

Heritage and Planning Statement

for

Alterations and extension to existing barns to form ancillary accommodation

at

Welful Lake House, Northleach, Cheltenham GL54 3PR



March 2024

1.0 Site Description

The site, known as Welful Lake House, is situated between the villages of Aldsworth and Sherborne, and is accessed via a private road off the A40 between Burford and Cheltenham. The postcode is GL54 3PR and the Grid Reference SP 15761 13027.

The subject of the Application is the group of two barns located to the south of the main Welful Lake House. The complex is set within a natural hollow and bounded by a drystone wall. The curtilage of the house is also defined by this drystone wall and is a large domestic garden with a tennis court, ornamental ponds and redundant dutch barn (not affected by these proposals). Whilst the barns were clearly once agricultural, they have formed part of the domestic curtilage for many years.

The barns are unlisted but the site is within the Cotswold AONB. It is likely the barns will be deemed non-designated heritage assets. The decision making authority is Cotswold District Council.

2.0 Existing buildings

The site consists of a two large stone built barns. Both barns are of a similar construction, typical of the Cotswold vernacular of coursed rubble limestone with lime mortar pointing, oak lintels and large barn doors and openings contrasting with narrow slot vents. The main difference between the two is the south-western one has a blue slate roof and the south eastern one has a plain concrete tile roof.

Both are fairly well maintained and have formed part of the domestic curtilage for over 15 years.

Whilst they are set apart, and separated by the aforementioned pond, they form a farmyard grouping of vernacular stone buildings and have a very modest landscape around of gravel, concrete and grassland as part of the domestic curtilage of Welful Lake House.

Both buildings are clearly capable of conversion without extension or any significant degree of re-building. The Agent of this Application is a Chartered Building Surveyor and has overseen this important confirmation.

3.0 Relevant Planning History

There is only one Application in recent history for the site - 03/03093/FUL 'Erection of a detached garage and external alterations to existing house including installation of gable dormer windows. Erection of forecourt wall and associated works' which was constructed in 2003.

4.0 Proposal

The proposal is to convert these two existing outbuildings into ancillary accommodation as follows;

Southwest barn

The proposal is to convert the existing barn to be an indoor swimming pool building. The external changes are mainly to glaze the existing openings with metal slim profile screens, set back from the face of the openings. There is a missing section of wall which is to be re-instated with a new oak lintel and then salvaged stonework above along with new glazing.

Internally, a swimming pool will be created along with a changing area, steam room and a first floor mezzanine gym.

Southeast barn

The proposal is to convert the existing barn to be a private music barn, for listening and playing music with family and friends. The external changes are mainly to glaze the existing openings with metal slim profile screens, set back from the face of the openings. External timber shutters will be reinstated. The roof will remain unchanged (plain concrete tiles)

Internally, the large single space will remain unchanged apart from the addition of a gallery and insulation of the floor and roof. The two smaller rooms will become loos and a catering kitchen. This is a private space for family and guest usage with no commercial or non domestic usage. To the north end will be a pitched roof greenhouse set back from the elevation built within existing stone walls (the remains of a former building).

There are no other site changes proposed; landscaping, access, parking and curtilage all remain unchanged.

5.0 Design and Materials

Given the size and location of the buildings they have been no longer suitable for modern day farming practices for decades. Given the scale and location of the barns it is unlikely that a long term viable use could be secured for the buildings other than residential. As such it is considered that the ancillary accommodation proposal would secure a long term viable use for buildings that would otherwise potentially remain empty and fall into disrepair.

The design was very much influenced by, and based on, good guidance such as Historic England Agricultural Conversions guide and the Cotswold Design Guide. Having lived at the house for several years, our Client was able to guide the design so as to make the best use of the sunlight and orientation of the site.

The main overriding benefit of this proposal is the continuing usage of these heritage assets. The barns as noted are physically capable of being converted in terms of their size, soundness and structural stability and the proposal maintains their traditional form and construction. The proposal is to have a very clear delineation between the authentic traditional vernacular shell with an high quality contemporary intervention to create the fit out of the ancillary accommodation.

