

AL/114/09



Watkins Wood Surveyors

37 North Street

Design and Access Statement
Proposed Tourist Accommodation Units in
redundant farm building – Amendment to AL/92/08
(in lieu of the B1 use approved under AL/92/08)

New House Farm, Norton Lane,
Aldingbourne, West Sussex

28th October 2009

1.0 Assessment of Physical Context

1.1 The application site comprises a regular shaped piece of land approximately 0.28ha in area located on the west side of Norton Lane, Norton, near Aldingbourne, West Sussex. The site was originally part of a dairy farm which, in recent years, has been subdivided with the constituent parts being sold off to several new owners. The application site accommodates the larger single agricultural barn which is now redundant to the needs of farming. The proposed development seeks a refurbishment of the building in order to bring it back into active use and utilise them for beneficial tourism related purposes. The barn was subject to an approval, AL/92/08, in which it formed part of the overall redevelopment of the site. The proposed use in that approval was for B1 Offices of which it has been determined that there is no local demand.

1.2 Norton Lane consists of a scatter of mainly residential development on either side of the road frontage. The majority of the nearby dwellinghouses can be described as being of a Sussex vernacular with many being set within extensive grounds that accommodate tennis courts and swimming pools. The number of buildings within the vicinity of the site gives the area a semi-rural ambience. The application site is outside any of the "built-up area boundaries" as defined by policy GEN2 of the Arun District Local Plan, 2003.

1.3 To the north of the application site is Norton Farmhouse whilst to the south are the rear and side boundaries of the dwelling houses Newhouse Farm and Harvests. To the west of the site is open countryside.

1.4 The application site comprises the large steel portal framed barn located within the sites south-west corner. The building has been used for the storage of animal feeds and hay however is now redundant to agricultural needs. The barn is open sided on its north and east elevations and is clad with profiled steel sheet panels to its west and south facades. The structure measures approximately 37.0 m long and 15.5 m wide with the ridge and eaves being 6.6m and 4.9m above ground level respectively.

2.0 Social/Economic Context and Planning Context

2.1 The land which forms the application site has been used in relation to agriculture for many years as part of the larger original New House Farm. The land was previously owned by West Sussex County Council, however, was sold off in a number of smaller lots. Modern farming practices have changed significantly in recent years. Farming now tends to be carried out on farms with extensive land holdings for reasons of financial viability and economies of scale. It is often the case that large single farm enterprises are created from several smaller farms with the consequence that many original farm buildings become redundant to agricultural needs.

2.2 The proposed development seeks to utilise and reuse the structurally sound former agricultural building for tourism purposes. The use of the building within the site for this purpose would provide rural employment and also help stimulate the local economy by encouraging tourists to the area. Such uses would be consistent with advice offered by both Development Plan and National Planning Policy guidance in respect of farm diversification.

A Policy Context

Government Planning Policy Guidance

2.3 The main thrust of current National Planning Policy is to optimise the sustainable redevelopment of previously developed land, in a manner that is sympathetic with and complementary to adjacent development. Government planning advice requires Local Planning Authorities to ensure that proposals are: - of a high quality design; not viewed in isolation with layout and design being informed by the wider context not just by immediate neighbouring buildings.

This advice is contained within Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (January 2005).

2.4 The Government sets out its objectives for the planning system in PPS1. In paragraph 1 of this policy document it states: - *"Planning shapes the places where people live and work and the country we live in. Good planning ensures that we get the right development, in the right place and at the right time. But poor planning can result in a legacy for current and future generations of run-down town centres, unsafe and dilapidated housing, crime and disorder, and the loss of our finest countryside to development."*

2.5 Paragraph 27 (viii) states that Local Planning Authorities should seek to *"Promote the more efficient use of land through higher density.... development and the use of suitably located previously developed land and buildings. Planning should seek actively to bring vacant and underused previously developed land and buildings back into beneficial use to achieve the targets the Government has set for development on previously developed land..."*.

