

**SMALLBURGH - PF/19/1287 – Conversion and extension of traditional barns to offices (B1) and use of portal frame barn for associated car parking; Church Farm, Church Road, Smallburgh, NR12 9NB for Worstead Farms Ltd**

**Minor Development**

**- Target Date: 26 November 2019**

Case Officer: Mr C Reuben

Full Planning Permission

**CONSTRAINTS**

LDF Tourism Asset Zone

SFRA - Areas Susceptible to Groundwater Flooding

C Road

EA Risk of Flooding from Surface Water 1 in 1000

Landscape Character Area

LDF - Principal Routes

LDF - Countryside

Development within 60m of Class A road

HO 9 - Rural Residential Conversion Area

Listed Building Grade II - Consultation Area

**RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

LA/19/1288: Conversion and extension of barns to office use (B1 Use Class) - approved  
13/01/2020

**THE APPLICATION**

The Church Farm complex lies to the south of the village of Smallburgh and to the west of the Parish Church of St Peter. The farm complex is accessed off Hall Road and Knowles Lane, with Hall Road connecting to Yarmouth Road near to the site to the north.

The application is for the conversion a C19th threshing barn and former stables into office and storage space. The barn lies within the curtilage of the grade II listed Holly House and forms part of the statutory listing as an accessory structure. The proposal also facilitates the reuse of the redundant portal framed barn to the south of Holly House for sheltered parking.

At ground floor level the conversion would provide 32 desk spaces, storage and toilet facilities. At first floor level, three mezzanines would be created incorporating four meeting rooms. Eighteen parking spaces would be provided.

**REASONS FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE**

At the request of Cllr N Dixon due to concerns regarding the overall sustainability (including transport sustainability) of the location.

**PARISH COUNCIL**

Smallburgh Parish Council – Objection. Further clarification sought regarding likely traffic flow as a result of development. Following further information provided, agree with the objection from the Highway Authority.

## REPRESENTATIONS

None received.

## CONSULTATIONS

Conservation and Design Officer – No objection.

Norfolk County Council (Highway) – Objection. The site is located in a rural and isolated location with a lack of alternative access modes. The type of employment use is considered to be unsustainable with access being totally reliant on the car. In addition, the scale of the building would allow a significant number of people to work or visit the site such as to give rise to highway safety concerns regarding increased use of the adjacent sections of the rural road network.

Landscape Officer – No objection subject to conditions.

Economic and Tourism Development Manager – No objection.

Environmental Health – No objection.

Norfolk County Council (Historic Environment Service) – No objection.

## HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

It is considered that the proposed development may raise issues relevant to

Article 8: The Right to respect for private and family life.

Article 1 of the First Protocol: The right to peaceful enjoyment of possessions.

Having considered the likely impact on an individual's Human Rights, and the general interest of the public, approval of this application as recommended is considered to be justified, proportionate and in accordance with planning law.

## CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998 - SECTION 17

The application raises no significant crime and disorder issues.

## POLICIES

North Norfolk Core Strategy (Adopted September 2008):

SS 1 - Spatial Strategy for North Norfolk

SS 2 - Development in the Countryside

EN 2 - Protection and enhancement of landscape and settlement character

EN 4 - Design

EN 8 - Protecting and enhancing the historic environment

EN 9 - Biodiversity and geology

EN 13 - Pollution and hazard prevention and minimisation

EC 2 - The re-use of buildings in the Countryside

CT 5 - The transport impact of new development

CT 6 - Parking provision

## National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

Section 2 – Achieving sustainable development

Section 6 – Building a strong, competitive economy

Section 12 - Achieving well-designed places

Section 15 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Section 16 - Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

## MAIN ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Principle
2. Design
3. Amenity
4. Highway impact
5. Landscape impact
6. Heritage impact
7. Biodiversity
8. Environmental considerations

## APPRAISAL

### 1. Principle (Policies SS 2 and EC 2)

The site is within the designated Countryside policy area of North Norfolk, as defined under Policy SS 1 of the adopted North Norfolk Core Strategy. Policy SS 2 lists the types of development that can be acceptable in principle within the Countryside where it can be demonstrated that a rural location is required. These include the re-use and adaptation of buildings for appropriate purposes.

