



PLANNING STATEMENT

Oak Farm, Green Barns Lane, Little Hay,
Lichfield, Staffordshire WS14 0QN

February 2024

VISTA

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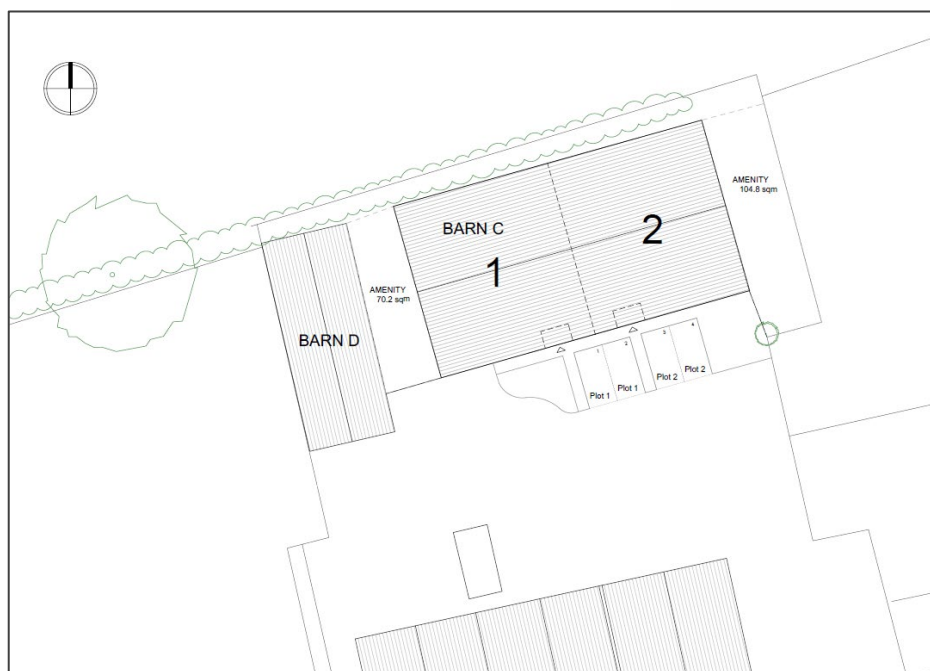
1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared to accompany a full planning application in relation to the change of use of a portal framed building to create 2no. dwellings.
- 1.2 The application follows the grant of planning permission (ref. 22/00328/COU) for the change of use of the buildings to the south to create 5no. dwellings.
- 1.3 The application is accompanied by a Structural Survey and Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. Planning drawings have been prepared by BHB Architects who undertook the architectural work on the barns to the south.

2. Proposed Development

- 2.1 The application seeks planning permission for the change of use of the existing barn to create 2no. dwellings. The barn is in equine use having previously used as an indoor riding arena.

- 2.2 The image below shows the barn being subdivided to create two properties. Their parking would be to the front (south) and gardens either side (east and west).



- 2.2 A detached barn, annotated as Barn D in the image above, is proposed to be demolished as part of the approved development to the south of the site. This application does not propose to include its demolition. If the permission to the south is implemented, and this current application is approved, a separate planning application would be required to change the use of the resultant land (upon which sits Barn D) to create garden for Unit 1.
- 2.3 Each barn conversion would be afforded two storey accommodation with the ground floor providing day to day living accommodation and the first floor providing 4no. bedrooms.
- 2.4 It is proposed to retain the existing block work walls and to apply new cladding at a higher level. Each front door, located on the south elevation, will be recessed such to provide a depth/reveal in the principal elevation.

3. Site Description

- 3.1 The application site is located at the north of an equine enterprise and comprises a portal framed building of block work and timber cladding construction. The barn is detached and sits to the east of a smaller portal framed building. To the south of the barn, across an area of hardstanding, sits a collection of single storey height brick/block stables. To the south of those sits a rectangular building of similar construction. A former agricultural workers dwelling is located to the east.



- 3.2 The site is within the Green Belt. It is within Flood Zone 1 (least at risk) and is not within close proximity to designated or non-designated heritage assets.