2.6 PPS7, Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, 2004, sets out its key principles for development in the rural area. These are stated in paragraph 1 as follows: -

"Sustainable development is the core principle underpinning land use planning. The following key principles should be applied in combination with all the policies set out in this PPS:

(i) Decisions on development proposals should be based on sustainable development principles, ensuring an integrated approach to the consideration of:

- social inclusion, recognising the needs of everyone;*
- effective protection and enhancement of the environment;*
- prudent use of natural resources; and*
- maintaining high and stable levels of economic growth and employment."*

2.7 With respect to the re-use of existing buildings within the countryside paragraph 17 states that the Government's aim *"is to support the re-use of appropriately located and suitably constructed existing buildings in the countryside where this would meet sustainable development objectives. Re-use for economic development purposes will usually be preferable, but residential conversions may be more appropriate in some locations, and for some types of building "*

2.8 Paragraph 40. of PPS7 specifically refers to the importance of the provision of self catering holiday accommodation in the countryside. This policy advocates the re-use of non-residential buildings. This paragraph states *"Local planning authorities should support the provision of other forms of self-catering holiday accommodation in rural areas where this would accord with sustainable development objectives. The re-use and conversion of existing non-residential buildings for this purpose may have added benefits, e.g. as a farm diversification scheme."*

West Sussex Structure Plan 2001-2016

2.9 The Structure Plan policies relevant to the determination of this planning application are policies LOC2, CH1 and DEV1.

2.10 Policy LOC2 The Countryside, states that *"Development in the countryside should not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated to require a countryside location.....Development should be compatible with its location in the countryside and, where appropriate, it should result in substantial environmental enhancement.....the priority is to accommodate such development through the re-use of existing buildings....."*

2.11 Policy CH1 Character states *"Development should not be permitted unless it maintains and, where possible, enhances the character, distinctiveness and sense of place of the settlements and different areas and features of the County"* Furthermore the policy requires Planning Authorities via their Local Plans to *"ensure that development within built-up areas and the countryside reflects and, where possible, reinforces the distinctiveness and sense of place of the main natural character areas (including the retention of important features or characteristics) taking into account the various elements which contribute to their distinctiveness such as geology and landform, habitats, scenic quality, tranquillity, settlement patterns, historic heritage, local vernacular, and land use."*

2.12 Policy DEV1 states: -

"(a) Development should not be permitted unless the construction, layout, scale, appearance and landscaping are of high quality taking into account the need to:

- (1) integrate with and, where possible, enhance adjoining land-uses and minimise potential conflicts between land-uses and activities;*
- (2) have regard to the local context including:*
 - (i) the varied traditions and character of the different parts of West Sussex;*
 - (ii) the characteristics of the site in terms of topography, natural and man-made features, and micro-climate;*
 - (iii) the morphology, landscape, townscape, streetscape and skyline of the surrounding area;*
 - (iv) views into and out of the site; and*
 - (v) the use of materials and building styles. "*

Arun District Local Plan 2003

2.13 The Arun District Local Plan 2003 was adopted on the 17th April, 2003 and covers the period up to 2011. It forms a statement of Arun District Council's planning policies, which will be used as a basis for decision making in planning applications. Of particular relevance to this proposal are policies DEV1 and DEV2. DEV1 relates to the conversion of rural buildings for business uses whilst DEV2 refers to the conversion of rural buildings to residential uses. These policies state the following: -

"DEV1 Conversion of Rural Buildings for Industrial or Business Uses

Proposals for conversion of buildings for industrial or business uses outside the built up area will be permitted provided that:-

- (i) the building is structurally sound, of permanent construction, and capable of conversion without rebuilding or significant alteration or extension;*

- (ii) the resultant building and use will not have an adverse effect on the rural character of the area in respect of the nature and level of activity likely to be generated, including the resultant traffic level;
- (iii) the resultant building is sympathetic to its setting in terms of form, bulk and visual design;
- (iv) where the building is of historic or architectural importance, there is no adverse effect on the character and appearance or features of architectural or historic interest, internally and externally, which the building possesses, or its setting; and
- (v) the traffic to be generated by the new use can be safely accommodated by the site access and the local road system.