In this particular case, the building is a large grade II listed barn which is part of a larger farm complex. It is proposed to convert the barn to offices (within Class B1), to be used partly in conjunction with Worstead Farm's operations, and partly as rental office space.

With regard to whether the proposed use requires a rural location, the applicant has provided reasoning, primarily including the use of part of the building by Worstead Farms who are already based on the existing site, and the possible use of the building in future by a rural based tenant, the identity of which is unknown at this stage. Furthermore, it is considered that weight should be given to the potential economic benefits of the proposed use to the local area.

Policy EC 2, has a presumption in favour of proposals for the re-use of rural buildings for economic uses provided:

- Such uses are appropriate in scale and nature to the location;
- It can be demonstrated that the building is soundly built and suitable for the proposed use without substantial rebuilding or extension and the proposed alterations protect or enhance the character of the building and its setting; and
- Is in accordance with other policies seeking to protect biodiversity, amenity and character of the area.

Matters relating to the design, biodiversity, amenity and character are discussed further below. In relation to the scale and nature of the location, the proposed offices would be sizeable, but confined to being within the existing building, with the existing building not being extended. It would also, be partly occupied by the existing farming business on site.

Importantly, paragraph 83a) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) encourages the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, including the conversion of existing buildings. In addition, paragraph 84 of the NPPF advises that planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business needs may have to be found beyond existing settlements and in locations that are not well served by public transport. Such development should not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and should exploit opportunities to make the location more sustainable. The use of previously developed land and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged.

In addition, policy EC 2 also states that its criteria do not prevent proper consideration being given to the optimum viable use of listed buildings. In this respect, weight is apportioned to the opportunity for preserving the designated heritage asset, noting that the building already benefits from listed building consent for the associated works under LA/19/1288. Given the need for the building to serve the existing business, and given its proximity to a working farm, the use of the building for residential purposes is not desired by the applicant.

Taking the above considerations into account, including the guidance in the NPPF, on balance, the principle of the proposed development is accepted under Policy SS 2.

## 2. Design (Policy EN 4)

As noted, there is existing listed building consent (LA/19/1288) for the works to the buildings. The approved plans significantly reduced the intensity of the scheme compared with that originally proposed. The extension to the east elevation has been removed, the number of desk spaces has been reduced from 61 to 32 and the parking spaces reduced from 43 to 18. These changes have mitigated the impact of the proposals on the host barn and the ensured the impact on the wider setting of the agricultural grouping is negligible.

The form, scale and footprint of the barns would remain unaltered. The external appearance of the curtilage listed threshing barn and stables would also remain largely unchanged. No new openings are proposed to the front (west) elevation. The east elevation will have a number of new rooflight openings but this aspect of the building is secondary and carries less significance to the wider grouping.

The existing cartshed openings will be utilised to provide full height glazing and borrow light to the internal spaces. The design of the offices is fairly low intensity and requires limited internal subdivision. The impact on the historic fabric would as such, be minimal.

An amended lighting plan has reduced the number of external lights, which will be restricted to downwards lighting to access ways only, with specific details to be secured through a condition. The raises no overriding design or heritage concerns.

Initial design concerns have been satisfactorily addressed and it is considered that the proposal is in keeping with historic nature of the host barn and wider agricultural grouping, such that the proposal complies with Policy EN 4 in respect of design.

### 3. Amenity (Policy EN 4)

Other than Holly House to the east, there are no residential properties close to the site. As such, it is considered that the proposed development would not have any detrimental impact on the amenity of any residential properties. As such, the proposed development complies with the Policy EN 4 in this respect.

### 4. Highways impact (Policies CT 5 and CT 6)

The proposed development incorporates cycle spaces and 18 parking spaces (including two electric car spaces and two car sharing spaces) which is acceptable. There is also scope to accommodate more spaces if required. Thirteen of the parking spaces would be largely hidden within an existing adjacent portal framed building. Furthermore, two existing site accesses exist, one onto Knowles Lane (south) and one onto Hall Road (north-east) with a one-way system proposed. It is also proposed to create a footpath link through to Yarmouth Road from the site. The Highway Authority have not raised an objection to these proposed parking and access arrangements.

