

PLANNING, HERITAGE AND DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

In support of

Full application to construct 2 no. affordable houses with associated
access and parking area

-on-

Land at

Top Lane, Stourton, Warminster, Wiltshire BA12 6QA

On behalf of

Stourhead (Western) Estate

July 2026

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This planning statement is prepared in support of a Full application for planning permission to form a new vehicular access off Top Lane and to erect a pair of two-bed semi-detached affordable dwellings.
- 1.2 The statement covers relevant planning, design and access and heritage matters.
- 1.3 The statement explains the rationale behind the proposal and how this follows a previous scheme built at Gasper (and Committee approval for another scheme at Bonham – which failed to proceed further following an application for judicial review) all promoted/provided by the Stourhead (Western) Estate.
- 1.4 Following an explanation of the proposal and planning history, the statement then justifies the need for the additional units of affordable accommodation to serve those either seeking accommodation or working within the Parish. Following an explanation of the design and layout of the proposal, the statement then considers the impact (if any) on heritage assets within a Statement of Significance.
- 1.5 Thereafter, following a detailed assessment of relevant planning policy, and taking into account the current lack of an up-to-date Local Plan, the case in support of the proposal is set out in full.

2.0 PROPOSAL AND PLANNING HISTORY

- 2.1 The application proposes the provision of two accessible (single-storey) affordable dwellings to address an identified need (see below) – on land owned by the Stourhead (Western) Estate at Top Lane situated between Stourton and Gasper. The Applicant secured planning approval for a development of four affordable dwellings at Gasper in 2015 (13/00636/FUL). The permission was subject to a s.106 agreement to ensure the approved dwellings remained as affordable housing and occupied in accordance with an agreed allocations policy procedure. All four properties are let to persons with a defined local connection at an affordable rent.
- 2.2 A more recent proposal to construct four affordable dwellings at Bonham Farm was supported by the Southern Area Planning Committee. Planning approval was issued and a s.106 agreement to control the affordable housing was signed in March 2021.

Subsequently the proposal was subject to legal challenge by a neighbour, following which Wiltshire Council conceded it had not fully justified the reason for approving the application contrary to objection from Historic England and the Wiltshire Council Conservation Officer. The planning permission was quashed.

- 2.3 Rather than proceed with the submission of a further application, the Applicant has decided to no longer pursue development on that site. After an extensive search of alternatives, they believe the site at Top Lane is least constrained and the modest proposal can be accommodated on site within a reasonably accessible location without harm to landscape character or the setting of any heritage assets.

3.0 NEED FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- 3.1 The Estate is keen to meet further demand for those living or working in the Parish, who are unable to afford to buy a home in the village or do not already own any residential property. The scheme is designed as a pair of single-storey dwellings in a barn style and will be for affordable rent to local people (as was the Brook Cottages' development at Gasper). It will comprise two single-storey two-bedroom houses built to Level 2 accessibility standards. Priority will be given to local people currently in need of ground floor accommodation, and older people who may need to downsize into such accommodation to enable them to stay in the village as long as possible.
- 3.2 A Parish Housing Needs Survey was undertaken in 2018. The survey recognised the low level of turnover of social housing within the Parish, such that the households identified as being at need, could not have this need met through existing social housing in the Parish. It identified the need as comprising:
- 3 x 1-bedroom homes (1 x bungalow/ground floor accommodation)
 - 1 x 2-bedroom home
 - 1 x 3-bedroom home
- 3.3 The Estate maintains a waiting list of people who have enquired about possible tenancies. The Applicant has contacted those on the list to check their current position. This confirms that there is a present (2026) need for accessible single-storey two-bedroom affordable accommodation to meet the specific needs of the following:

- Three elderly couples who need to downsize from two-storey affordable accommodation to more suitable single-storey accommodation. Two couples are existing tenants, one of which is in the 2015 approved affordable housing.
- Three young couples with parents in the parish and who would like to be able to return to live there. They would be keen to live either in the proposed bungalows or in other accommodation freed up by people moving from existing houses.

3.4 The application is accompanied by an Allocation Policy which will form part of the s.106 agreement, which the Applicant agrees should be imposed to control the tenure and occupancy of the development in perpetuity. A draft s.106 agreement (with the same terms to that agreed previously at Bonham) is submitted with the application to assist with an early resolution/determination.

