



PLANNING BY DESIGN

FROM CONCEPT TO COMPLETION

Design and Access Statement:

Casa Lena, Sunnyhill Road, West Hyde,
Hertfordshire, WD3 9XN

Conversion of the swimming pool and pool
house into meditation rooms and three
holiday accommodation suites

On Behalf of
George Lymperis

Drafted by **Planning By Design**

Date: 14 April 2024

Application

Planning By Design (The agent) has been instructed to act on behalf of George Lymperis (the applicant) to submit a planning application to Three Rivers Council (the Local Planning Authority) for a conversion of the swimming pool and pool house into meditation rooms and three holiday accommodation suites at: Casa Lena, Sunnyhill Road, West Hyde, Hertfordshire, WD3 9XN (the site).

In support of this application, the following Design and Access Statement has been constructed to demonstrate the suitability of this site for this proposal and evaluate its accordance with national and local planning policy along with supplementary design guidance.

Site Location

The application site is situated in West Hyde, opposite the construction company site (Align JV). It is surrounded by Chalfont Ln from the south, Sunny Hill Road from the west, an agricultural field from the east and a residential site from the north. The site is situated between M25 (from the west) and A412 road (from the east).

The application site comprises a pool and pool house to the east of an existing two storey detached dwelling on Sunnyhill Road, West Hyde.

To the front of the main dwelling is an existing gravelled driveway accessible via Sunnyhill Road with off street parking provision for three vehicles. An outbuilding converted to ancillary annex and associated external alterations is present to the south of the main dwelling.

To the rear and side of the dwelling is an amenity garden which is predominantly laid as lawn, with areas of hardstanding surrounding the main dwelling and various outbuildings on site.

The wider context of Sunnyhill Road contains detached dwellings of varying architectural style and appearance, it is not clear whether these properties have been previously extended, but the neighbouring dwelling Fresh Air sited to the north of the application dwelling appears to have a number of outbuildings.

The site is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt.

The Proposal

The proposed development is for the conversion of the swimming pool and pool house into meditation rooms and three holiday accommodation suites. The application is being submitted due to the high energy costs of keeping the swimming pool open.

Casallena Property has a long and successful history of operating a swimming pool as part of its wellness retreat, which has been managed by qualified therapists since 2008. Over the years, the boutique spa and yoga retreat has earned the respect and patronage of both local community members and visitors from afar.

The applicant's commitment to inclusivity is evidenced by the pool's user-friendly design, which accommodates disabled individuals with hoists and access ramps. Moreover, the private and exclusive nature of the facilities has provided a sanctuary for individuals whose religious beliefs might otherwise deter them from visiting public pools, thereby enriching the local area with an important service.

Despite this success, the recent unprecedented rise in energy costs has placed a significant financial strain on the operations. The operational costs of maintaining the swimming pool have surged, culminating in an energy debt exceeding £40,000 over the past two years. This has led to the need to re-evaluate the current business model.

In response to these challenges, the applicant proposes a transformative shift in their service offering, aimed at both preserving the essence of our retreat and ensuring its financial sustainability. The intention is to retain the core elements of the wellness services, including the treatment and yoga meditation rooms, while making strategic alterations to the physical infrastructure.

Specifically, the applicant proposes the decommissioning of the swimming pool to repurpose the space into monastic-style meditation cells. The existing building will also be converted to provide three holiday suites as accommodation, enabling the business to offer multi-day retreats.

This evolution of the facilities is designed to embrace the growing demand for mindfulness and meditation spaces, allowing the business to continue serving our community and visitors in a meaningful and sustainable manner.

This adjustment not only aligns with the commitment to promoting wellness and tranquillity but also represents a pragmatic response to the financial challenges imposed by rising operational costs. Through this reconfiguration the applicant aspires to enhance our retreat's offerings, ensuring its place as a cherished sanctuary for personal reflection and rejuvenation.