4. Planning History

- 4.2 22/00328/COU – Change of use of existing equestrian buildings to form no 5 dwellings and erection of two detached parking barns. Approved 3 May 2023.

5. Planning Policy

5.1 The development plan for Lichfield District comprises the Local Plan Strategy (LPS) and the Site Allocations Plan (SAP). There are no policies of the Site Allocations Plan considered to be relevant to the proposals. The following policies of the Local Plan Strategy (LPS) are considered relevant to the determination of this application:

- Policy BE1 – High Quality Development
- Core Policy 1 – The Spatial Strategy
- Core Policy 3 – Delivering Sustainable Development
- Core Policy 6 – Housing Delivery
- Policy ST1 – Sustainable Travel
- Policy ST2 – Parking Provision
- Policy NR7 – Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation

5.2 In addition to the Local Plan Strategy and Site Allocations Plan, the Council has adopted a number of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). This includes the ‘Rural Development’ and ‘Sustainable Design’ SPDs.

5.3 There is a Neighbourhood Plan in place for Shenstone. Relevant policies include:

- Policy GB1 – Protection of Green Belt Boundaries
- Policy H1 – Dwelling Mix
- Policy H3 – Design of Residential Development
- Policy H4 – Provision of Private Amenity Space to Serve Residential Development
- Policy GSC3 – Minimising the environmental impact of development

5.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government’s planning policy and is a material consideration.

- 5.5 Paragraph 2 states that “Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise” and that the NPPF “is a material consideration in planning decisions.”
- 5.6 Section 4 address decision-making with paragraph 38 requiring LPAs to approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. It states that they should use the full range of planning tools available, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. It requires decision-makers at every level to seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.
- 5.7 Section 5 covers the Governments policies around housing supply. Paragraph 60 states that “it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay. The overall aim should be to meet as much of an area’s identified housing need as possible, including with an appropriate mix of housing types for the local community.”
- 5.8 Paragraph 63 notes that the need, size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies.
- 5.9 Paragraph 70 observes that small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirements of an area and that they are often built out relatively quickly.
- 5.10 Paragraphs 82-84 relate to rural housing. Paragraph 82 states that policies and decisions should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing that reflects local needs.
- 5.11 Paragraph 83 states that to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.

- 5.12 Paragraph 84 states that planning decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of a series of circumstances apply. This includes, at (c) where development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting.
- 5.13 Section 9 relates to sustainable transport. It states at paragraph 109 that the planning system should actively manage patterns of growth whilst recognising that “opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision-making.”
- 5.14 Section 11 sets out the Government’s policies around the effective use of land. Paragraph 123 states that planning decisions “should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions.”
- 5.15 Paragraph 124 sets out that planning decisions should *inter alia*:
- (d) promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially if this would help to meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained and available sites could be used more effectively (for example converting space above shops, and building on or above service yards, car parks, lock-ups and railway infrastructure)⁵⁰;
- 5.16 Section 12 sets out policies in respect of design with paragraph 131 setting out that “Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.” Paragraph 135 goes on to list a series of broad design criteria (a-f) that proposals should meet from a design perspective.
- 5.17 Section 13 relates to Green Belt. Paragraph 142 begins by outlining the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and stating that the essential characteristic of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

- 5.18 Paragraph 143 lists the five purposes of Green Belt.
- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
 - b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.
 - c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
 - d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 5.19 Paragraph 152 sets out that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. LPAs are asked to ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, outlining that very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations (paragraph 153).
- 5.20 Paragraphs 154 and 155 list a series of development types that might be considered to be appropriate development in the Green Belt. Paragraph 155(d) states that the re-use of buildings that are of permanent and substantial construction is not inappropriate development provided the development preserves its openness and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within Green Belt.
- 5.21 Section 15 relates to the natural environment and, amongst other things, sets out to achieve a biodiversity net gain (paragraph 180(d)).
- 5.22 Paragraphs 189-194 relate to ground conditions and pollution.

