CASE OFFICER'S REPORT

Application Reference:	PL/2023/09222
Site Address:	Gurston Farm, Gurston Lane, Broad Chalke, SP5 5HR
Date of Inspection:	N/A
Date site notice posted:	13/11/23
Consultation Expiry:	27/11/23

POLICIES

National Planning Policy Framework
Section 2 Achieving Sustainable Development
Section 12 Achieving Well Designed Places
Section 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Wiltshire Core Strategy
Core Policy 1 Settlement Strategy
Core Policy 2 Delivery Strategy
Core Policy 39 Tourist Development
Core Policy 48 Supporting Rural Life
Core Policies 50 & 52 Biodiversity and Geodiversity
Core Policy 51 Landscaping
Core Policy 57 Ensuring high quality design and place shaping
Core Policy 61 Transport and Development
Core Policy 69 Protection of the River Avon SAC

AONB Management Plan 2019-2024

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

PL/2023/01566 – Change of use of an agricultural barn to form a single C3 dwelling with holiday use restriction REF 27.04.23 APPEAL HAS BEEN SUBMITTED TO PINS TBC

ISSUES

- Principle of development including recent history, design and scale of proposal;
- Impact on neighbouring amenity and context and character of the surrounding area/AONB including PROW;
- Archaeology Impact;
- Parking/Highways;
- Ecological Impact

REPRESENTATIONS

Broad Chalke Parish Council – No objection

WC Highways – No comment

WC Public Protection – No objection subject to conditions

WC Archaeology – No objection

WC Ecology – No comments received

WC PROW – No comments received

AONB Group (National Landscapes) – No comments received

Third Party Representations – None received

Site Description:

The application site is an existing open sided agricultural barn located within the open countryside for the purposes of the local plan. The agricultural barn is used for the storage of agricultural machinery and straw. The building is set with the wider Gurston Farm complex and is accessed via a series of tracks/bridleways known as BROA20 and BROA21 via Fifield Road. The building is located within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The site is located in Flood Zone 1.



Proposal:

Planning permission is sought for the conversion of the existing agricultural barn to form a class C3 three bedroom dwellinghouse with a holiday let restriction (resubmission of PL/2023/01566).

Principle of development including recent history, design and scale of the proposal

The proposal seeks planning permission to convert the existing agricultural barn to a dwellinghouse with a holiday let restriction. The agricultural barn is located within a predominately rural location within the open countryside for the purposes of the local plan. The site is located within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The Settlement and Delivery Strategies of the Wiltshire Core Strategy are designed to ensure new development fulfils the fundamental principles of sustainability by focusing growth around settlements with a range of facilities, where local housing, service and employment

needs can be met in a sustainable manner. A hierarchy has been identified based on the size and function of settlements, which is the basis for setting out how the Spatial Strategy will deliver the levels of growth.

Core Policy 1 of the Core Strategy sets out the 'Settlement Strategy' for the county, and identifies four tiers of settlement - Principal Settlements, Market Towns, Local Service Centres, and Large and Small Villages. Only the Principal Settlements, Market Towns, Local Service Centres and Large Villages have defined limits of development.

Core Policy 2 of the Core Strategy sets out the 'Delivery Strategy'. It identifies the scale of growth appropriate within each settlement tier, stating that within the limits of development, as defined on the policies map, there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development at the Principal Settlements, Market Towns, Local Service Centres and Large Villages.

With the exception of the circumstances as permitted by other policies within the Plan, identified in paragraph 4.25, development will not be permitted outside the limits of development, as defined on the policies map other than through identification of sites for development through subsequent Site Allocations Development Plan Documents and neighbourhood plans. At Small Villages development will be limited to infill within the existing built area where they seek to meet housing needs of settlements or provide employment, services and facilities.

The exception policies identified in paragraph 4.25 of the Core Strategy include Tourist Development (Core Policy 39) and Supporting rural life (Core Policy 48) which together form the basis for the assessment of this application. Also of relevance is Core Policy 57 of the WCS (Ensuring high quality design and place shaping) which stated the following:

The proposal should aim to conform to the objectives of Core Policy 57 of the WCS which aims to achieve a high standard of design in all new developments, including extensions, alterations, and changes of use of existing buildings. Development is expected to create a strong sense of place through drawing on the local context and being complimentary to the locality.