The proposed works will comprise mainly internal reconfiguration works. Externally new doors will be fitted to the west and north elevations and a new window to the west elevation. A new small stone wall will screen the proposed bin location. Cycle parking will be added to the front drive.

Planning History

23/0722/FUL Change of use of existing outbuilding into ancillary annex. Application Permitted

22/2129/FUL for the conversion of existing outbuilding to ancillary annex and associated external alterations. Application Permitted

07/0448/CLPD Certificate of Lawfulness Proposed Use/Development: Demolition of existing poolhouse and erection of single storey poolhouse with pitched glass roof. Application Permitted

Planning Policy

The following planning policy and guidance documents are recognised as material considerations for the assessment of this application

- National Planning Policy Framework 2023;
- National Planning Practice Guidance;
- Core Strategy (2011)
- Site Allocations Local Development Document (LDD, 2014)

The following section will evaluate the proposals in accordance with the relevant policies and supplementary design guidance of the Council to demonstrate why the proposal should be considered as acceptable in principle and in strict accordance with the Councils development criteria.

National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (NPPF)

The new National Planning Policy Framework was revised in 2023 and the following paragraphs are considered to be relevant.

Paragraph 38 confirms that Local Planning Authorities should approach decisions on proposed developments in a positive and creative way. They should work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

Paragraph 47 confirms that planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The National Planning Policy Framework must be taken into account in preparing the Development Plan, and is a material consideration in planning decisions. This paragraph also states that decisions on applications should be made as quickly as possible,

and within statutory timescales, unless a longer period has been agreed by the applicant in writing.

Paragraph 55 advises that Local Planning Authorities should consider whether otherwise unacceptable development could be made acceptable through the use of conditions.

Paragraph 56 advises that planning conditions should be kept to a minimum and only imposed where they are necessary, relevant to planning and to the development to be permitted, enforceable, precise and reasonable in all other respects. Conditions that are required to be discharged before development commences should be avoided.

Strong and competitive economy

Paragraph 85 states that planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. 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 approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future.

Paragraph 88 states that planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed, beautiful new buildings;
- b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;
- c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and
- d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

Paragraph 89 states that planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.

Healthy and safe communities

Paragraph 96 states that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places and beautiful buildings which: a) promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong

neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages.

High quality places

Paragraph 135 states that the creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. 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.

Development should:

- a) Function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) Be visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) Be sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- d) Establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- e) Optimise the potential of the Site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks;
- f) Create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

Green Belt

Paragraph 142 states that The government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

Paragraph 143 states that Green Belt serves 5 purposes:

- 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

Paragraph 152 states that Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Paragraph 153 states that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very

special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Paragraph 154 states that a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

- a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
- d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- e) limited infilling in villages;
- f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and
- g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:
 - not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or
 - not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.

Paragraph 155 states that Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:

- a. mineral extraction;
- b. engineering operations;
- c. local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
- d. the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;
- e. material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and
- f. development, including buildings, brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

Core Strategy 2011

The Core Strategy seeks to provide growth required to support local communities and provide for their needs in the most sustainable way possible. The main emphasis is to continue to focus development within the existing urban area through development of previously developed land and appropriate infilling, recognising potential for mixed use development to contribute to the development of sustainable communities.

Local Plan 2014

CP1 Overarching Policy on Sustainable Development states that all development in Three Rivers will contribute to the sustainability of the District. This means taking into account the need to:

- a) Tackle climate change by reducing carbon emissions, increasing energy and water efficiency of buildings, promoting the use of renewable energy systems, and using other natural resources wisely, including through the use of sustainable building materials
- d) Make efficient use of land by guiding development onto previously developed, brownfield land and incorporate mixed-use development wherever possible, recognising that some previously developed land can have significant biodiversity value
- f) Protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environments from inappropriate development and improve the diversity of wildlife and habitats
- h) Maintain high levels of employment by attracting jobs and training opportunities for local people
- i) Improve access to jobs, skills, services and facilities particularly within areas of deprivation in the District Hierarchy
- k) Protect and enhance existing community, leisure and cultural facilities and provide new facilities
- m) Provide necessary infrastructure to enable and/ or support development, including (but not limited to) transport, education, health, green infrastructure, utilities, waste facilities, waste water, leisure, cultural and community facilities

