

BLUE MOON Paddock
WOODFIELD LANE
ESSENDON
HERTFORDSHIRE
AL9 6JJ

PLANNING; DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT
ON BEHALF OF JAMES WESTROPE

DECEMBER 2017

magenta
planning

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This statement is submitted in support of further revised proposals for the erection of a single family dwelling together with associated tree planting and landscaping at Blue Moon Paddock, Woodfield Land, Essendon.
- 1.2 It is Mr Westrope's third application for planning permission and is submitted subsequent to the Planning Inspectorate's appeal decision (ref:- APP/C1950/W/17/3179182) dated 17th November 2017.

2.0 Site Context

- 2.1 The application site is previously developed land, comprising a former paddock and stables accessed via an existing driveway, located directly off Woodfield Lane which forms the southern boundary of the site.
- 2.2 There are two existing structures on the land (a derelict barn and stables in a poor physical condition) which are located within the north east corner of the site, whilst the southern and western sections of the site are mostly wooded. There are pockets of scarred and damaged land interspersed throughout.
- 2.3 There are a group of existing buildings associated with Chestnut Farm located immediately to the east of the site.
- 2.4 The overall area of the site is 1.33 hectares. There is no public access or rights of way across the land.

3.0 Background Planning History & Background

- 3.1 Prior to the recent planning history relating to the applicant's involvement in the current residential project (since 2015), there is one other record shown on the Council's web site, as follows:-
 - Planning Application Ref:- S6/1990/0063/FP:- Erection of a block of four loose boxes and one tack room; granted on 2nd March 1990.
- 3.2 The site has however now been vacant for a number of years. Prior to its previous private stables use, it is understood that the site was formerly part of Chestnut Farm which was split into two in the mid 1950s.
- 3.3 The application site had previously formed part of a special area of traditional English woodland, the quality and condition of which has deteriorated over the years due to neglect and lack of management.

4.0 Revised Application Proposals (Third Scheme)

4.1 The description of the proposed development is for:-

'Demolition of existing redundant structures and erection of single family dwelling house (within envelope of existing structures), together with associated tree planting scheme (part of Centenary Woods project sponsored by Woodland Trust); landscaping and car parking'

4.2 The applicant's revised design brief now provides a development solution for the site which simply replicates the same footprint; floor area and volume as the existing structures (buildings A and B) as shown at P/310A. The only exception being a subtle frameless glazed link provided between the buildings which is required for functional purposes.

4.3 A very high quality of design is maintained, incorporating a traditional 'barn like' vernacular, using soft timber and tiled roof materials in keeping with the local rural character and landscape. A number of sustainability features will continue to be incorporated into the scheme design, including the use of air source heat pumps; SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage); 20Kw Solar panels; SIP (Structural Insulated Panel Construction); LED lighting; and rainwater harvesting. An electric charging point is also proposed for cars/bicycles.

4.4 Over 100 new trees are proposed to be planted at the site as part of the Woodland Trust's Centenary wood project in memory of the 100 year World War 1 anniversary. A detailed landscaping plan is included within the application drawings, as previously discussed and agreed with the Council's Tree Officer.

4.5 The proposed development is not a speculative project and will be occupied by the applicant as his family home, which will include an annex for the applicant's parents; his mother is registered disabled and currently undergoing psychiatric specialist treatment. An updated personal statement by the applicant is provided as part of the application documents.

Access

4.6 Vehicular access is gained from Woodfield Lane, with gates that are significantly set back from the edge of the highway to provide good visibility splays in both directions. This is positioned adjacent to the existing entrance to Chestnut farm and associated house beyond.

4.7 This general arrangement will be maintained and the existing driveway leading into the site will be upgraded accordingly to provide suitable residential access, with ample off street parking to serve the new dwelling. It is noted that the County Highway Authority, in previous consultations, considered that the proposals are unlikely to have a material impact on the local road network and consequently no highways objections were raised.

4.8 Access to the residential dwelling will be provided on a level threshold, with good circulation space throughout internally, to meet disability standards.

