

15 February 2024

Y:\391 - Foxholes Farm\01 Admin\06.0 Stat Authorities\6.1 Planning\20240214 Barn Prior Approval\20240215 Statement of Agricultural Need rev 3.docx

## **Proposed Barn at Foxholes Farm.**

### *Justification of Agricultural Need.*

Application reference.

**TBC**

Application Description.

***“Erection of new agricultural barn and the installation of 14 solar PV panels with battery storage. Soft and hard landscaping including installation of sub ground rainfall holding tank & the formation of a new yard space”***

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## **1 Introduction.**

This application follows the withdrawal of a full Planning Application – reference number S. 23.2512.FUL.

It was advised that a Prior Approval Application would be a more suitable approach – See separate Planning Statement.

During the course of the previous (withdrawn) Planning Application various objection comments were submitted by a group of local residents in Alderley. This Statement of Agricultural Need seeks to address those comments and to explain the circumstances and demonstrate the “reasonable need” for the barn to make it possible to continue of sheep farming on the farm.

## **2 Background.**

### **2.1 The applicant.**

The applicant is the son of the former owner who died in July 2023. The parents of the applicant have been farming at Foxholes - a smallholding of about 7.85 hectares, since 1976. Foxholes has been the family home of the applicant since that time - 48 years. As such it is reasonable to assume - despite the suggestion to the contrary from some of the objection comments - that the applicant has a very good working knowledge of the site and farming practices that are required to maintain the land, and it is also reasonable to assume that preserving the character of the place in as sensitive a way as possible is a high priority for the applicant.

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*Foxholes Farm. The farmhouse on the right hand side is joined to and connected internally to the Mill on the left. The sheep shed is to the left hand end of the mill, with living accommodation above it and a monopitch metal roof above it. The animal yard is in front of the mill - accessed by crossing the front garden of the house.*

## 2.2 Changes in farming practices.

Since 1976 most of the neighbouring smaller farms have ceased being farms - part of the process of "gentrification" of these former farming villages.

Nowadays most of the former farmhouses are just houses with big gardens - some with a bit of land which, almost without exception, they do not farm: This is the case with the immediate neighbours: New Mills Hillesley was a dairy farm until about 1983 - and incorporated what is now another separate property - Larton's Mill, neither of which do any farming. There was a working farmyard in the middle of Alderley and three in Hillesley - all of which have now been, or are in the process of being redeveloped and turned into residential use. Foxholes is still a rare exception, but in order to make it possible still to cut hay and manage a flock of sheep on the land - the only way to preserve landscape so much

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admired by the residents of Alderley- it is now essential to have a barn which is accessible to vehicles, for the hay storage and for lambing in the early spring.



*The Mill at Foxholes. The foreground – (white windows) are part of the house and the flat - above the “sheep shed”*

It used to be the case that the local farmers collaborated over various jobs such as hay making, sharing equipment and labour but this is becoming increasingly difficult - and farming practices are changing. In large part this is due to the now almost universal switch to making large bales – impossible to move by hand - but also due to the gradual "gentrification" of the countryside. There is an increasing threat to the agricultural landscape from "horsiculture" (which is not agriculture) - which unfortunately always seems to result in a proliferation of poor quality stable buildings, horse lorries and boxes, electric fencing, muck heaps and all the other visual litter that goes with horses.



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*One of the objections received to the withdrawn application was written by the owner of this stable - situated about 50m further along the access track from Hillesley to Foxholes. If this was the proposal being considered then the applicant would share their objection. It is not agriculture, and it is a good example of all the unsightly paraphernalia that goes with pony paddocks.*

### **2.3 The setting.**

Public comments on the withdrawn application suggest that the proposal is both unnecessary and that the application is made without due care and consideration for the sensitive setting. It is however self evident that some trouble has been taken to design a sensitive, bespoke structure, and it has been carefully located to cause minimal visual impact. Some public comments clearly regard any development as "harm". However, a sensitively designed and positioned building in a landscape can, arguably, enhance the location, and add significance to its setting. (EG Foxholes Farm itself adds significance to its location, as does the village of Alderley, or perhaps the "Folly" which sits on the

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top of Foxholes woods, which sits in the most prominent location for miles around at the very end of the Cotswold escarpment - with commanding views to the west over Alderley, Wotton and the surrounding countryside as far as Wales - and therefore of course it is highly visible from miles around. These buildings are an intrinsic part of the landscape. They are shaped by the landscape and the landscape is shaped by these buildings. It is doubtful that anyone considers these to be “harmful” to the landscape”. They have become an intrinsic part of the landscape, and a well designed and sensitively positioned barn is certainly capable of attaining that same status over time.