Policy CP6 Employment and Economic Development states that the Council will support development that:

- a) Sustains parts of the District as attractive areas for business location
- b) Provides an appropriate number of jobs to meet strategic requirements
- c) Promotes skills and learning of the local workforce

d) Provides for a range of small, medium and large business premises

g) Aligns economic growth with housing growth in the area in order to balance the provision of homes and jobs and reduce out-commuting

This policy adds that the sustainable growth of the Three Rivers economy will be supported by:

l) Supporting economic development in rural areas where this would contribute to sustainable development objectives would be consistent in scale with the rural location and would not result in harmful effects on the environment or local communities

Policy CP11 Green Belt states that the Council will e) Encourage appropriate positive use of the Green Belt and measures to improve environmental quality. There will be a general presumption against inappropriate development that would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt, or which would conflict with the purpose of including land within it.

Policy CP10 Transport and Travel states that development will need to demonstrate that:

i) It provides a safe and adequate means of access,

j) It is appropriate in scale to the existing transport infrastructure, including public transport and, where necessary, infrastructure can be improved,

k) It is integrated with the wider network of transport routes, including public rights of way and cycle paths where appropriate,

l) It makes adequate provision for all users, including car and other vehicle parking, giving priority to people with mobility difficulties, pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians.

CP12 Design of Development In seeking a high standard of design, the Council will expect all development proposals to:

a) Have regard to the local context and conserve or enhance the character, amenities and quality of an area

b) Conserve and enhance natural and heritage assets

c) Protect residential amenities by taking into account the need for adequate levels and disposition of privacy, prospect, amenity and garden space

d) Make efficient use of land whilst respecting the distinctiveness of the surrounding area in terms of density, character, layout and spacing, amenity, scale, height, massing and use of materials

Development Management Policies Local Development Document 2013

Policy DM2 Green Belt states that as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt is inappropriate with certain exceptions, including:

f) Re-use and Conversion of Buildings in the Green Belt 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.

Assessment

Principle of development

The proposed conversion of the existing swimming pool and pool house into meditation rooms and holiday accommodation suites is designed to align with the requirements of Green Belt policy, ensuring the preservation of the openness of the Green Belt and adhering to sustainable development principles.

The project fully embraces the ethos of making efficient and appropriate use of existing structures within the Green Belt by proposing the conversion of the current pool and pool house. This approach is consistent with Policy CP11 and DM2 and the Policies on the NPPF which encourage the adaptive reuse of buildings to prevent unnecessary construction on undeveloped land, thus maintaining the essential characteristics of the Green Belt.

The existing buildings are deemed highly suitable for the intended conversion without the need for extensive alterations, rebuilding, or extension. This ensures that the development's impact on the Green Belt's openness is minimal, aligning with the policy's stipulations for preserving the natural and historical landscape.

In keeping with the commitment to limit the development's footprint and preserving the Green Belt's natural state, the proposal includes no expansion of parking provisions or other hard surfaces. This decision further mitigates any potential encroachment on the Green Belt, aligning with policies aimed at minimising alterations to the existing landscape.

The design ensures that no new access to gardens or amenity spaces is created, and all proposed doors are oriented towards the development's curtilage rather than onto open land. This careful planning respects the policy's guidance on avoiding developments that could disrupt the area's openness or encroach upon undeveloped land.

The transformation of Casallena Property's facilities is anticipated to have a significant positive impact on the local economy, primarily through job creation and enhanced economic activity. By diversifying its service offerings to include meditation rooms and holiday accommodation suites, the development will create a range of employment opportunities, from construction-related roles during the conversion process to long-term positions in the management and operation of the new facilities.

