



LASSETTER DOWNIE PLANNING

Planning Statement

Prepared for: Hilldrop Farms

Site Location: Chandlers Barn, Hilldrop Lane, Ramsbury, Marlborough SN8 2HB.

Proposal: Notification for Prior Approval under Class R for a Change of Use from Agricultural Building to a Flexible Commercial Use specifically Class C1 (hotels).

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Site and Surroundings
3. Planning History
4. Proposed Development
5. Policy Considerations – Development Plan and NPPF
6. Conclusions

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This planning statement has been prepared by Lasseter Downie Planning (LD) on behalf of Hilldrop Farm in support of the associated operational development to facilitate the change of use from agricultural building to flexible commercial use granted under PL/2025/08332 at Chandlers Barn, Hilldrop Lane, Ramsbury, Marlborough SN8 2HB. Easting: 426373; Northing: 172926.

2. Site and Surroundings

- 2.1. The site is located northwest of Hilldrop Farm, Hilldrop, Ramsbury, Marlborough SN8 2HB.
- 2.2. It comprises a plot of land approximately 0.7 hectares (excluding the access) and comprises a redundant agricultural building and immediately surrounding land including access. Specifically the site location is Easting; 426373; Northing 172926.
- 2.3. The site is within open countryside outside of the limits of development of the village of Ramsbury and within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. Hilldrop Farm is located 900m to the southeast and the large village of Ramsbury is only a short distance (2km) away. Marlborough, one of Wiltshire's Market Towns, is approximately 10km to the southwest.
- 2.4. The site is surrounded on all sides by open agricultural fields and is screened by mature hedges and hedgerow trees, and further afield by woodland copses. There is an existing access lane off Hilldrop Lane that provides access to the existing agricultural building.
- 2.5. The surrounding area is characterised by an agricultural landscape which includes open agricultural fields, scattered farms, agricultural and employment buildings and some residential properties.
- 2.6. A public footpath that connects to Ramsbury runs 400m to the north of the site.
- 2.7. The site is outside of any flood risk or critical drainage area, it is not in a conservation area, there are no listed buildings present on site or its immediate surroundings.

3. Planning History

- 3.1 PL2022/00367 - Notification for Prior Approval under Class R for a Change of Use from Agricultural Building to a Flexible Commercial Use Specifically Office Use – Approved 10/03/2022
- 3.2 PL/2021/07132 – Associated operational development to facilitate the change of use from agricultural building to flexible commercial use granted under PL/2022/00367 – Approved 05/04/2022

3.3 PL/2022/07368 - Amendment to roof following approval of Class R conversion (PL/2022/00367) to accommodate solar panels – Approved 17/11/2022

3.4 PL/2025/08332 - Notification for Prior Approval under Class R for a Change of Use from Agricultural Building to a Flexible Commercial Use specifically Class C1 (hotels) – approved 18/12/2025.

4. Proposed Development

4.1 The proposal seeks to gain permission for the operational development under Class R for a Change of Use from Agricultural Building to a Flexible Commercial Use specifically Class C1 (hotels).

4.2 The building will provide 8 bedrooms, meeting rooms, and dining facilities to enable the applicant to provide a greater offering to clients such as the following:

- Strategic corporate offsites with overnight stays
- Cookery demonstrations with overnight stays
- Accommodation for clay pigeon shooting guests in association with the established shooting business at Hilldrop
- Yoga retreats
- Local conference facilities for meetings.
- Charitable venue – Hilldrop have raised over £800,000 in recent years for community projects in Ramsbury and Aldbourne including building the pre-school in Ramsbury.
- Holiday lets when available.

4.3 A parking forecourt will be created to the south and a landscape framework of tree and native hedge planting will be incorporated onto the layout which will help screen the parking area from the wider countryside and minimise the impact upon the National Landscape. This landscape strategy will help integrate the development in its surroundings and will also offer opportunities for biodiversity enhancements with hedge/tree planting, provision for bats, birds, and other fauna/flora.

4.4 The applicant has supplied the visibility splays that are conditioned as part of the Class R application PL/2025/08332 and these are included as part of this application.