This application is the resubmission of the recently refused planning application PL/2023/01566. This application was refused for the following reason:

The Local Planning Authority is not convinced that the building subject of this application is capable of conversion without significant new build/modification. The existing building is of poor visual quality and does not positively enhance the landscape character. The proposed scheme is also considered to be of a similarly utilitarian appearance and would be tantamount to a new C3 class dwelling which would result in urbanising of the immediate area. The remoteness of the site in an isolated countryside location with degree of inaccessibility to local services and facilities would fail to achieve a sustainable form of development. Consequently, the location of the building and the retention and reuse for residential use, together with any curtilage/residential paraphernalia would be an inappropriate form of unsustainable development detrimental to the special character and appearance of the landscape of the AONB. Subsequently, the proposal is considered to contrary to the aims of Core Policies CP39, CP48, CP51 and CP57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the aims of the NPPF.

This application is accompanied by a planning statement and a structural survey undertaken by Harvey and Snowdon Consulting Structural Surveyors and a letter from the Head of Building Surveying and Design from Symonds and Samson (the agent for this application).

The planning statement accompanying this application claims that the application site is located in close proximity to the village of Broad Chalke (a large village as defined in the WCS) approximately 3.5km away "which is accessible by the public rights of way network, a realistic alternative to the private car, especially for occupiers of the holiday accommodation". The statement also states that… "The site is also approximately 15km from the principal settlement of Salisbury. Salisbury offers a wide range of services and public facilities, as well as a good level of public transport and links to tourist attractions across Wiltshire. By rural standards, the site is relatively accessible and occupiers of the holiday accommodation will have a realistic alternative to the private car for some journeys".

The LPA considers that the site is in open countryside rather than close to any settlement. Accordingly, the relevant part of Core Policy 39 to be applied to tourism related development in this instance states that:

"In exceptional cases development may be supported away from the Principal Settlements, Market Towns, Local Service Centres and Large and Small Villages where it can be demonstrated that all of the following criteria are met:

i. There is evidence that the facilities are in conjunction with a particular countryside attraction.
ii. No suitable alternative existing buildings or sites exist which are available for reuse.
iii. The scale, design and use of the proposal is compatible with its wider landscape setting and would not detract from the character or appearance of the landscape or settlement and would not be detrimental to the amenities of residential areas.
iv. The building is served by adequate access and infrastructure.
v. The site has reasonable access to local services and a local employment base.

Extensions to existing facilities should be appropriate in scale to their location and help to ensure the future viability of the business, including farm diversification schemes.

Proposals for camping and touring caravan sites (including extensions) will be supported where they can be accommodated without adverse impact on the character and appearance of the landscape and meet criteria iii to v above."

In respect of criterion i of CP39, Officers note that the application refers to a number of events within the Gurston Farm complex that include the Gurston Down Hill Climb and Gurston Down Shoot. Officers also note the location of the site in reasonable proximity to the Fovant Badges that are approximately 1km from the site.

This application refers to criterion ii of CP39, which confirms there are currently, no other buildings on the site or in the ownership of the applicant that could be converted into tourist accommodation.

The description of development given for this application refers to a restrictive condition of the change of use of the barn to C3 dwellinghouse with holiday use restriction", the proposal continues to be designed as a dwelling, comprising living room, kitchen/dining room, utility room, 3 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms. There are no changes to the design of the proposed in comparison to refused application PL/2023/01566. Other than broad analysis of how this scheme is considered to be in accordance with criterion iii of this policy and Core Policy CP51 of the WCS stating that this resubmitted scheme does not have a wider detrimental impact on the wider landscape setting it is apparent that this proposal as shown is clearly designed for and capable of permanent resident occupation. As such, it is considered that the proposal is a single residential dwelling (C3 use) whose occupation would be limited to

self-contained holiday accommodation only by way of a restrictive condition. There is no material difference in the use of a dwelling used for permanent occupancy and a dwelling used for holiday purposes. It is therefore considered that this proposal for the use of the converted building is contrary to criterion iii of CP39 of the WCS as the use of the building for occupation would detract from the character and appearance of the designated landscape setting this being the AONB. The appearance of a holiday home, which would not be visually distinguishable from a permanent home, within the location of the site is considered an incongruous feature in the context of the designated landscape setting.

Criterion v of CP39 requires a site to have **reasonable** (emphasis added) access to local services and a local employment base. Whilst there is no definition of what reasonable can be considered as, given the remote location of the existing agricultural barn to be converted is approximately 3.5km from the large village of Broad Chalke, the proposed is contrary to criterion v of CP39 in that the site does not have reasonable access to local services or an employment base.

Officers also note the comments of the Highways Officer that state 'no comment'. Referring to criterion iv of this policy, it would be appropriate to refer to the comments of the Highways Officer for the previous application, PL/2023/01566. These comments are referred to in more detail with the Highway/Parking section of this report.