### **3.0 Agricultural need.**

Some of the objection comments previously received suggest that there is no need for the proposed barn. This is an opinion based on ignorance of farming needs and practices, and unfounded speculation as to the motives for proposing the barn.

It will cost a significant amount of money to build the barn, so it would be surprising thing to do if the applicant felt that there was no need for it. Some public comments also opine that there is no reason why the existing buildings cannot continue to be used in the way that the applicant’s parents used them since 1976:

The farmland at Foxholes is the subject of a mixture of Entry Level and Higher Level Stewardship agreement (since 1991). The Stewardship Agreement aims to preserve the landscape and ecology of the land and as such requires - among other things - grazing of the fields and hay cutting. Due to the steep topography, much of the land can only be grazed by sheep, and the landscape can only be preserved in its current condition by grazing sheep. The ideal flock size is about 20 breeding ewes - with the flock expanding to around 50 - 60 heads over the summer months. The field where the barn is proposed is the only field which is suitable for hay cutting, and already benefits from vehicular access – avoiding the need for any additional roads or tracks.

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*The loose boxes – situated in the front garden of the house. Previously used for storing a small number of hay bales. Clearly not viable for storing large bales.*

This much admired landscape is the result of the hard work of farming people, and that landscape is at considerable risk right now of becoming overgrown and abandoned. There seems to be a fundamental lack of appreciation of what farming entails by people who move to a pretty village in the country and do not understand that the landscape they so admire is actually the workplace of the farming community, in all weather, 365 days of the year - and sometimes at night as well.

The barn will be used for storing hay (equivalent to approximately 3- 400 standard small hay bales – which weigh about 20 - 25 KG each) which is the approximate quantity that are expected each year from the 6.5 acre hay field where the barn is to be located. In terms of large round 350 kg bales this would equate to around 23 bales. For a smallholding it is much more convenient to be

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able to make the old traditional rectangular hay bales, but this is becoming increasingly difficult and rare. To do this it would be necessary to own the machinery - which in any case is becoming more and more obsolete and difficult to repair and maintain. This would allow the bales to be manually handled without the need to own a tractor. (The applicants' parents never owned a tractor). But the barn would also allow for the possibility of having the large – rectangular or round bales – each weighing around 350 KG - made and then stored in the barn. These could then be split and used as required (using quadbike etc) during the winter, without needing to move a whole bale. None of the existing buildings at Foxholes cannot be accessed by a tractor.



*The yard and sheep shed at Foxholes. This end of the Mill is in serious need of renovation. There is no possibility of storing large bale hay in the Mill – and the only access is across the front garden and through domestic sized stable doors.*



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For the last few years the applicant's parents worked the land with the assistance of the last remaining farmer in Hillesley. The neighbouring farmer made the hay (large round bales) with his machinery and took it and stored it in his barn in Hillesley. (Greenfields Farm). He would deliver the hay back to Foxholes as and when needed. It wasn't an ideal arrangement, but it worked well enough. Sadly he died in 2018 and his widow has since moved to a retirement home, with the farm now sold for housing development. Since then the hay cut has been problematic - relying on a contractor - a process which was highly weather dependent and sometimes not very successful. Contractors, unsurprisingly, are not always particularly keen to travel to a single field (for a minimum of four visits) to cut hay in the midst of the short weather window when everyone is trying to get the hay cut, turned, rowed, baled and undercover before it rains. You have to make your hay while the sun is shining!

It is true to say that the applicant's parents were accustomed to using part of the Mill as an animal shelter. Ewes and young lambs were kept in during the lambing season when necessary, and in the existing yard in front of the mill (approximately the same size as the proposed yard). The Mill is fully attached to and part of the house at Foxholes, with a separate flat occupying the space above the animals in the Mill, looking out directly over the yard. It is reminiscent of pre - industrial small farming practices, when people routinely lived above their animals, but the smell of the sheep and the noise and other consequences have not always been appreciated by the occupants of the flat. Times are continuing to change.

The Mill was not always an animal shelter of course - it was built as a wool weaving mill – (Early or mid 18<sup>th</sup> C) at which time it was a whole storey taller. The mill machinery was removed in the 1940s. Until about 1950 there as a barn (on the site of what is now a garage/ loose box), as well as numerous other buildings which were mill workers' cottages, only one of which still remains. ("The Bothy").

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*Foxholes Farm – 1930s*

There was also a steel dutch barn which was owned by a neighbour just above the Foxholes land – alongside the Cotswold way. It was removed in about 1980 due to its poor condition, and the fact that the neighbour - now called Larton's Mill – had built a series of more modern barns at Larton's Mill. These are currently in the process of being removed by the new owners – as part of the general gentrification trend.

