create significant benefits for the local economy, and would contribute to the Framework objective of supporting a prosperous rural economy. Therefore, on balance the masterplan is considered '*sustainable*' reflecting the needs to balance the differing and conflicting dimensions.

Forest of Bowland

- 4.17 The sites are located within the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), so the proposals have been designed to protect the character, appearance and setting of the surrounding vernacular.
- 4.18 Considering the accommodation at Brook Lodge by reason of design, timber cladding and timber doors and windows, it is considered the proposal would be in keeping with the rural vernacular of the surrounding area. Furthermore, the proposal would not materially encroach into the surrounding AONB beyond the existing developed site. Further to this, a condition can be provided to deliver a comprehensive Landscape Plan to further assimilate the chalets into their setting.
- 4.19 Taking into account the appropriate nature, scale and previously developed settings, it is deemed that the proposal would have a minimal impact on the landscape, thus fall under categorisation as a minor development within the AONB. The commercial diversification of this sites under the Wyreside Masterplan would be considered principally compliant with Adopted Policy SP5 (Forest of Bowland AONB).

5.0 The Resubmission & App Ref 23/00439/FULMAJ

5.1 Policy EP9 promotes the extension of existing businesses subject to certain criteria:

- Criterion a) Scale & Landscape Impact – Brook Lodge has a well-defined boundary that has matured throughout the years of subsequent commercial operation. This vegetation buffers the site from the surrounding landscape and confines all the proposed infrastructure to the existing brownfield envelope. The amended proposed plans show an organic scheme, with generous spacing between the lodges and around the site edge, which has the effect of softening the impact of the development. The units have also been moved onsite to ensure they are all contained behind the existing planting buffer onsite. Opportunities will also be utilised to further enhance the site’s existing screening. Given the siting of the proposed units within a commercial fishery setting, any visual change will be restricted to the immediate site and not further afield. Thus, it is deemed that the impacts of the proposed development can be adequately mitigated in terms of visual impact.
- Criterion b) Supporting Infrastructure are Necessary – The Brook Lodge accommodation sits comfortably within the confines of the existing fishery and the lakes are already physically present onsite, with no requirement for any incursion into an open landscape. Furthermore, the nature of holiday lodges means that only minimal infrastructure is required, given their temporary status. This infrastructure includes the access tracks, drainage and the bases. The development will retain the existing access arrangement, so it is only a small section of internal road that will be created.
- Criterion C- Long term viability- The application site will be operated as part of the wider Wyreside Master Plan, and will form an integral part of the leisure experience that the applicants are seeking to create. The site is closer to the main Hotel than other applications approved under the same masterplan including Taylors Farm, thus viability should be considered in context with the wider scheme. To confirm the application is supported by an amended viability/ feasibility study which considers a range of issues facing the wider master plan including competition, growth goals of

the site and predicted occupation. It is deemed that this document adequately demonstrates viability of the existing business and the proposed development.

- 5.2 At the point of application signoff, the robustness of the information presented concerning the extant fishery business use at Brook Lodge was challenged. However, the physical infrastructure onsite makes it clear to any reasonable observer, beyond doubt, that the site has operated for an extensive period as a commercial fishery. This was also the opinion of the case officer during the initial application. To reiterate the business has lawfully operated and could do so again, without the need for planning or any physical alterations onsite that would trigger the need for planning consent. Thus, it isn't considered justifiable in practice for decision makers to desegregate Brook Lodge from either the lawful commercial fishery use onsite or the wider Wyreside Hall Masterplan. The 'Taylors Farm' Ref:23/00438/FULMAJ approval was afforded weight in connection with Wyreside Hall, despite being located further from the main Hotel.
- 5.3 On balance, it is deemed that insufficient weight was afforded to Brook Lodge's integral role as part of the wider Wyreside Hall Master Plan, the facilities on offer and the symbiosis between the respective sites. Furthermore, with its location within the AONB it is considered visitors would be within reasonable distance of other tourism destinations such as walking/hiking routes. It must also be noted that Policy SP2 seeks to *'Protect and enhance biodiversity, landscape, cultural heritage and green infrastructure assets'*, thus greater weight should be afforded to the restoration and the on-going viability of Wyreside Hall, a Grade II listed building. It is deemed, on balance, that the site's strategic objectives in supporting the wider Wyreside Masterplan, as well as the bio-diversity gains that can be achieved, would deliver sufficient weight to accord with Policy SP2 of the plan.
- 5.4 Whilst the site would in theory be capable of operating on its own without relying on other sites or facilities, this is the same for a host of countryside uses that are appropriate in specific circumstances such as agricultural dwellings, or farm diversification schemes. Wyre Council would have a number of mechanisms available to ensure that the site remained controlled as part of the Wyreside Master Plan, and as such maintains the necessary locational policy justification.