6. Discussion

6.1 The main matters relating to this application are considered to be as follows:

Matter 1 – Principle of Development

Matter 2 – Design

Matter 3 – Amenity

Matter 4 – Ecology

Matter 1 – Principle of Development

6.2 Core Policy 6 of the Local Plan Strategy (LPS) relates to housing delivery. The policy seeks to direct the majority of housing growth to Lichfield and Burntwood, and the six main rural settlements of Alrewas, Armitage with Handsacre, Fazeley, Fradley, Shenstone and Whittington. Sites, located in areas such as the application site; away from a settlement boundary and one of the main rural settlements, are to be considered as being located within open countryside.

6.3 Core Policy 6 seeks to restrict housing in these locations unless the housing meets one or more of a listed set of types. This includes “changes of use and conversion schemes;”.

6.4 The ‘Rural Development’ SPD provides guidance on conversion schemes in rural areas with Appendix B providing specific guidance on residential conversions. It notes that,

“Not all rural buildings are suitable for conversion. Some buildings would require major or complete reconstruction, alteration or extension to allow their re-use. Such works would effectively represent the creation of a new building in the countryside which would in most circumstances, be contrary to rural area planning policies.” (paragraph 1.2, Appendix B)

- 6.5 Paragraph 2.2 of Appendix B of the SPD provides some further guidance, setting out a number of tests that are applicable to any conversion scheme(s). This includes:
- The importance of good design – one that functions well, adds to and improves the built environment and responds to local character and history.
 - The importance of minimising impacts on ecological interests.
 - That the building should not require extensive alteration and/or extension.
 - That there is appropriate access such that highway safety is not compromised.
 - That there would be no adverse impact on residential amenity.
- 6.6 In summary, provided the building in question is of a size that can (without extension) provide acceptable living standards, say adhering to the Nationally Described Space Standards (although there is no development plan policy requirement); and provided it can be converted without substantial structural alteration, it would be one that would align with Core Policy 6 of the LPS. The detailed design would then be considered under the guidance within the Rural Development SPD and Policy BE1 of the LPS.
- 6.7 It is important to stress at this juncture that Core Policy 6 does not distinguish buildings located in places accessible by modes of transport other than private car to those where occupants would likely have to rely on their car to reach day to day services. It is noted that Staffordshire County Council (Highways) have a policy of objecting to developments where occupants rely on cars. They claim this is unsustainable development. Sustainability is more than the ability to use public transport or to walk to a place. Paragraph 109 of the NPPF indeed acknowledges that transport solutions will differ in rural and urban areas. It is therefore considered that any potential objections from SCC Highways on grounds of development being unsustainable would not be substantiated by adopted policy, nor reflect the more nuanced sustainability of re-using buildings and enhancing the built and natural environment.
- 6.8 The application is accompanied by a Structural Survey. The report considers the structural condition of the building to be converted under this application and concludes that the building is suitable for conversion with no major structural upgrades required. The report goes on to make a series of recommendations none of which are considered

fundamental to the structural integrity of the buildings or their ability to be converted in a manner consistent with the requirements of Core Policy 6 or the Rural Development SPD.

6.9 The Rural Development SPD states that (paragraph 2.6),

“Re-building means the substantial replacement of parts of the original structure whilst alteration or re-modelling involves changes to the original structure. The extent to which this would be considered ‘significant’ will vary depending on the scale and type of building affected and the extent of the work proposed. Limited re-building is acceptable to effect repairs but where for example, a significant part of the original building has been removed or fallen into disrepair, re-building will not usually be acceptable, particularly where the building is located within the Green Belt.

6.10 Having regard to the limited extent of re-modelling on a small part of the wider portal framed building it is considered that the overall conversion remains just that, a conversion scheme and thus one consistent with Core Policy 6 and the Rural Development SPD.

6.11 With regard to Green Belt matters, the NPPF states that the re-use of a building that is permanent and of substantial construction is appropriate development where openness is preserved and the development does not conflict with the purposes of including land within in.

6.12 The building is evidently of permanent and substantial construction. That much is clear on inspection but it is also evident from the Structural Report.