The proposal is sympathetic to the setting and existing structures because the layout and accommodation is designed around the historic door and window openings which are present in the barns. The new glazing is recessed within these, and is of a simple, functional design, avoiding domestic style. The roofs will remain as existing with no roof lights or dormer windows proposed. In term of internal layout, in minimising new external openings, and maximising natural light to rooms from existing openings, an open plan is maintained. Both barns have a mezzanine floor - this lack of infill allows the full historic volume and scale is appreciated from within the building.

The only noticeable opening alteration is the south west barn, which has a large opening to the long elevation which has been temporarily infilled with timber. The proposal is to rebuild this area with a new reduced size opening, oak intel and simple inset glazed windows with a stone infill above.

The only new build accommodation is the greenhouse on the south east barn. This is a classic pitched roof greenhouse which is very much of a high quality and timeless design. It is set back and contained within two existing walls which in essence mitigate the view of the greenhouse from the wider site. It does not obscure important elevations or features of interest, or in any way diminish the quality or integrity of the buildings.

As noted previously, the barns are built out of Cotswold oolitic limestone laid to courses randomly varied in size up through the stonework and with lime based pointing. The roofing materials are different, one is plain concrete tiles and the other a blue-grey Welsh slate. It is likely the barns are nineteenth century contemporary with the main house.

High quality materials will be used throughout. All new structural elements such as lintels will be in oak which is untreated. The wood then weathers and silvers with time to very successfully complement the stone.

It Is acknowledge that there is public benefit resultant from the scheme through the retention of the barns therefore ensuring a long term viable use for the non-designated heritage assets.

6.0 Landscape and setting.

The site is located within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) wherein the Council is statutorily required to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape. The site is surrounded by drystone walling, parkland, agricultural land and mature trees and it is these features which play a major part in establishing the character of the Cotswold landscape and make a valuable contribution to the ecological balance of the area, particularly veteran trees, ancient woodland and hedgerows. All of which remains unchanged.

The proposal to retain and re-use these barns is critical in maintaining this landscape - the grouping of the buildings, whilst not visible from the road, is part of the charm and character of the area. By not changing the landscaping outside of the barns, the setting is conserved. Key views, skyline features, settlement patterns, field boundaries are all respected.

In relation to potential light spill from the converted buildings this would be relatively limited being domestic level Internal lighting. Any external lighting proposed would be minimal. The tranquil feeling of this area is respected and the natural contours help mitigate these negligible changes.

7.0 Ecology & Sustainable Design

A preliminary ecological appraisal was carried out by Bombus Ecology Ltd in 2023. The target buildings are deemed to be of negligible potential for roosting bats due to their lack of potential roost features and in some cases the amount of ambient light, and as such no further surveys will be required.

They confirmed that any demolition/reconstruction activities should take place outside the nominal bird breeding season (March to August) If this is not achievable then the ecologist will provide advice and potentially a watching brief. Potential for improvements include additional swift bricks and bat tiles into the final design and improved planting around the site along with the strong recommendation for the use of a bitumen type felt or second generation breathable membranes.

Thus, taking into account the proposed enhancements, there will be a net gain of biodiversity.

Our Client is very committed to sustainability and the impact of any proposal on the environment. Solar panels will have too much of an aesthetic impact, but it is proposed where possible all materials are locally sourced and insulation is used in the floors and ceilings along with an efficient heating system.

8.0. Relevant Planning Policies:

As noted previously, the proposal has been guided by both National and Regional Planning Policy and especially the Cotswold Design Code which was read in conjunction with the Local Authority Local Plan and the NPPF along with the Historic England guide "Adapting Traditional Farm Buildings". These emphasise the importance of good design as a key aspect of sustainable development and encourage high quality and inclusive design that establishes a strong sense of place and responds to local character, which is what these proposals deliver.