5. Policy Considerations – Development Plan and NPPF

NPPF 2024

5.1 Turning to Government policy in the NPPF, achieving sustainable development is at the heart of that document and paragraph 8 refers to the three objectives of sustainable development, as follows:

‘a) an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth’;

- 5.2 The National Planning Policy Framework at Paragraph 11 makes it clear that a presumption in favour of sustainable development is at the heart of national planning policy and where a proposal accords with planning policy then it should be permitted without delay.
- 5.3 Further attention is drawn to Paragraph 39 of the NPPF which encourages local planning authorities to approach decision-making in a positive way by looking for solutions rather than problems. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications by using the full range of planning tools available to them and working proactively with applicants.
- 5.4 The application proposes to convert a surplus agricultural building back into active use. The proposal will support the rural economy and an existing business. It will also create local employment opportunities.
- 5.5 There is a section of the NPPF that considers the benefits in supporting a prosperous rural economy specifically paragraphs 88 and 89.

In paragraph 88, the two key points that relate to this application are:

- a) The sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;
 - b) The development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;
 - c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside
- 5.6 Paragraph 89 of the NPPF goes on to state: “Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.” This application fulfils this objective.
- 5.7 The proposal recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and proposes a carefully designed conversion which will seek to retain the existing agricultural character and uses hedgerow and tree planting to improve the existing setting and enhance the surrounding views.

Wiltshire Council Core Strategy 2015

- 5.8 The Community Area Strategy for Marlborough identifies that due to its strong economic base and lack of current employment land supply there is likely to be some demand for new employment space for small businesses to showcase their work and to help create .
- 5.9 The proposals will create a flexible opportunities for growing businesses in a location where this is currently lacking. This will reduce commuting and carbon emissions and will help strengthen existing businesses and offer local employment opportunities to younger members of the community.
- 5.10 The Core Strategy states that the Community Area will deliver, within the overall objective of conserving the designated landscape, a modest and sustainable level of development, and highlights that development within the Community Area will need to conserve the designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting, and where possible enhance its locally distinctive characteristics.
- 5.11 This scheme has been carefully designed to respect the existing context: its siting has responded to an understanding of the surrounding character and views, and it retains agricultural character in its design. The proposal will be well screened from views and maintains the visual amenity and scenic quality of the landscape.
- 5.12 CP 34 states that Outside the Principal Settlements, Market Towns and Local Service Centres, developments will be supported that are adjacent to these settlements and seek to retain or expand businesses currently located within or adjacent to the settlements where they:
- a) meet sustainable development objectives (as set out in the policies of this Core Strategy),
 - b) are consistent in scale with their location, do not adversely affect nearby buildings and the surrounding area or detract from residential amenity,
 - c) are supported by evidence that they are required to benefit the local economic and social needs and
 - d) would not undermine the delivery of strategic employment allocations and
 - e) are supported by adequate infrastructure.
- 5.13 The proposed conversion will support the existing business at Hilddrop, providing the applicant with a multifunctional space and will also support new growing businesses. This in turn will benefit the local economy and social needs. There is currently an existing suitable access in place and the proposals do not result in a detrimental change to the surrounding character, views and amenity. The proposal represents a sensitive conversion which allows the building to be brought into the 21st Century and provides it with a sustainable future.

- 5.14 CP 48 states that proposals to convert and re-use rural buildings for employment, tourism, cultural and community uses will be supported where
1. 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,
 2. 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,
 3. The building can be served by adequate access and infrastructure,
 4. The site has reasonable access to local services.
- 5.15 The existing building is constructed with concrete posts, supporting a corrugated roof with timber boarding, enclosing the structure. It is sound and capable of conversion and the changes proposed have been carefully designed to retain the existing character. The building benefits from an existing suitable access and is a short distance away from the large village of Ramsbury, which offers a post office, shop and pub amongst other businesses.
- 5.16 CP 51 highlights that all development within the Community Area will need to protect, conserve and where possible enhance the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and its setting and must not have a harmful impact upon its landscape character and scenic beauty, while any negative impacts must be mitigated as far as possible through sensitive design and landscape measures.
- 5.17 The proposal will not cause a noticeable change to the surrounding North Wessex Downs National Landscape. The conversion will retain the existing character and the introduction of new openings and other built elements has been carefully planned to enhance the existing qualities and character. The proposed parking will be well screened from surrounding views, through both existing and proposed native hedgerow and tree planting.
- 5.18 CP 57 mentions that development is expected to create a strong sense of place through drawing on the local context and being complementary to the locality. Development should enhance local distinctiveness by responding to the value of the natural and historic environment, relating positively to its landscape setting and the existing pattern of development and responding to local topography by ensuring that important views into, within and out of the site are to be retained and enhanced.
- 5.19 The proposal has been designed to integrate into its surroundings whilst seeking to enhance overall character of the locality. The metal sheeting will be used as roofing material and timber cladding, reclaimed oak lintels and quoins will be used externally, which seek to retain the characteristics and design features typical of agricultural buildings.
- 5.20 The proposed development will meet the Council's requirements for on-site car and cycle parking. The proposed development would have its own (existing) access to Hilldrop Lane. Visibility from all points of access is good. The access has been used by large, slow-moving farm vehicles, so the switch to more nimble cars and vans mainly using the accesses would also be beneficial.