The Highway Authority do however, object on the grounds of transport sustainability. In this respect, the development is within walking distance of Smallburgh with links North Walsham (just under 6 miles away), Stalham (just over 3 miles away) and Hoveton (just under 5 miles away). Smallburgh is served by a bus service to both North Walsham and Stalham. Worstead Station situated approx. 3.5 miles away.

It is recognised that the proposed development will generate vehicular traffic, however the proposed use is office based, and as such, it is not expected that the volume of traffic, other than for a brief period early morning and late afternoon, is likely to be high, and noting alternative transport options available. It is also recognised that part of the building would be used by existing employees of Worstead Farms which should further partially reduce the highway impact.

Although the highway concerns are recognised, these factors are also considered to be outweighed by the potential economic benefits of the proposal along with the benefits of preserving the long-term future of the listed building. In addition, paragraphs 83a) and 84 of the NPPF are considered relevant, both in recognising the need for sustainable growth and expansion of businesses in the countryside and that locations that are not well served by public transport may be require. In this instance, the public transport option is, to an extent, available.

As such, it is not considered that, on balance, the proposed development is contrary to Policies CT 5 and CT 6.

### 5. Landscape impact (Policy EN 2)

The existing barn sits within a complex of farm buildings and the adjacent farmhouse. Most of the new window openings would be at lower level. As such, it is not considered that the proposed development would have any significant visual impact upon the wider landscape. It is considered that the proposed development application complies with Policy EN 2.

## 6. Heritage impact (Policy EN 8)

In respect of heritage impact, the works to, and extension of, the building have already been accepted following approval of the associated application for listed building consent (LA/19/1288) earlier this year.

The historic agricultural outbuildings form part of the Church Farm complex and form a cohesive interrelationship with the grade II listed Holly House and the rural landscape setting. Although altered over time, the barns have retained much of their historic character and architectural integrity. The proposed conversions are therefore welcomed as a means of securing the future of these curtilage buildings. Minimal external changes are proposed aside from the rear elevation rooflights and the introduction of glazing to the existing openings. Internally, three large full height voided spaces are retained and offer a sense of the original barns scale and volume. The mezzanine levels offer additional floor space whilst still retaining the principal roof structure. The nine rooflights to the principal threshing barn have been relocated to the rear (east facing) slope to mitigate disruption and clutter to the elevation facing into the courtyard. In this context the barn also screens the parking from the wider complex and historic setting. The interrelationship of views between the barn and the principal listed building Holly House will not be affected by the proposals.

The proposed reuse of these redundant and underutilised curtilage listed outbuildings represents a significant opportunity to secure the long term conservation of these heritage assets. The proposed works will not harm the significance of the adjacent grade II listed Holly House. As such, as with application LA/19/1288, the proposed development is considered to be compliant with the requirements of Policy EN 8.

## 7. Biodiversity (Policy EN 9)

The application was accompanied by a Protected Species Survey which found evidence of roosting bats. A European Protected Species Licence would therefore be required along with the securing of suitable biodiversity mitigation and enhancement measures (through submission of a Biodiversity Method Statement) and the prior agreement of external lighting. Subject to appropriate conditions to address these matters it is considered that the proposed development complies with Policy EN 9.

## 8. Policy EN 13 (Environmental considerations)

No concerns have been raised by the Council's Environmental Protection Officer in respect of either the former use of the building or the proposed methods of foul and surface water discharge (package treatment plant/soakaway). As such, it is considered that the proposal complies with Policy EN 13.

## 9. Conclusion and planning balance

The application is finely balanced, with the concerns regarding transport sustainability being recognised, along with the size of the existing building. However, it is considered that, on balance, the economic benefits of the proposed scheme along with the opportunity to preserve the future of the designated heritage assets, and justification regarding the need for a rural location, are sufficient to outweigh the transport sustainability concerns raised.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the application be APPROVED subject to conditions relating to the matters listed below and any others considered necessary by the Head of Planning:

- Time limit for commencement (3 years)
- Constructed in accordance with the approved plans
- Surfacing materials for driveway/turning area
- Access improvements (visibility splay)
- Parking/turning provision in accordance with approved plans
- Signage indicating one-way system
- Provision of footpath
- Biodiversity Method Statement
- European Protected Species Licence
- Prior agreement of external lighting
- Restrict use to B1 only

Final wording of conditions to be delegated to the Head of Planning.