The mill building at Foxholes is now in urgent need of renovation (it still has a corrugated steel roof). The position of the mill on the site also means that the only access to it is across the front lawn of the house - which is less than ideal for any vehicles especially when the ground is soft. The Mill is certainly not accessible by tractor and therefore of no use for modern hay bale storage.

One of the side benefits of the proposed new barn would be to allow for the renovation of the mill and the removal of a concrete yard from immediately in front of the mill. No doubt this would all be supported by the Alderley Parish.

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*The proposed barn is in the Hay Field. Google earth view July 2021– Haymaking in progress– note large round bales being lined up ready to transport off site. The (objecting) neighbour’s pony stables are located in the bottom l/h corner of the view.*

#### **4 Location and Design.**

##### **4.1 Location and visual impact**

The application Design and Access Statement outlines the main principles behind the design.

The objection comments to the withdrawn application made much of the fact that the site is visible from certain locations:

On the approach to Foxholes Farm, the barn is carefully located so that it would only become visible once the viewer is close up to the barn - and therefore actually on the private land owned by Foxholes.

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The barn is designed so that it presents a blank stone and timber wall to the side that would be visible from the access road - in contrast with the scruffy horse stable encampment about 50 metres further up the track (under separate ownership) which presents an open yard to the access track filled with unsightly horse related paraphernalia, as well as (usually) a very large horse lorry and a horsebox).

Most of the objection submission to the withdrawn application concentrates on various views into the site from the North side of the valley, along which runs the Cotswold Way. The photographs - despite being intended to show the barn site in the most visible way possible - actually demonstrate that the best possible site has been chosen for the barn, which is already well screened by tree planting (planted by the applicant's parents in 2014, and grant funded by the Forestry Commission). The applicant is of course well aware of the purpose of the tree planting - and neither the trees - nor the bees - will be affected by the presence of the barn. The trees will help to protect the yard from the prevailing wind as well as to ensure that the barn itself will be totally invisible from the sensitive receptor sites along the Cotswold Way - and from the houses in Alderley. It should be noted, that all but one of the photographs presented in the public comments are taken from private land well above the altitude of the Cotswold Way - (The other was taken from within the land holding of Foxholes): If you go high enough up ( eg from a balloon) then any site would ultimately become visible, but the site chosen has been carefully considered to minimize visual impact, and for those who respect private land and stick to the public rights of way, it is clear that the siting of the barn would ensure that it is extremely discreet if not invisible. It is noted that none of the public comment photos were taken from the Cotswold way itself.

#### **4.2 Other design points.**

The barn is not designed to be the cheapest construction possible. It has been carefully designed by an award winning architectural practice and it is a highly site specific response to the design brief. Dug into the site to "hunker down" and wedge shaped to make sure that at the highest / widest point it is well below the



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tree line, and then reducing in height and width as it gets further from the trees and becomes more visible as you travel up the track away from the farmhouse. The overall intention is to reduce the mass of the building and to make it as discreet as possible.

### **4.3 Size**

The size of the proposed barn is dictated entirely by its functional requirements as outlined below. Farmers generally do not build barns bigger than they need to because they cost money, but in this case it is recognized that just throwing up a cheap steel barn would be much less sympathetic to the setting.

The barn is sized to accommodate the anticipated hay crop (see above) , and to allow for the lambing needs of a flock of around 20 ewes. See drawings

**391.P.100.P2** and **391.P.200.P2**

The height is a function of the minimum eaves height, - 3m to allow access for a (small) tractor- and the width. The pitch of the roof takes account of a reasonable pitch for the roofing material chosen. However, the barn at its highest point will be lower than, and well screened by the surrounding trees.

### **4.4 Materials**

The materials that have been specified are chosen for a balance of their functionality and cost and because they are “neutral” in the landscape setting, sustainable, durable, non reflective and in fact could be considered to be part of the local agricultural vernacular.

### **4.5 Lighting**

From time to time it will be necessary to have some lighting in the barn. These will be limited to the interior, and only used of when needed: when it is dark and a person needs to do something in the barn – mostly for short durations after dark eg when lambing is in progress. It is a barn not a house.

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Small power tools etc will also be required from time to time so the solar panels will provide for that requirement. The power will be provided by solar panels and stored in batteries as the most sustainable way to provide the essential facilities.

### **5.0 Heritage Statement.**

The heritage statement provided in the Design and Access Statement is very brief for the simple reason that the proposed barn is well outside the curtilage of the Listed Building, and will have no impact whatsoever on the Listed building or its immediate setting.