4.0 DESIGN, LAYOUT AND OTHER SITE-SPECIFIC ISSUES

- 4.1 The proposed site layout plan (see drawing 25035-2) and the floor plans and elevations (see drawing 25035-3A) show how a simple barn style building – comprising two units of accommodation – can be provided on site. The proposal shows a building of vernacular proportions – rectangular plan form with narrow gables – set back a short distance (and slightly above) Top Lane. It is proposed the building will have a low brick plinth with horizontal timber boarded elevations above. The roof will be covered with plain tiles (as on many houses on Top Lane) incorporating solar panels on the south side.
- 4.2 Windows and doors are to be powder-coated aluminium (white) like neighbouring properties.
- 4.3 The proposal is in keeping with the National Landscape’s “Dark Skies” designation. The proportion of glazing is modest; there are no skylights and all external lighting will be low level path downlights.

5.0 HIGHWAYS

- 5.1 The development is served by a new access positioned to the west side of the development, leading onto turning and parking areas to the rear of the buildings.
- 5.2 Prior to submission, Wiltshire Council Highways Authority was consulted, and some minor modifications/improvements have been made to the access/turning arrangements to meet its requirements. It has confirmed that the level of parking provided is sufficient.
- 5.3 As was the case with both previous applications (both supported by the Southern Area Planning Committee) the Highway Authority has tabled an 'in principle' objection – simply because of the location of the development beyond a defined village. That said, the location of development will be for the decision-maker to assess in terms of its suitability. Below (see Planning Policy section) a recent planning appeal decision (for an open market dwelling) near Semley is referred to, as the Inspector recognised the multi-centric nature of Semley area and various clusters of development within the Parish.
- 5.4 The Stourton with Gasper Parish presents a very similar situation. There is the village of Stourton itself – which previously had a defined housing policy or housing restraint area boundary (within the Salisbury District Local Plan) but is now identified as a small village without any such boundary.
- 5.5 The reality (somewhat like Semley) is the Parish comprises Stourton itself but also several other hamlets/clusters of development which clearly form part of the village, taking into account the dispersed nature of locations where residents live and work within the Parish.

6.0 FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 The application is accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment undertaken by Calibro Consulting who have expertise in relation to flood risk and drainage matters.
- 6.2 The scheme details show the development to be served by a Package Treatment Plant with the outfall to be taken to a watercourse/ditch to the south of Top Lane (within

land under the Applicant's control). Surface water drainage will be taken to soakaways.

- 6.3 The report addresses the identified possible medium risk of groundwater flooding demonstrating that the proposed dwellings will clearly not be at any risk, considering the natural fall from north to south (sloping topography), local geology and the ability to control surface water drainage on site.

7.0 BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

- 7.1 Despite the Government confirming that the requirement to provide Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for small sites (those below 0.2ha/2,000m²) will come into effect in Autumn 2026, unfortunately, because of the length of the private access between the site and the adopted highway (which has to be included within the red line application boundary) this takes this small site over the 0.2ha threshold. BNG will need to be provided.
- 7.2 The application scheme (along with the BNG report and associated documentation) shows how the 10% uplift can be secured on site (such that this can be conditioned in the normal fashion) as part of any planning approval.

8.0 VISUAL IMPACT

- 8.1 Although the site is situated (along with most of the Parish) within the Cranborne Chase National Landscape (AONB), the site chosen is not conspicuous. At [Appendix A](#) there is a brief Landscape Impact Assessment – looking at the site and its immediate surroundings including pasture, woodland, hedging and nearby dwellings.
- 8.2 This shows that Top Lane is characterised by a series of modest buildings/dwellings utilising a mixture of materials (with there being several timber clad/tiled structures within the vicinity. The housing along Top Lane is dispersed but creates a pockets of development on each side of the lane enclosed with hedging and fencing.

- 8.3 With the proposed development site, this will be a logical continuation of development immediately west of no. 60 Top Lane, very much reflecting the form of development found in this relatively 'tucked away' (visually) location.
- 8.4 With the land rising naturally to the north (rear) of the site and there being woodland a short distance beyond, and with the proposal to retain the existing established roadside hedge (which is set well above the level of Top Lane) the site can be integrated into the local landscape with minimal visual impact. Once the planting is established, the development will 'read' as a logical addition to the various cottages, farmhouses and other structures along the lane.