Below a commentary is provided on the most relevant Local Plan policies and NPPF paragraphs;

Policy EC6 - CONVERSION OF RURAL BUILDINGS

The conversion of these two former agricultural buildings is in line with policy as they are structurally sound, suitable for and capable of conversion to the proposed use without substantial alteration, extension or re-building. They have been domestic stores within the curtilage for over fifteen years and as such would not conflict with any farming operations as these ceased years ago. The proposal for ancillary accommodation is suitable with extant uses on the site and ones in close proximity to the site.

Policy EN1 - BUILT, NATURAL AND HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

The proposal is in line with EN1 as it preserves the historic and natural environment ensuring the protection and enhancement of these non-designated historic assets and their setting. The wildlife enhancements help habitats and ecology and the careful detailing complements the character of the area and the sustainable use of the development.

Policy EN2 - DESIGN OF THE BUILT AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The retention of the character of the barns and the careful conversion with minimal changes and high quality design accords with the Cotswold Design Code and respects the character and distinctive appearance of the locality.

Policy EN4 - THE WIDER NATURAL AND HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

The proposal accords with EN4 as it does not have a significant detrimental impact on the natural and historic landscape (including the tranquillity of the countryside) of Cotswold District or neighbouring areas and it takes account of landscape and historic landscape character, visual quality and local distinctiveness.

Policy EN5 - COTSWOLDS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (AONB)

The site is within the AONB and as such the design has been carefully considered that it conserves and enhances the natural beauty of the landscape.

Policy EN8 - BIODIVERSITY AND GEODIVERSITY: FEATURES, HABITATS AND SPECIES

A preliminary ecological appraisal was carried out by Bombus Ecology Ltd who found that the site had negligible potential for roosting bats but recommended enhancements to improve the site. Thus this development conserves and enhances biodiversity with a potential minor net gains by following the enhancements.

Policy EN12 - HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT: NON-DESIGNATED HERITAGE ASSETS

It can be considered the barns are non-designated heritage asset. The scheme has been designed with careful attention paid to this, with minimal fabric changes and new openings to ensure the character and setting is respected.

Policy EN13 - HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT: THE CONVERSION OF NON-DOMESTIC HISTORIC BUILDINGS (DESIGNATED AND NON-DESIGNATED HERITAGE ASSETS)

Whilst the buildings are in an existing domestic use, they will be converted to ancillary accommodation. This will give a long term use which would secure the future of the barns and maintain their setting, including its form, features, character and setting. The barns are structurally sound and capable of conversion without substantial alteration or rebuilding and the minor extension to form a greenhouse would preserve the significance of the asset (including its form and features), its setting and/or the character or the appearance of the surrounding landscape in a manner that is proportionate to the significance of the asset.

Paragraph 115 of the NPPF states that 'great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscapes and scenic beauty'. Given the minimal external changes and the limited visibility of the site from public views it is considered that the proposal would not result in harm to the character and appearance of the AONB.

Para 135 of the NPPF states that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly non designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset. The proposals would be considered to not cause harm to the character and significance of the barn as a non-designated heritage asset and that there is public benefit resultant from the scheme through the conversion of the barn therefore ensuring a long term viable use.

Paragraph 170 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by 'protecting and enhancing valued landscapes' and 'recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside' which these proposals do.

Paragraph 172 of the NPPF states that 'great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in ... Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection In relation to these issues.' Which these proposals do.

Para 175 of the NPPF sets out that 'when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

a) If significant harm to biodiversity resulting from development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful Impacts) adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused)

d) development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.

This proposal enhances biodiversity and causes no harm and as such should be supportable.

9.0 Access

The villages of Northleach and Burford are within driving distance, boasting churches, local shops, post offices, public houses and thriving primary schools. Ample off street parking is available near the barns and near the main house.

10.0 Conclusion

The proposals would represent a sympathetic alteration of a group of non-designated heritage assets and the proposals would secure long term viable uses for the buildings. The proposals would not give rise to biodiversity concerns. The proposals would represent a sustainable re-use of buildings. The proposals are therefore considered to accord with national and local planning policies and would represent an overall enhancement to the character and appearance of the AONB.