In addition to consideration under Core Policy 39, the criteria of Core Policy 48 also remain relevant to the assessment of this proposal since tourism uses are specifically listed within this policy as one of the re-uses of an existing building which may be supported.

Core Policy 48 of the WCS seeks to support rural life. With reference to the conversion and reuse of rural buildings, the supporting text at para 6.68 states…*insensitive reuse of rural buildings can be damaging to the character of the building and its rural setting. Furthermore, additions and extensions should normally be avoided"*

The policy states that:

Proposals to convert and re-use rural buildings for employment, tourism, cultural and community uses will be supported where it satisfies the following criteria:

i. The building(s) is / are structurally sound and capable of conversion without major rebuilding, and with only necessary extension or modification which preserves the character of the original building; and

ii. The use would not detract from the character or appearance of the landscape or settlement and would not be detrimental to the amenities of residential areas; and

iii. The building can be served by adequate access and infrastructure; and

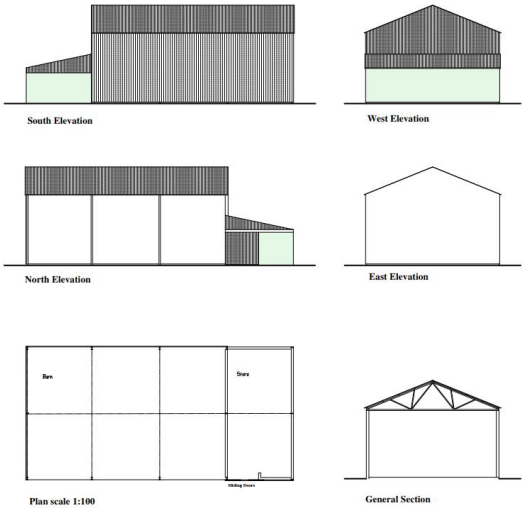
iv. The site has reasonable access to local services or

v. The conversion or re-use of a heritage asset would lead to its viable long term safeguarding

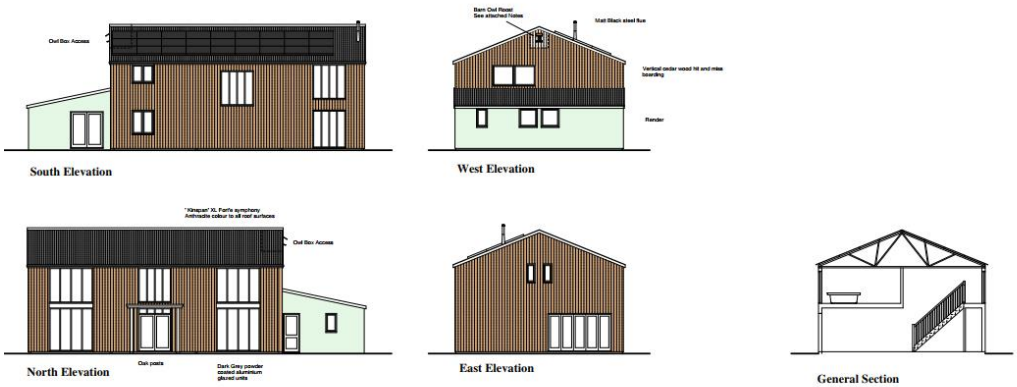
Where there is clear evidence that the above uses are not practical propositions, residential development may be appropriate where it meets the above criteria. In isolated locations, the re-use of redundant or disused buildings for residential purposes may be permitted where justified by special circumstances, in line with national policy.

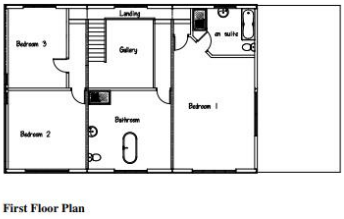
The existing building is an open sided iron clad agricultural barn with a rendered concrete block mono-pitched single storey lean-to extension on the western elevation. Officers

considered that the barn in itself is of little visual interest to warrant retention in the landscape. The existing and proposed elevations/floor plans are shown below.



Existing elevations/floor plan (above)





Proposed Elevations/Floor Plans (above)

It is noted that a Visual Inspection Structural Survey and an accompanying letter is provided to support this application and both confirm that the existing agricultural building is capable of conversion or not. However, no detail of the works proposed or schedule of works to convert the building have been provided. Whilst the building may be considered to capable of conversion, it is the level of works proposed that is the crux of this matter. These proposed works include the infilling of the northern elevation of the building, the removal of the existing iron cladding and the replacement with timber cladding as well as the insertion of a new mezzanine floor and doors and windows to support the change of use of the building. Considering the level of works proposed, officers consider the agricultural building is not

capable of being converted without major works being required, thus being contrary to criterion i of Core Policy 48 of the WCS.