Visual Impact

- 5.5 Given the visual sensitivity of the wider landscape, being a designated AONB, the revised scheme has been drastically scaled back to reduce associated impacts on the character of the area. It should also be acknowledged that while the wider landscape is sensitive, Brook Lodge's character has been completely altered by decades of commercial activity, including engineered excavation of the ponds, siting of buildings and laying of access tracks. The site's character differs significantly from the surrounding open rural parkland setting which local policy is keen to protect and preserve.
- 5.6 The original officers report referenced views from footpath FP-02-19-028 that crosses through the field to the north, however this footpath is over 300 meters away from the site and is buffered by a tree line and dense native hedgerow. Nevertheless, to further mitigate the situation the number of lodges has been reduced and also the land area used. All the units are now proposed specifically behind a natural planted buffer. Thus, views would be acceptable in the AONB as people using the PROW would have no sight of the development which is now concentrated within a localised area.
- 5.7 The specific timber design of the lodges has been selected to ensure that they are appropriate within the sensitive landscape setting, and subject to landscaping and ecological enhancements the development would improve the aesthetics of the extant fishery site. When taking into account the reduction in the number of units proposed, the harm to the character of the AONB would be negligible.
- 5.8 There is substantial natural screening to the north of the site and planting buffers within the site itself which are considered to sufficiently conserve the character of the AONB and wider landscape. As such it is considered that the proposal would have an acceptable level of localised change within the landscape, and through enhancements could improve the appearance and setting of the AONB. Thus, the development is deemed on balance to comply with Policies SP4 and SP5 and the Forest of Bowland Management Plan.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 Wyre's Development Plan establishes that tourism and leisure uses are an acceptable form of development within the countryside in principle, including extensions to established

businesses, which evidently are restricted in terms of locality. Indeed, the proposal will help increase the financial resilience of the existing business and ensure that the Wyreside Hall Master plan is an accessible option for all to enjoy.

6.2 The additional accommodation and the tourism facilities proposed are an integral part of the extant major leisure facility which is linked to the restoration of the grade II* listed Wyreside Hall. The key benefits include:

- Contributing towards diversifying and growing the local economy through increasing visitor numbers and generating employment opportunities. The Master Plan will create a significant number of full-time equivalent jobs;
- Contributing to the objective of strengthening the rural tourism sector by broadening the range of attractions including fishing lakes.

6.3 There would not be an unacceptable detrimental impact on the intrinsic value and rural character of the countryside to the degree that it would outweigh the substantial benefits of the scheme.

6.4 Given the sensitive way in which the scheme has been designed, there would be no significant harm to biodiversity. However, the proposal presents an opportunity to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around the development. The biodiversity enhancement areas are detailed within the supporting ecological assessment.

6.5 There are no insurmountable technical issues relating to highways, flood risk or drainage, whilst the scheme has been sensitively designed to respect the objectives of AONB and avoid unacceptable harm to visual amenities generally.

6.6 In summary, the proposal is in general compliance with the requirements of relevant Local Plan policy and represent a sustainable and positive development which ought to be granted planning permission.

GRAHAM ANTHONY ASSOCIATES

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