A structural survey may be required to demonstrate that the building is capable of conversion. Provision for bats and/or owls should be incorporated into the scheme. Where necessary, planning conditions will be imposed removing relevant Permitted Development Rights under the General Permitted Development Order. All large scale proposals must be accompanied by a landscape assessment."

2.14 As a result of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, Development Plans were saved for a transitional period of 3 years whilst their replacement plans were prepared. Both the West Sussex Structure Plan and the Arun District Local Plan, 2003, expired on 24 September 2007 but the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) c/o of the Government Office for South East (GOSE) has issued a direction stating which policies will be retained until the Local Development Framework is complete. All of the above policies have been "saved".

3.0 Involvement of Local Interests

3.1 The immediate neighbours to the site have all been consulted by the applicant and copies of the proposal given to said neighbours for their information. Generally the feeling is one of support as the proposed Tourism use would reduce the impact in terms of traffic and disturbance associated with office use, deliveries, commuting etc. Copies of letters of support are attached with the application documents for officers information and are requested to be included with the submission.

The planning application will also be the subject of a neighbour notification and publicity exercise which will be undertaken by the Local Planning Authority. Neighbours and members of the local community will be given 21 days in which to comment on the proposed development.

4.0 Evaluation

4.1 This application should be considered in light of current planning policies relating to development within the rural area. Policy contained within National, Strategic and Local planning guidance documents supports the reuse of redundant, structurally sound rural buildings. Current policy encourages sustainable economic growth in rural areas which does not have an adverse impact upon the character of the surrounding countryside.

The Proposal

4.2 The application seeks a reuse the single building within the site for holiday let purposes.

4.3 Access to the site would be via the existing entrance from Norton Lane.

4.4 The proposal and approval to convert a large, former barn building, located adjacent to the sites western boundary, into four Class B1 business units is considered unrealistic given the total lack of interest from potential tenants in the period since it was granted approval. In addition the potential disturbance to the amenity of local residents adjacent to the site has always been a concern of the applicant.

Following consultations with the neighbours the proposal for converting the barn into 6 smaller tourist units was formulated and following further discussions has met with approval from the majority of the neighbours.

A much smaller parking area is to be provided and the building will be softened using natural materials such as brick and flint lower walls and feather edge boarding at high level.

Each unit will have two bedrooms and their own private garden areas defined immediately adjacent to each unit. The tourist units will benefit from the use of the amenity space created for the tourist units approved under AL/92/08.

4.5 The development would be provided with a Sustainable Drainage balancing/attenuation pond in order to mitigate against flash flood events and allow for adequate surface water run off as previously approved. A private drive serving the entire development would follow a line adjacent to the sites northern boundary.

4.6 The tourist units would each benefit from a photovoltaic solar panel system mitigating electrical use and providing sustainable levels of electrical supply back into the national grid during periods of vacant occupancy.

Assessment

4.7 The development for which permission is sought has been the subject of pre-application discussions with the Local Planning Authority. In essence Officers of the District Council have advised that the principle of tourism development is acceptable provided that it can be satisfactorily demonstrated that: -

- The re-use of the buildings would not harm the existing amenities of the occupiers of adjacent property;

- It can be demonstrated that the buildings to be converted are all structurally sound;
- That the proposed development would not place future occupiers at danger from flood risk, and;
- The development would be of a scale that would not create problems for the local road network.

4.8 Additionally, the Applicant has undertaken a bat and owl survey of the buildings under the previous application in order to demonstrate that the proposed development would not adversely affect any known protected species.

Residential and Visual Amenity

4.11 With regard to the first of these considerations the Applicant has been careful to ensure that the proposed development would result in a net reduction in the number of persons and vehicles using the site to that normally expected of domestic dwellings. Each unit provides accommodation levels for a small family of 3 or 4 persons

4.12 The additional tourist accommodation units would be located within the sites south western corner away from the nearest residential property. As such it is considered that the reused buildings would sit comfortably within the rural landscape and would not have a harmful impact upon the amenities of the occupiers of adjacent dwellings. The proposed development, being for tourism use is considered to be consistent with policies DEV1 and DEV2 of the Local Plan.