Furthermore, officers note that there is no change in design to this scheme in comparison to the refused application PL/2023/01566. It is therefore considered that the proposal as submitted with the level of glazing proposed would not visually improve the building, and would result in an urbanising effect as a result of the proposal harming the visual amenity of the immediate landscape setting, this being the AONB.

As such, Officers consider that the current proposal does not accord with CP48. The clear aims of this policy are to permit the retention and conversion of buildings within the countryside, but only those which can positively contribute to the landscape character without significant works (as emphasised by criterion i) and ii) of CP48). For the reasons outlined in the next section of this report, officers consider that this proposal does not meet these policy aims.

In respect of criterion iii CP48, comments received from the Highways Officer raise no concern to the existing access arrangements for this scheme. These comments are referred to in more detail within the Highway/Parking section of this report.

In respect of criterion iv of CP48, the location of the existing agricultural barn to be converted being approximately 3.5km from the large village of Broad Chalke. To access the proposal, would be accessed via a series of tracks/bridleways known as BROA20 and BROA21 via Fifield Road. It would appear that there is no street lighting along these tracks/bridleways and given their nature, would not encourage cycling for the purposes of accessing services and facilities or public transport connections. Realistically, all day to day services and facilities are located via a private car.

Impact on neighbouring amenity and context and character of the surrounding area/AONB including PROW

The NPPF guidance supports proposals to enhance rural employment opportunities, and adopted policy CP48 of the WCS also deals with supporting rural life, including improved local services and facilities.

Core Policy CP51 of the WCS which states:

Proposals for development within or affecting the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), New Forest National Park (NFNP) or Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site (WHS) shall demonstrate that they have taken account of the objectives, policies and actions set out in the relevant Management Plans for these areas.

The proposal should also aim to conform to the objectives of Core Policy 57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy which aims to achieve a high standard of design in all new developments, including extensions, alterations, and changes of use of existing buildings. Development is expected to create a strong sense of place through drawing on the local context and being complimentary to the locality.

Paragraph 176 of the NPPF states *'Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited'*.

The proposal seeks to convert the existing barn into a three bedroom dwelling house with a holiday let restriction. The existing barn on site is considered to be of poor visual quality. The submitted plans show that the converted barn would also be utilitarian in appearance following the proposed works. Officers are of the opinion that the existing building is of poor visual quality and that its proposed retention and reuse as a dwellinghouse with a holiday let restriction in the manner suggested, together with any curtilage/residential paraphernalia, would result in a building and surroundings of limited visual quality, and thus the proposal would remain visually detrimental to the special landscape character and appearance of the AONB.

Views of the proposed development would remain relatively limited from public vantage points, these being the nearby public rights of way known as BROA 20/21 and this is supported by the submission of a photographic montage showing the application site in the context of the wider area. However, the conversion/change of use of the agricultural building through the introduction of domestic features and associated paraphernalia would be more apparent within the landscape and therefore, the proposal (the effective retention of a building of poor visual quality) is considered to cause significant harm to the landscape character of the AONB. This is given great (significant) weight in line with the guidance given in the NPPF namely paragraph 176 of this framework.

Archaeological Impact

Comments received from the Council's Archaeology Team to this proposal refer to the comments provided under application PL/2023/01566. These comments are detailed below:

The barn proposed for conversion at Gurston Farm formed part of a group of farm buildings dating from the late 19th-century. There is therefore some historic interest in this location, but the proposed conversion will not involve any significant below ground impacts outside of the footprint of the existing barn. On this basis, I have no archaeological concerns with this proposal and no further action is therefore required as regards the buried archaeological heritage in relation to this planning application.

Based on the above comments previously provided, the proposal is not considered to have any impact to the buried archaeological heritage in relation to this proposal.

Parking/Highway Safety

The existing access/egress is to remain and is unaltered by way of this proposal. The Council's Highways Officer has assessed the proposal and returned comments of 'no comment'. It would therefore be appropriate to refer to the comments provided by the Highways Officer in respect of the previous application, PL/2023/01566 that had no objection to the scheme as the existing highway arrangements are considered reasonable. These comments stated the following:

On the basis that the proposed change of use and use is strictly for tourist and holiday accommodation only, I raise no highway objection. I note existing highway access arrangements to be used and seem reasonable.

Therefore, for the above reasoning, it is considered that there would be no impact to highway safety or parking to that would justify the refusal of planning permission.