4.9 There are no existing rights of way across the site.

5.0 Relevant Policy Context

- 5.1 The site is located within the Green Belt and the West End to Brickendon Wooded Slopes Landscape Character Area, as defined in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan adopted in 2005. As advised by the Local Planning Authority, the site also lies within the Chestnut Farm Meadows Local Wildlife Site (Ref: 70/080), which at the time of selection was identified on the basis of its grassland interest. This issue has been addressed by Arbtech Consulting Ltd, expert ecologists, in their previous accompanying supporting documentation.
- 5.2 The adopted Local Plan is however now out of date and the Council are well advanced with their work on a new Local Plan to replace it; the Examination in Public sessions started in October this year and are due to be re-commenced by the Local Plan Inspector at the beginning of 2018.
- 5.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (adopted March 2012) sets out the Government's policy position on Green Belts at Chapter 9. It stresses that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence. They serve five main purposes, as follows:-
- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
 - to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 5.4 Paragraph 81 states that;- *'Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; **to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land***'. (Our emphasis in bold)
- 5.5 Paragraphs 87 and 88 set out that inappropriate development, is by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Furthermore, such 'very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. Paragraph 89 however provides for various exceptions, including;-
- 'the limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land) whether in redundant or continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within it than the existing development'*.
- 5.6 Both the LPA and the applicant (as well as the appeal Inspector) agree that the application site comprises such previously developed land. The Inspector stated (at paragraph 4 of his letter):-
- 'As a former equestrian use the site falls within the definition of previously developed land as contained in the Framework, and with regards to the first part of the exception to paragraph 89 therefore the proposal constitutes the redevelopment of a redundant previously developed site, a point on which both parties agree'*

6.0 An Exceptions Case

Appropriateness

- 6.1 It is accepted by the applicant that the proposed residential development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness. As stated above however there is no dispute with the LPA that the existing structures on the land are considered to fall within the definition of previously developed land.
- 6.2 Paragraph 89 of the NPPF (as highlighted above) is therefore directly relevant and is a very important material consideration in terms of assessing these further revised proposals, which are sited on brownfield land and specifically on the same part of the land as the existing structures.
- 6.3 The NPPF exceptions criteria must therefore be applied and tested against the proposals, as follows:-

Impact on Openness

- 6.3 The applicant has provided the comparative numerical assessment between the 'existing' and 'proposed' situations at Drawing No P501 & P502. This shows that, with the exception of the glazed link, the proposed floorarea (at 196.5 sqm) and the volume (at 603 cubic metres) is exactly the same as the existing situation. As such, the proposals have been carefully profiled to sit precisely within the same building envelope as the two existing structures. The dimensions for the glazed link are provided separately, but effectively this part of the development will have no material visual impact due to its subtle position between the two buildings and its transparency.
- 6.6 The Council's previous concerns about a possible increase in domestic paraphernalia are noted, but the applicant has continued to deliberately define a limited residential curtilage on the plans which would be clearly and physically apparent on the ground. This garden area and its associated domestic activity would be functionally separate from the wider planning unit. The applicant would be willing for this matter to be controlled by an appropriate planning condition to remove permitted development rights as deemed necessary.
- 6.7 Essentially, the project is therefore now a rebuild of the existing and as such there would be no harm to the visual sense of openness at the land.

Purposes of including land in the Green Belt

- 6.8 The application proposals also need to be assessed in terms of how they would effect the site's role within the Green Belt with reference to its five identified purposes, as follows:-
- To check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- 6.9 The application proposals would not create a situation of sprawl; the site is not located adjacent to a large urban area but would form a discreet and visually contained development within a rural setting, located upon exactly the same footprint where derelict stables buildings are currently in-situ (ie. on previously developed land)
- To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
- 6.10 The application proposals would have no effect upon this purpose.

- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- 6.11 With the exception of the glazed link, the footprint of the proposed building is contained precisely within the same footprint as the existing buildings on the land. As such there would be no encroachment into the countryside; rather, the countryside will be enhanced through the additional tree planting that is proposed.
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;
- 6.12 There are no historic towns within the setting of the subject site and as such this purpose is not relevant to this assessment.
- To assist in urban regeneration;
- 6.13 There will be no material harm caused to the overall objective of encouraging urban regeneration by the Authority permitting one single house in this location. Furthermore, there will be no material change to the pattern of development in this locality since there are existing structures in situ and there is no dispute that this constitutes previously developed land.
- 6.14 As such, it is concluded that the approval and implementation of the application proposals would have no adverse effect on the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. Furthermore, the sense of openness of the existing site would be preserved and its landscape character significantly enhanced. Both the visual and spatial aspects of the Green Belt would therefore be protected, and accordingly the proposals satisfy the NPPF exceptions test whereby they do not constitute inappropriate development.

7.0 Benefits of Proposals & Other Material Considerations

- 7.1 Given that the revised scheme proposals now satisfy the NPPF exceptions criteria, there is no requirement for the applicant to advance a 'special circumstances' case. Notwithstanding this, there are a number of benefits that flow from the proposals which should be highlighted in their assessment, as follows:-
- An attractive architectural design of quality, incorporating a high specification of traditional materials
 - Incorporation of sustainability features with the objective of achieving an equivalent of Code for Sustainable Homes level 6
 - Special tree planting and landscaping scheme supported by the Woodland Trust (part of Centenary Woods project)
- 7.2 The aim is to provide a high quality design with a simple rural aesthetic that sits comfortably within the existing landscaping, blending seamlessly within its enhanced woodland setting and with no impact whatsoever upon the Green Belt, either spatially or visually.
- 7.3 Sustainability has been a fundamental part of the client's design brief from the outset and continues to be so. As a result, the building's performance in terms of overall carbon emissions will be considerably beyond the Council's normal policy requirements. Specifically, after incorporating efficiency measures, air source heat pump system and photovoltaic system the

development will achieve net zero carbon emission. Furthermore, the proposed fabric specification exceeds the requirements of Part L1A 2013 and is in line with the principles of the Energy Hierarchy.

- 7.4 The applicant has also established and maintained a close dialogue with the Woodland Trust, and remains committed to plant 100 trees to commemorate one hundred years since the outbreak of the First World War as part of the Trust's Centenary Wood project. A detailed landscaping proposal is therefore included as part of this application, consistent with that agreed previously with the Council's Arboricultural Officer. The implementation of this new tree planting would have a positive impact on the removal of carbon from the atmosphere thereby helping to deal with climate change. It should be noted that the timescale for the planting scheme is proposed by the applicant as being prior to development commencing, which can be controlled by a suitable planning condition.
- 7.5 Furthermore, economic and social benefits would flow from the proposals. Namely, the contribution of new housing; not just the new unit but also freeing up two existing dwellings in the borough (the applicant's home and that of his parents). This would add to the quantity and quality of the district's housing stock consistent with the NPPF's objective to significantly increase housing supply and the opportunity for the applicant to provide care on-site for his elderly and infirm mother. As such, all three strands of sustainable development will be satisfied by the proposals (ie. environmental; economic and social).
- 7.6 There are also other related benefits to the project such as the applicant's intention to provide access for local schools' nature study projects (ie. Chancellor's School). This would provide community access for educational and recreational purpose where presently there is none. The Officer's previous comments regarding these aspects are noted however and as such they are not relied upon.
- 7.7 In addition, there are no issues of highways safety and there would be no adverse impact upon residential amenities of the adjacent farm/dwelling, as previously accepted by the Local Planning Authority.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 For all these reasons, it is considered that the application proposals satisfy the relevant NPPF exceptions criteria regarding the appropriateness of developing within the Green Belt.
- 7.2 The dimensions of the new building follows precisely those of the existing structures, and as a result it has been shown that there will be no impact upon the Green Belt, either from a spatial or visual perspective. Essentially, the project is now a rebuild of the existing structures, but with a number of benefits flowing from it, addressing all three dimensions of achieving sustainable development (namely; economic; social and environmental).
- 7.3 It is therefore very much hoped that Officers' will now be supportive of this further revised application package and that planning permission can be granted accordingly.