

**BLUE MOON Paddock**  
**WOODFIELD LANE**  
**ESSENDON**  
**HERTFORDSHIRE**  
**AL9 6JJ**

**PLANNING; DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT**  
**ON BEHALF OF JAMES WESTROPE**

**AUGUST 2016**

**magenta**  
planning

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 This statement is submitted in support of 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 follows a formal pre-application process with the Council and withdrawal of an earlier proposal (planning application S6/2015/0524/FP) in February 2016. The revised proposals have been advanced with careful reference and adherence to the Council's advice as contained in their correspondence dated 14<sup>th</sup> March 2016 (ref:-S/2016/S005/PA).

## **2.0 Site Context**

- 2.1 The application site comprises 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 A search on the Council's web site has revealed the following record:-
  - Planning Application Ref:- S6/1990/0063/FP:- Erection of a block of four loose boxes and one tack room; granted on 2<sup>nd</sup> 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**

- 4.1 The description of the proposed development is for:-

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

- 4.2 Whilst this description of development is almost identical to that of the previous withdrawn application, the scheme has been fundamentally changed in light of the Officer's advice and the client's revised brief to provide a very special and innovative design solution of exceptional quality.
- 4.3 The project is conceived as the renewal of a landscape and the buildings within it; this concept is expanded in the architect's statement (as appended). The proposed building is of a barn vernacular pared down to a fundamental form and composed of charred timber in keeping with the local rural character and landscape. It also includes a stainless steel feature elevation to reflect the surrounding landscape, adding visual interest and an element of drama. The merits of the design approach adopted are set out in more detail subsequently within this statement (See 'A Very Special Case').
- 4.4 Consistent with the earlier proposals, the applicant has sought to contain the proposed footprint of the development within the broad extent of the outline established by the existing structures on the land in order to minimise the visual impact of the development on the landscape.
- 4.5 Sustainability measures have been designed into the proposals at the outset, to include the use of air source heat pumps; SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage); 20Kw Solar panels; SIP (Structural Insulated Panel Construction); LED lighting; and rainwater harvesting. Sustainability is an integral part of the whole project and the applicant is now aiming to achieve the equivalent of Code level 6 (of the Code for Sustainable Homes), increased from Code level 4 previously. This is covered in detail by the accompanying Sustainability Statement by EAL Ltd.
- 4.6 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, with on-going management to be provided by the applicant. A detailed landscaping plan is included within the application drawings, as discussed with the Council's Tree Officer.
- 4.7 In addition to the woodland proposals, it should be noted that millions of wild poppies have been seeded already at the site (during Spring 2015), as a complementary project supported by British Legion. This element had previously formed part of the proposals, but the applicant advanced this planting in any event, notwithstanding the absence of a planning permission at that time. More poppy seeds could of course be planted as part of the future landscaping proposals, as considered to be appropriate by the Local Planning Authority (LPA).
- 4.8 As part of the wider amenity and landscaping scheme, the applicant is also proposing a chicken coop; vegetable garden; an apple and pear orchard; and a bee hive.
- 4.9 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. A personal statement by the applicant is provided as part of the application documents.

#### Access

- 4.10 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.

- 4.11 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.
- 4.12 Access to the residential dwelling will be provided on a level threshold, with good circulation space throughout internally, to meet disability standards.
- 4.13 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 is addressed by Arbtech Consulting Ltd, expert ecologists, in their 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; a final consultation document is due out later this summer.
- 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 Paragraph 92 in respect of 'Community Forests' is also of some relevance to this particular proposal in that it establishes that such projects may be a material consideration in deciding planning applications. It acknowledges the value of such projects for upgrading the landscape and providing for recreation and wildlife.
- 5.7 Chapter 10 (Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change) of the NPPF is particularly relevant in respect of the environmental credentials of the application proposals. In addition, Chapter 11 (Conserving and enhancing the natural environment) is relevant with its focus on protecting and enhancing valued landscapes. In particular, it stresses that opportunities to incorporate bio-diversity in and around developments should be encouraged.
- 5.8 Finally, paragraph 55 of the Framework should also be highlighted. This provides the various exceptions criteria for locating single new homes within countryside locations, including that of *‘exceptional quality or innovative nature of the design’*.