Ecological Impact including the River Avon SAC

CP50 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework require that the planning authority ensures protection of important habitats and species in relation to

development and seeks enhancement for the benefit of biodiversity through the planning system.

The application is accompanied by an Ecological Impact Assessment undertaken by Lowans Ecology & Associates dated February 2023 that has found evidence of owls within the barn and within the vicinity of the site. Whilst no formal comments on this assessment have been received from the Council's Ecology Team, based on these findings and subject to the implementation of the ecological mitigation as suggested within the assessment, it is unlikely that the conversion/change of use of this agricultural building would cause any significant detrimental ecological impact that would justify the refusal of planning permission.

WCS policy CP50 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity) and the NPPF requires the Local Planning Authority to ensure protection of important habitats and species in relation to development and seeks enhancement for the benefit of biodiversity through the planning system. Whilst the site is not adjacent to any rivers or in any respective flood zones, it is situated within the River Avon Special Area of Conservation (SAC) catchment area. The SAC is designated for several species of wildlife that depend on pristine water quality that is typical of chalk rivers such as the Avon. It is part of a network of sites across Europe designated in order to protect these and other species vulnerable to man-induced habitat change. This SAC is particularly vulnerable to the effects of pollutants including phosphate and nitrogen which may enter the river for example at sewage treatment works or from fertilizers applied to farmland throughout the catchment.

This development falls within the catchment of the River Avon SAC and has potential to cause adverse effects alone or in combination with other developments through discharge of phosphorus in wastewater. The Council has agreed through a Memorandum of Understanding with Natural England and others that measures will be put in place to ensure all developments permitted between March 2018 and March 2026 are phosphorus neutral in perpetuity. To this end it is currently implementing a phosphorous mitigation strategy to offset all planned residential development, both sewered and non-sewered, permitted during this period.

In the absence of comments from the Council's Ecology Team on this proposal, it could be considered that this proposed falls within the scope of the mitigation strategy and generic appropriate assessment and as such, will not have any significant impact to the River Avon SAC.

CONCLUSION/PLANNING BALANCE

Officers note that this application is accompanied by a Visual Inspection Structural Survey undertaken by Harvey and Snowdon and letter from the Head of Building Surveying and Design at Symonds and Sampson (the agent for this proposal) that confirms that the agricultural barn subject to this proposal is capable of conversion.

How, there is clear direction for applications of this type by way of the settlement strategy within the Wiltshire Core Strategy. The settlement strategy directs new residential and tourism accommodation to within or close to existing settlements (Core Policies, 1, 2 and 39) with exceptions made (in appropriate circumstances) for the conversion of existing rural buildings subject to a number of criteria set out in Core Policy 48 being met and in exceptional cases for tourism facilities in the countryside where the criteria of Core Policy 39 are met. Notwithstanding, the protection of the landscape of the AONB must be given great weight, in accordance with NPPF guidance.

Having regard for the above and the level of works required to enable the conversion of the agricultural barn to a dwellinghouse/holiday let and; the remote location of the existing agricultural barn away from local services, would result in the retention of a building of poor

visual quality, and together with the associated residential paraphernalia, it is considered that the proposal would cause significant harm to the immediate landscape character of the AONB.

For the reasons outlined within this report, officers consider the level of works required for the retention and reuse of the existing building as a dwellinghouse/holiday let as proposed would cause significant harm to the AONB and therefore would be contrary to the aims of Core Policies CP39, 48, 51 and 57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the aims of the NPPF. Therefore, planning permission should be refused for the development.

RECOMMENDATION

Refuse for the following reason(s):

1. The application is accompanied by a Visual Inspection Structural Survey. However, the Local Planning Authority is not convinced that the building subject of this application is capable of conversion without significant new build/modification. The existing building is of poor visual quality and the proposed scheme is also considered to be of a similarly utilitarian appearance that would be tantamount to a new C3 class dwelling which would result in urbanising of the immediate area. On the basis of the information and details submitted, the building is not considered to being capable of conversion for habitable occupation without substantial fresh or re-building, that would include but not be limited to, new infill walling on the northern elevation of the existing building. Furthermore, the remoteness of the site in an isolated countryside location with degree of inaccessibility to local services and facilities would fail to achieve a sustainable form of development. Consequently, the location of the building and the retention and reuse for residential use, together with any curtilage/residential paraphernalia would be an inappropriate form of unsustainable development detrimental to the special character and appearance of the landscape of the AONB. Subsequently, the proposal is considered to contrary to the aims of Core Policies CP39, CP48, CP51 and CP57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the aims of the NPPF.