Structurally Sound Buildings

4.13 This planning application is supported with a structural appraisal of the buildings undertaken by Cluttons LLP in 2005 and submitted with the previous application and subsequent approval. This assessment concludes that all of the buildings are structurally sound. It is considered, therefore, that the proposal to convert the existing building to tourism use is also consistent with the relevant sections of Local Plan policies DEV1 and DEV2.

Flood Risk

4.14 This planning application is submitted with a Flood Risk Assessment carried out by Monson Engineering Limited and submitted with the previous application and subsequent approval. The company's engineers have consulted with the Environment Agency (EA) in respect of the proposed development and have ascertained that they (the EA) have no objection in principle to the scheme. In a letter dated 15th August 2008 the EA has stated that finished floor levels should be 300mm above existing ground levels and are encouraged at the utilisation of a Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS). Both the specialist consultants report and the reply from the EA were submitted and approved as part of the previous planning application documentation.

Highways Safety

4.15 Prior to the submission of this planning application West Sussex County Council as Highway Authority (HA) were consulted by the Applicants. The HA commented that they were satisfied that adequate parking provision was being provided within the site for the self catering holiday let accommodation. The HA advised that they considered the site access to be acceptable allowing for adequate driver visibility and that the proposed drive could accommodate two way traffic.

Biodiversity Issues

4.16 This site was the subject of a bat and owl survey in February 2006 undertaken by specialist consultants 4Woods Ecology. The survey concludes that whilst there were old birds nests within some of the buildings there was no evidence that either Barn Owls or Bats occupied the buildings. Please refer to the bat and owl survey which was submitted and approved under the previous application.

5.0 Design Principles

5.1 The design principles that have been utilised seek to ensure the building within the site retains its rural appearance where possible given the large modern nature of this particular building. As such any re-cladding would be carried out in a sympathetic manner which would ensure the structure did not appear overly domestic in appearance. Additionally, the number of new or re-instated window openings would be kept to a minimum.

6.0 Amount of Development

6.1 The site comprises an area of 0.28 hectares. In total the proposed development would result in the provision of: -

6 x two bedroom holiday lets;

12 parking spaces;

Use of the existing tennis court and amenity space created for the earlier phase of development of the adjacent site under the previous application and approval.

7.0 Layout

7.1 The site would be laid out in a manner that would result in an enclosed courtyard accessed via a private drive originating from Norton Lane. Additionally a SuDS balancing/attenuation pond (previously approved under the earlier application) would be provided in the adjacent sites north western corner. Since the development seeks to re-use existing buildings the overall site layout would not differ that greatly from the existing situation.

8.0 Scale

8.1 All buildings would retain their existing single storey height / scale..

9.0 Landscaping

9.1 This would be the subject of a revised robust planting scheme. This would incorporate the use of indigenous species that would hopefully encourage native biodiversity.

10.0 Appearance

10.1 Sensitive attention to detail would ensure that the buildings would retain their agricultural character and appearance.

11.0 Access

11.1 Access to the site would be from Norton Lane. The existing access allows for adequate driver visibility for motorists either approaching or exiting the site entrance. As is stated at para.4.15 of this report the HA have commented that they would have no objections to the proposed development. Additionally all of the development proposed would ensure the conversions complied with Part M of the Building Regulations.

12.0 Conclusions

12.1 In conclusion, it is considered that the development, as proposed, would result in the acceptable reuse of the large redundant, structurally sound former farm building. The proposal as set out is consistent with both National planning policy guidance (i.e. PPS7) as well as the relevant policies of the Local Plan (i.e. DEV1 and DEV2). It is considered that, if successful, the development proposed would provide much needed additional rural employment which would benefit the local economy.

12.2 It is respectfully requested, therefore, that both Officers and Members of the District Council look favourably on this proposal and issue a grant of planning permission.