9.0 IMPACT ON HERITAGE ASSETS (STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE)

- 9.1 Part 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework deals with conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Paragraph 207, in relation to proposals affecting heritage assets states *'in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary'*.
- 9.2 At paragraph 208 it continues *'Local Planning Authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by a development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking into account the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage assets' conservation and any aspect of the proposal'*.
- 9.3 This statement includes a brief evaluation of the site and its immediate surroundings with a view to considering whether there is any impact upon the significance of heritage assets at or nearby the site.

- 9.4 As the proposed development does not physically affect any heritage assets, it is only any impact upon the 'setting' of such an asset that is relevant to the determination of the application and consideration within this Statement of Significance.
- 9.5 The setting of a heritage asset is defined (within the NPPF) as follows:
The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.
- 9.6 At the end of this Statement ([Appendix B](#)) is a photograph of the north elevation of no. 59 Top Lane – a Grade II Listed Building which the listing suggests dates from the early C.18.
- 9.7 From a distance, the roof of the (two-storey) dwelling at no. 60 can be seen with its adjacent garage. The proposed new access to the site is just forward of the second telegraph pole visible along Top Lane i.e. the built part of the development is set some considerable distance from the heritage asset.
- 9.8 It is understood most of the dwellings along Top Lane (whether listed or not) were constructed in connection with the Stourhead Estate, so are most likely to be farm workers' (or possible farmhouse) dwellings. Whilst the proposal will introduce new built form some distance to the east of the heritage asset, the intention is that this will reflect the characteristics of an agricultural building and be positioned to reflect the typical/characteristic position of dwellings along the lane. Other than the creation of the new access and a small amount of levelling of the site, the creation of an enclosed area with an additional two dwellings within it will echo properties found along the lane.
- 9.9 It is assessed that the setting of the listed building (no. 59) is defined by its general relationship to the former Stourhead Country House and its status as a surviving (former agricultural worker's) property remaining within the ownership of the Stourhead (Western) Estate. The listed building sits within its own defined garden (as is characteristic of the properties along Top Lane) and has a more general connection with open countryside (being a dwelling constructed to house workers on the large Estate,) rather than a defined/specific relationship with any specific area of adjacent open land.

- 9.10 Along with all the remaining Estate cottages within the control of the Applicant, they are simply constructed on land adjacent to those areas retained by the Estate – including agricultural land and woodland.
- 9.11 With the proposed housing intended to be made available for rent by local persons, and the landlord being the Stourhead (Western) Estate, the purpose of the proposed dwellings is very much the same as the purpose for the original construction of those houses found along Top Lane and elsewhere on the Estate.
- 9.12 The surroundings within which no. 59 is experienced will not be altered or adversely affected by the proposed dwellings. As the setting of this (only) heritage asset nearby will not be adversely affected, there is an entirely neutral impact, such that there is no harm to significance.

10.0 DESIGN AND ACCESS

- 10.1 Matters of design have been addressed above.
- 10.2 With respect to the vehicular access, this is covered under the ‘Highways’ section above. The dwellings are proposed to be constructed to Level 2 accessibility standards – suited to those who require any increased amount of circulation space due to personal accessibility limitations. The houses are single-storey, accessible on the level and will be fully compliant with Part M of the Building Regulations.

11.0 PLANNING POLICY

- 11.1 The Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) adopted 2015 – which included some saved policies from the previous Salisbury District Local Plan - comprises the Development Plan for the area.
- 11.2 The Wiltshire Local Plan has been withdrawn from examination in May 2026. The Council proposes, by 30 June 2026, to publish ‘Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation’ under a 30-month time-frame – seeking for adoption of the new Local Plan to be achieved in 2029. A report considered by Full Council on 19 May 2026 (following which the Council agreed that the Local Plan should be withdrawn)

recognises the LPA is now in a very weak position with respect to trying to defend planning applications in relation to the provision of new housing, when being assessed at appeal. As such, there is something of a policy vacuum, with the WCS being clearly out-of-date. The Head of Spatial Planning has confirmed the LPA needs to re-assess the potential of all sustainable settlements to accommodate additional growth – prior to a revised Local Plan being prepared.