Moreover, the project is set to stimulate local economic growth by attracting visitors seeking wellness retreats, thereby increasing patronage to local businesses and services. This influx of visitors will not only contribute directly to the retreat's revenue but also benefit the wider community through increased spending in the local area.

The proposed development represents a sustainable economic venture that respects the environmental constraints of its Green Belt location while contributing to the local economy's vitality and diversity. The economic benefits, particularly in terms of job creation and economic stimulation in this rural area, further underscore the proposal's alignment with broader planning objectives to support rural economies and contribute to the social and economic well-being of the area.

The proposal is therefore compliant with Policies CP1 Overarching Policy on Sustainable Development, Policy CP6 Employment and Economic Development, Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy and Policy DM2 of the Development Plan as well as the Policies on the NPPF and is therefore acceptable in principle.

Design and Character

The design philosophy underpinning the proposed development is one of harmonious integration with the existing landscape and visual context. Recognising the sensitivity of the site's location within the Green Belt, this approach is characterised by:

- Minimal external changes to the existing structures, ensuring that the development has a neutral impact on the landscape and visual amenity of the area.
- A thoughtful landscaping scheme has been developed throughout the years to enhance the biodiversity of the site while mitigating any residual visual impacts. This scheme will continue to develop to incorporate native planting, the creation of naturalistic boundaries, and the enhancement of habitat connectivity across the site.

The proposed development is thus crafted to respect and enhance the character of the local area, ensuring that the change of use from swimming pool and pool house to meditation rooms and accommodation suites is implemented with a careful consideration for design quality, landscape character and amenity in accordance with Policy CP12.

Parking provision

The consideration of parking provision has been carefully evaluated to ensure alignment with both the functional requirements of the new facilities and the overarching objectives of sustainable development within the Green Belt.

The proposal anticipates that there will be no significant changes in parking provision from the existing use of the site. The current access and parking arrangement, designed to accommodate visitors to the swimming pool and spa, is deemed sufficient to meet the needs of the redeveloped site. The overall use levels will remain broadly the same, ensuring that the proposed change of use to meditation rooms and holiday accommodation suites will not exacerbate parking demand or require the expansion of parking facilities.

The proposal is compliant with Policy CP10 Transport and Travel.

Residential amenity

The nature of the proposed development, centered around meditation and wellness, inherently promotes a tranquil and serene atmosphere. The activities associated with the proposed use are of a quiet and reflective nature, aligning with the existing ambiance of the spa and retreat environment. Consequently, it is anticipated that there will be no increase in noise levels resulting from the development. In fact, the change from a swimming pool, which can be a source of varied noise levels, to meditation and wellness spaces is expected to maintain or even reduce the overall sound footprint of the property.

Operational guidelines will be put in place to ensure that the quiet nature of the proposed activities is maintained. This includes the management of movement around the site, the scheduling of activities to avoid noise peaks, and the implementation of a policy to manage and minimise any potential disturbance.

The external alterations associated with the conversion are minimal, with an emphasis on utilizing existing structures and maintaining the current footprint. This approach ensures that the visual impact on the surrounding area is negligible, preserving the character and aesthetic appeal of the neighborhood.

Lighting design will be carefully considered to ensure that there is no increase in light pollution. External lighting will be designed to be unobtrusive, focusing on safety and navigation without impacting the ambient light levels experienced by neighbouring properties.

The layout and design of the proposed development have been conceived to respect the privacy of neighbouring properties. Adjustments to the site will not introduce new vantage

points that could lead to overlooking, thereby maintaining the privacy and seclusion valued by residents.

The proposal is in accordance with Policy CP12 Design of Development.

Conclusion

For the above reasons, we see no reason for the Council to withhold our request for planning permission and kindly request that the council make a reasonable decision on this submission in line with the developmental objectives and timescales of the National Planning Policy Framework. Should the Planning Authority have any further questions in relation to this proposal or feel that certain conditions would be necessary to accommodate this proposal, Planning By Design would welcome conversation on any of these matters.