## **6.0 A Very Special 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. There is however 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 relevant and this is an important material consideration in terms of the overall assessment and balancing of the issues, since the new dwelling will be sited on this part of the site (ie. on brownfield land).

### Openness

- 6.3 With reference to the NPPF, the 'test' for special circumstances to exist requires that any such harm which arises from the proposals must be clearly outweighed by other considerations. The logical starting point for this assessment is to consider how the application proposals would impact upon the site's openness, as being the essential characteristic of Green Belt land.
- 6.4 Rather than *‘planning by mathematics’*, the applicant has provided informative comparative visuals of the ‘before’ and ‘after’ situation, as a separate supporting document. This demonstrates how the applicant has sought to minimise the visual impact of the dwelling, at the same time as providing an attractive rural aesthetic, through its ‘barn like proportions’, incorporating a steeply pitched roof and low level eaves.
- 6.5 The proposed high quality materials of charred larch cladding, and the inclusion of a feature gable of highly polished and reflective stainless steel panels, together with the use of water (through provision of an adjoining balancing pond), will ensure that the building will blend in seamlessly with its natural surroundings, whilst also providing visual interest. Furthermore, there will only be glimpsed views of the bulk and mass of the new building available from the

public highway and surrounding countryside. As such, there are only very limited views of the site from the public realm.

6.6 The Council's concerns about a possible increase in domestic paraphernalia are noted, but the applicant has deliberately defined 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, which would involve the management of the woodland. 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 Overall, it is therefore considered that any harm to the visual sense of openness would be minimal.

#### 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 a 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 The footprint of the proposed building is contained within the broad outline established by the existing buildings on the land. It should be noted that the overall site coverage of the new building is only 2.37%, which is sited upon brownfield land. Any resulting encroachment into the countryside would therefore be minimal at worst. Rather, the countryside will be enhanced through the significant landscape and environmental benefits delivered by the proposals.

- 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.

- 6.15 The only harm caused to the Green Belt would therefore be by definition in terms of the 'inappropriateness' of the development, which is tempered in any event by virtue of the site's part brownfield land status. This limited harm (ie. by policy definition only) must then be weighed against the benefits that would be delivered by the proposals.
- 6.16 The three key benefits, which the applicant relies upon for this assessment, are set out below:-
- Exemplary high quality contemporary design with minimalist qualities
  - Achievement of equivalent of Code for Sustainable Homes level 6
  - Special tree planting scheme supported by the Woodland Trust (part of Centenary Woods project), together with associated woodland management plan

Each of these benefits are amplified in turn below:-

#### The 'Special' Design

- 6.17 The aim is to provide a high quality contemporary design which will be both extraordinary and very special, blending seamlessly within its enhanced woodland setting. The architect has provided his conceptual thoughts in a separate supporting document, which conceives the project as *'the renewal of a landscape and the buildings within it'* and describes an episodic sequence of transitional experiences as you move through the site. The building itself is described by the architect as *'a barn vernacular pared down to a fundamental form'*, which composed of charred timber is made of the same materials of the landscape itself.
- 6.18 This provides a truly unique design approach to the site and it is accepted by the Local Planning Authority that a high standard of architecture has now been introduced. The architect's submitted drawings and accompanying visual material clearly demonstrate this to be the case.
- 6.19 With reference to paragraph 55 of the NPPF, the applicant therefore contends that the design:-
- is truly outstanding and innovative, helping to raise standards more generally in rural areas;
  - reflects the highest standards in architecture;
  - will significantly enhance its immediate setting; and
  - be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.

#### Sustainability

- 6.20 The sustainability and environmental credentials have been significantly enhanced as part of the revised proposals to achieve Code level 6 (increased from a minimum of Code 4 associated with the previous application). This includes a whole range of measures that have been integrated with the revised pure timber design from the outset of this concept, acting as an exemplar of new building techniques and solutions.
- 6.21 Sustainability has been a fundamental part of the client's design brief from the outset and as a result, the building's performance in terms of overall carbon emissions will be considerably beyond the Council's normal policy requirements.