- 11.3 This means very limited weight (if any) will be given to policies for the control of housing development at a time when the LPA accepts it can only demonstrate a 2.42-year housing land supply.
- 11.4 Stourton is identified as a small village within the Wiltshire Core Strategy (which was adopted after approval of the Gasper scheme). Core Policy 1 does not define a settlement boundary/limit. This recognises it is a reasonably sustainable location for additional housing. Numerous appeals have been allowed at small villages in the last 12 months because of the housing land shortfall.
- 11.5 A recently allowed appeal (at Semley) well beyond the (only) part of the village the LPA insisted must be considered as comprising the ‘small village’ - which it felt must be open countryside – confirms small villages do not have a boundary and they may well be multi-centric i.e. proposals to meet ongoing needs may not necessarily be provided within or immediately adjacent to the most built up parts of the settlement.
- 11.6 Core Policy 44 of the WCS, which deals with affordable housing (see [Appendix C](#) for NPPF definition) on rural exception sites, sets out that:

At settlements defined as local service centres, large and small villages (Core Policy 1), and those not identified within the settlement strategy, a proactive approach to the provision of affordable housing will be sought in conjunction with Parish Councils and working with local communities and other parties.

The Policy allows housing for local needs to be permitted, solely for affordable housing, provided:

- (i) the proposal has clear support from the local community;*
- (ii) the housing is being delivered to meet an identified and genuine local need;*

- (iii) the proposal is within, adjoining or well-related to the existing settlement;*
- (iv) environmental and landscape considerations will not be compromised;*
- (v) the proposal consists of 10 dwellings or fewer;*
- (vi) the employment and services are accessible from the site;*
- (vii) its scale and type is appropriate to the nature of the settlement and will respect the character and setting of that settlement;*
- (viii) the affordable housing provided under this policy will always be available for defined local needs, both initially and on subsequent change of occupant.*

- 11.7 Core Policy 46 (Meeting the needs of Wiltshire's vulnerable and older people) requires the provision of housing to meet the specific needs of these groups. For older people, housing schemes should assist older people to live securely and independently within their communities. The proposed accessible bungalows will be the only properties meeting this need in Stourton.
- 11.8 Core Policy 51 (Landscape) requires development to protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character. The site is situated within the National Landscape (AONB) as is most of the village. However, it is located immediately beyond an existing property owned by the Estate and positioned adjacent to Top Lane, which is characterised by small numbers of dwellings – sometimes grouped together.
- 11.9 The proposal will satisfy the requirements of Core Policy 57 (ensuring high-quality design and place-shaping) and Core Policy 58 (ensuring the conservation of the historic environment). Whilst the proposal satisfies the requirements of Core Policy 44 dealing with rural exception sites, it should be noted in a general planning context, that Wiltshire Council has a substantial shortfall in housing land supply, with this currently being recognised as only 2.42-years. Additionally, the LPA has just withdrawn the emerging new Local Plan and will shortly be starting the Local Plan process afresh.
- 11.10 In such circumstances, the presumption in favour of sustainable development (see para 11(e) of the NPPF) is relevant on the basis that no assets of importance (including the National Landscape or heritage assets) are adversely affected. In such circumstances, the presumption in favour of sustainable development should be applied and form part of the material considerations that weigh in favour of the proposal.

11.11 Although the site is not within Stourton itself, the small village comprises several clusters of development, including at Gasper, Bonham and along Top Lane. The site is reasonably accessible and there are footpath connections providing an alternative means of access to other facilities within the village. Stourton is also within a short and safe cycling distance from the site.

12.0 CONCLUSION

12.1 As has been recognised before, and with there being no suitable sites adjacent to Stourton itself, provision of affordable housing proposals delivered by the Stourhead (Western) Estate will need to be brought forward in other locations away from the central part of the village.

12.2 However, as confirmed within the recent Semley appeal, and with the Parish being Stourton with Gasper, the 'small' village should be assessed as not only comprising Stourton itself but also the various outlying hamlets nearby – all of which are physically and socially connected to the lives of those living and working within the village and on the Estate.

12.3 The scheme brings forward two units of accessible single-storey accommodation to meet identified local need and where current residents/households in need have been identified.

12.4 The occupants of the units will be controlled by Allocations Policy (as is the case with Brooks Cottages at Gasper) and subject to s.106 agreement to ensure they are retained in perpetuity to meet the needs of occupants with a defined local connection and at a discounted rent.

12.5 It is assessed, in a similar fashion to how the Southern Area Committee adjudged the Gasper development, that the proposal does satisfy the requirements of Policy 44 (Rural Exception Sites) as well as Policies 51 and 57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

12.6 At a time of a significant shortfall in housing land supply, and where numerous larger scale developments being brought forward are unable to deliver a policy compliant quantum of affordable dwellings (because of viability issues), this proposal (although modest) provides a significant contribution to the provision of affordable housing to meet the specific needs of identified households within the Parish.