6.13 The development does not look to extend the built form and the garden areas proposed are located on the sides (east/west) and contained by existing development or within the confines of the equine enterprise that exists. There is no wider sprawl of development of domestic curtilage into the wider countryside or Green Belt. As with the development that was approved immediately south of the site, the change of use of this barn to create

2no. dwellings will not conflict with the 5no. purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

- 6.14 Having regard to the above, it is submitted that the development is appropriate development within the Green Belt and the principle of development is acceptable; consistent with the Development Plan and in particular to Core Policy 6. The development is also consistent with the Neighbourhood Plan and Policy GB1 which relates to Green Belt.

Matter 2 – Design

- 6.15 The proposed conversion will, to a large degree, reflect the character of the existing building. The block work will be either painted or over-rendered; a detail we would anticipate forming a planning condition. The cladding will be timber laid vertically to reflect the existing high level cladding.
- 6.16 New openings will be created in the elevations but these are set back from the road behind the building subject of a separate planning permission and are considered to reflect openings that would be typical on a range of this scale and design. The entrance on the south elevation is 'cut' into the building to offer relief within the massing of the building whilst also affording a small covered area for boots etc.
- 6.17 The parking to the front of the site makes use of the existing areas of hardstanding. Given the use of the existing livery use of the site, the visual impact of the car parking on the character and appearance of this rural lane is considered to be improved and certainly no worse. The gardens are to the side of the buildings and are both more than 70sqm in area.
- 6.18 The design submitted is considered an appropriate response to local context and will be in harmony with the buildings to the south should they be converted. If the livery use was to be maintained to the south i.e. the extant permission not implemented, there would be no harm by way of design on either site.

Matter 3 – Amenity

- 6.19 The building is set away from the buildings to the south and there would be no instances of overlooking or loss of privacy for future occupants of the application buildings or those to the south subject of the extant consent. Should the livery use continue to the south, it is submitted that the use of low impact and rural in nature. The noise generated from keeping horses and the traffic associated with visitors is limited and not considered to be harmful to the living conditions of future residents.

Matter 4 – Ecology

- 6.20 The application is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal prepared by SEED. The report was undertaken at the appropriate time of year by persons qualified to undertake such an assessment. The conclusions made confirm that the conversion can take place without causing harm to bats.
- 6.21 The application site is understood to lie outside of the 0-15km zone of influence of the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation. Policy NR7 of the Local Plan Strategy sets out that any development leading to a net increase in dwellings within 0-15km of the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC) will be deemed to have an adverse impact on the SAC unless or until satisfactorily avoidance and/or mitigation measures have been secured. The LPA have adopted a practice of securing this mitigation through a Unilateral Undertaking where a financial contribution is obligated with funds being directed to mitigation efforts of the SAC Partnership authorities.
- 6.22 Given the site is believed to be outside the ZOI, it is submitted that no mitigation is required. However, if the LPA confirm otherwise, we are able to confirm that the applicant is happy to enter into a Unilateral Undertaking to mitigate for the impacts of development on the integrity of the SAC.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 A structural report is submitted that confirms the buildings are structurally sound and the conversion can take place without significant structural alterations. The proposed alterations are considered to be modest re-modelling and is consistent with the Rural Development SPD. Moreover, none of the buildings require extension in order to facilitate their habitable conversion.
- 7.2 The conversion of the building to create 2no. dwellings is not considered to adversely affect the openness of the Green Belt nor conflict with the purposes of including land in it. The development is thus considered to be appropriate development within the Green Belt.
- 7.3 Given the compliance with Core Policy 6, any potential objections relating to sustainability (in terms of location) that might be raised by consultees should be weighed against the accord with the Plan and lack of policy that would substantiate that particular objection.
- 7.4 There would be no harm to neighbouring amenity, the character and appearance of the countryside and no harm to protected species. The existing access is capable of serving 2no. homes without causing harm to highway safety and the new access can demonstrate good visibility and the ability for users to leave the site in a forward gear.
- 7.5 The application adheres to Core Policy 6 which allows for conversions in rural areas and no other harm has been identified. In that respect, the application is considered to fully accord to the development plan and planning permission should be granted, subject to conditions. With regard to conditions, the application would welcome the opportunity to deal with possible pre-commencement conditions in advance of a decision such to enable the swift commencement of development.



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