6.22 The accompanying report from EAL Consultants sets out the detailed information on how this will be achieved with reference to the various categories of the Code, such as Energy; Water; Materials; Surface Water run-off; Health and Wellbeing; Management; and Ecology. For ease of reference, the conclusion from their report is set out verbatim below:-

*'The design and sustainability measures incorporated in the proposed strategy are of an award winning standard. Welwyn and Hatfield Borough Council Energy and Sustainability Policies and appropriate measures have been incorporated at design level. After incorporating efficiency measures, air source heat pump system and photovoltaic system the development will achieve net zero carbon emission.*

- *Code for Sustainable Homes pre-assessment shows that the dwelling can meet Code level 6*
- *A truly unique design of a high standard of architecture*
- *The proposed fabric specification exceeds the requirements of Part L1A 2013 and is in line with the principles of the Energy Hierarchy'.*

6.23 These positive sustainability and energy efficiency measures should be attributed significant weight in the balancing assessment in favour of granting planning permission for the scheme.

#### Woodland

6.24 The applicant has established and maintained a close dialogue with the Woodland Trust, and is 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.

6.25 A detailed landscaping proposal is therefore included as part of this application and discussions regarding the proposed woodland management principles are underway with the Council's Tree Officer, who has provided positive feedback on the scheme.

6.26 This planting and management plan represents a unique opportunity in this specific location for restoring and managing the woodland back to its former glory. Its implementation would significantly enhance the natural aspect of the borough's countryside in terms of landscape; visual amenity and bio-diversity, allowing local wildlife to flourish. The new tree planting would also have a positive impact on the removal of carbon from the atmosphere thereby helping to deal with climate change.

6.27 In response to comments from the pre-application process, it should be noted that the significance of the site's woodland interest is dealt with by Arbtech Consulting Ltd (expert ecologists and environmental consultants) in their accompanying report. They also deal with the need for a reptile survey, as identified by the Council, the next appropriate window for which is early September. This survey work has been commissioned by the applicant; the findings of which will be submitted to the LPA in due course.

6.28 In particular, it should be noted that the proposed woodland enhancement is consistent with the strategy and guidelines contained in the Council's Landscape Character Assessment ie. *'to conserve and strengthen'*. This includes the encouragement of woodland management to ensure age diversity, a species-rich ground flora and a variety of management types, such as high forest, coppice, coppice-with-standards and wood pasture; and to promote the planting of locally indigenous species.



- 6.29 In response to the Council's pre-application comments, 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. Furthermore, the proposed residential dwelling provides the commercial incentive and catalyst for the applicant to deliver this landscaping scheme, as well as his intended on-going management of the enhanced woodland. This will only become possible due to his 'day to day' presence at site and there is no realistic prospect for these benefits to be delivered otherwise, as they go 'hand in hand' with the overall development project. The applicant wishes to enter into a Section 106 agreement with the Council to secure these benefits.
- 6.30 This issue should therefore also be given significant weight in the Council's balancing assessment exercise.
- 6.31 All of these factors, when combined, represent the special circumstances necessary and weigh firmly in favour of the grant of planning permission, as balanced against the very limited harm that will be caused to the Green Belt (ie. harm by policy definition only).

#### Other Material Considerations

- 6.32 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 comments regarding these aspects are noted however and as such they are not relied upon as part of the main planks of our special case.
- 6.33 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).
- 6.34 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 accepted by the Local Planning Authority.

### **7.0 Conclusion**

- 7.1 For all these reasons, it is considered that the application proposals will cause only very limited harm (by definition of policy only) to the Green Belt and that the benefits that flow from the proposals will considerably outweigh any such harm.
- 7.2 The key planks of this special case are based upon the following:-
- the truly outstanding and innovative architectural design
  - the considerable sustainability and environmental credentials of the scheme
  - the unique opportunity that exists to restore and manage this important piece of woodland back to its former glory

- 7.3 Noting the other economic and social benefits that would be achieved through the implementation of the development proposals, as well as the other relevant material considerations involved, the special case becomes an overwhelming one.
- 7.4 It is therefore very much hoped that Officers' will be supportive of this revised application package and that planning permission can be granted accordingly.