- 12.7 It is hoped the LPA will applaud the Applicant's continuing commitment to provide additional affordable housing to be built and controlled by the Estate to meet the needs of local workers and residents who are unable to purchase their own homes or rent at full market rent.
- 12.8 Permission granted in 2015, precedes Stourton being identified as a small village in the WCS and the advent of Core Policy 41 which does permit (on an exceptional basis) housing of this type to be permitted in such locations to serve an identified local need. With all site-specific matters having been comprehensively addressed, and it complying with relevant WCS policies, the LPA is urged to support this carefully considered proposal.

APPENDIX A

Visual Impact Assessment



View looking East along Top Lane with site behind hedge on left. Note extensive mature trees to the South side of Top Lane.



View of site from Top Lane looking North-East. Note woodland up the hill and existing residential development immediately to the East.



View looking across site with Top Lane to the right and no. 60 Top Lane in the background beyond hedge. Note existing hedging along boundary of no. 60 and Top Lane, as well as mature tree planting on the South side of Top Lane.



Similar view looking downhill (note the topography) showing how the site is well-related to existing development and visually contained within an area screened (from distant views) by trees and hedging.

APPENDIX B

Photograph of Listed Building (no. 59 Top Lane) with the application site being in the far distance (just forward of existing residential buildings) and at some distance ensuring there is no adverse impact to setting.



APPENDIX C

Definition of Affordable Housing

NPPF 2024 contains both a full definition of affordable housing, and Build to Rent, as well as Rural Exception sites in Annex 2 – Glossary, extracts from which are set out below:

Affordable housing: housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is for essential local workers); and which complies with one or more of the following definitions (footnote 90):

- (a) [social rent]
- (b) Other affordable housing for rent: meets all of the following conditions: (a) the rent is set in accordance with the Government's rent policy for Affordable Rent, or is at least 20% below local market rents (including service charges where applicable); (b) the landlord is a registered provider, except where it is included as part of a Build to Rent scheme (in which case the landlord need not be a registered provider); and (c) it includes provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision. For Build to Rent schemes affordable housing for rent is expected to be the normal form of affordable housing provision (and, in this context, is known as Affordable Private Rent).

Build to Rent: Purpose built housing that is typically 100% rented out. It can form part of a wider multi-tenure development comprising either flats or houses, but should be on the same site and/or contiguous with the main development. Schemes will usually offer longer tenancy agreements of three years or more, and will typically be professionally managed stock in single ownership and management control.

Rural exception sites: Small sites used for affordable housing in perpetuity where sites would not normally be used for housing. Rural exception sites seek to address the needs of the local community by accommodating households who are either current residents or have an existing family or employment connection.

The s106 Agreement signed by Wiltshire Council in March 2021 for the affordable housing scheme at Bonham accepted the use of build to rent as an affordable housing mechanism

The current proposal at Top Lane is also a proposal for Affordable Private Rent

Meeting Build to Rent Criteria

The proposed development is of two additional housing units for affordable rent by SWE, a long established landlord providing approximately 20% of the housing in Stourton. SWE owns and professionally manages these properties from an Estate Office in Stourton. The existing properties include 4 affordable houses on an exception site built in 2016 and secured as affordable in perpetuity by a S106 agreement incorporating an allocations policy.

The proposed development will be subject to a restriction on rents charged being no more than 80% of market rent in perpetuity. The houses will only be available to be let to the local community whose needs are not being met by the market. In particular, these will be the only affordable accessible housing in Stourton, enabling older or less mobile residents to remain in their community as long as possible.

Following the Renters' Rights Act, the leases on the properties will be by default be Assured Periodic Tenancies.

In summary, the proposed houses will meet the definition of Affordable Housing for Rent by way of a build to rent scheme as follows:

1. The houses are purpose built for rent
2. They will be professionally managed alongside the existing 20 houses owned and managed by Stourhead (Western) Estate in Stourton,
3. The leases will be Assured Periodic Tenancies so minimum lease terms are not relevant
4. The rents will be capped by means of s106 agreement at no more than 80% of the market rent
5. As Affordable Housing as a part of a Build to Rent scheme, there is no requirement to involve a Registered Housing Provider and the Landlord can have control of nominations subject to the allocation policy to meet the needs of the local community which will be in the s106 scheme.
6. The s106 agreement will contain provisions for the houses to remain at affordable rents in perpetuity, as for the 2016 scheme in Stourton.