- 5.21 The proposed conversion would be built to the highest standards of energy efficiency enabling a move towards a low-carbon economy, and the development of the site will offer opportunities for biodiversity enhancements with hedge/tree planting, provision for bats, birds, and other fauna/flora. There will be cycle storage facilities on site with EV charging points.

North Wessex Downs Management Plan 2014-19

- 5.22 The Management Plan sets out the vision for North Wessex Downs and illustrates the special qualities that make its landscape unique. The management plan describes the North Wessex Downs as:

“visibly ancient landscape of great beauty, diversity and size. It embraces the high, open arable sweeps of the chalk downs and dramatic scarp slopes with their prehistoric monuments and beech knolls, the moulded dip slopes, sheltered chalk river valleys; intimate and secluded wooded areas and low-lying heaths with a rich mosaic of woodland, pasture, heath and commons. The North Wessex Downs form a surprisingly remote, expansive and tranquil landscape in the heart of southern England.”

- 5.23 The North Wessex Downs Partnership believes that promoting and supporting local enterprise is a key part of conserving and enhancing the character and special qualities of the area and acknowledge the need to enable vibrant communities to develop sustainably in the North Wessex Downs by stimulating economic prosperity and local culture.

- 5.24 The Position Statement describes what is considered as setting and provides guidance in relation to development within this area.

“The setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape can be explained as being the surroundings outside the National Landscape and although outside its boundary its extent is not fixed and may change over time. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the National Landscape, it may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral. For the purposes of spatial planning, any development or change capable of affecting the significance of the NATIONAL LANDSCAPE or people’s experience of it can be considered as falling within its setting.

The surroundings of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape are also important to its landscape character and quality. Views out of the National Landscape and views towards or into it from surrounding areas can be very significant. Development proposals that affect views into and out of the National Landscape need to be carefully assessed to ensure that they conserve and enhance the natural beauty and landscape character of the National Landscape”.

- 5.25 In order to minimise adverse visual impacts on the setting of the National Landscape the position statement encourages the following:
- Care over orientation, site layout, height and scale of structures and buildings;
 - Consideration not just of the site but also the landscape, land uses and heritage assets around and beyond it;
 - Careful use of colours, materials and non-reflective surfaces;
 - Restraint and care over the installation and use of street lighting, floodlighting and other external lighting to prevent harm to the dark night skies of the National Landscape;
 - The grouping of new structures and buildings close to existing structures and buildings to avoid new expanses of development that are visible and out of context (though detrimental impact on historic buildings/groupings will need special consideration to avoid insensitive development); and
 - Detailed mitigation measures, for example including native landscaping (where possible contributing to BAP targets), and noise reduction.
- 5.26 The proposals will help stimulate economic prosperity by creating a new workspace and tourism destination which will promote and support local enterprise. This is in accordance with the aims of the North Wessex Downs Management Plan.
- 5.27 The scheme has been designed to ensure a positive contribution to the surrounding character in terms of local distinctiveness and sustainability. It re-uses an existing disused agricultural building and proposes a high-quality, visually attractive conversion which is sympathetic to local character, draws inspiration from the surrounding buildings in terms of character, features and materials and helps to reinforce the natural beauty and landscape character of the National Landscape.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The proposals seek to bring an underused and surplus agricultural building back into use which in turn will support the rural economy with a new tourism business that will help support other local businesses in the 'large' village of Ramsbury
- 6.2 The proposal recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and proposes a carefully designed conversion which will seek to retain the existing agricultural character and uses hedgerow and tree planting to improve the existing setting and enhance the surrounding views.
- 6.3 There is an existing suitable access and the proposed site is only a short distance away from the large village of Ramsbury. There will be cycle storage facilities on site as well as EV charging stations.
- 6.4 Given the presumption in favour of sustainable development and the advice in the NPPF, planning permission for the operational development should be granted without delay.

Lasseter Downie Planning
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