

8. FULL APPLICATION – CHANGE OF USE OF BARN TO AGRICULTURAL WORKER'S DWELLING AT NEW BUILDING, VICARAGE FARM, HOLLINSCLOUGH (NP/SM/0315/0158, P.1813, 406551/366550, 26/06/2015/KW/CF)

APPLICANT: MR JIM HUDSON

Site and Surroundings

The building known as 'New Building' is a detached barn situated in an isolated and exposed position about 240m north-east of Hollinsclough hamlet. It is adjacent to the narrow northerly back lane between Hollinsclough and Longnor. A Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT) passes diagonally through the yard area to the front of the barn, which is also signposted as a public footpath. The barn is framed by the dramatic backdrop of Chrome and Parkhouse Hills, which are situated ½km to the north-east. Access to the barn is directly off the BOAT and there is an informal grassed yard area to the front of the barn

This is a traditional barn with a low two-storey form and constructed of roughly coursed natural gritstone under a Staffordshire Blue natural plain clay tile roof. It has a fairly simple appearance, but has pleasant symmetrical frontage with three door openings on the ground floor and a central 'picking hole' window above. The external corners of the barn are dressed with natural gritstone quoinwork and there is projecting gritstone string coursing to the eaves. There is a single-storey, lean-to building attached to its north-eastern gable, which has a corrugated sheet roof.

The barn sits on level ground close to the lane and occupies a prominent position in the landscape, particularly when approaching the site along the back lane and the public footpath. The barn is also visible from more distant viewpoints along the southerly approach road into Hollinsclough from Longnor 460m to the south-west. From these viewpoints the barn appears relatively isolated and is framed by the iconic limestone hills of Chrome and Parkhouse. Consequently, it presents a pleasing composition in the landscape that makes a significant contribution to the character of the surrounding landscape.

Proposal:

The application proposes the conversion of the barn to an agricultural dwelling for the applicant's son. The applicant and his family operate from their tenanted farm at Dale Farm Wetton, but also have a farm unit and associated complex of farm buildings at Vicarage Farm in the centre of the Hollinsclough hamlet. There is currently no-one resident on the Vicarage Farm unit.

The submitted scheme proposes the conversion of the barn to a two-bedroomed agricultural worker's dwelling. The accommodation is provided over two floors with part of the first floor extending into the roofspace in order to achieve appropriate headroom. The overall floor area is 94m², which just exceeds the size of a 5 person local needs dwelling (87m²).

The scheme proposes no new openings in the walls, save for the unblocking of an existing door opening on the rear elevation. The grassed yard area to the front of the barn is to be incorporated into the residential curtilage and enclosed by a drystone wall, and a small 12m deep strip of the field to the rear of the barn is to be incorporated into the residential curtilage and enclosed by a post and wire fence. Two vehicular parking spaces and associated turning space are to be provided to the eastern side and rear of the barn.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the revised application be REFUSED for the following reasons:

1. The barn occupies a prominent and exposed position in a landscape of exceptional value that should be safeguarded because of its intrinsic scenic beauty. The current proposals would fail to meet achieve this objective and the proposed residential conversion of the barn would spoil the character and setting of the barn by the introduction of a domestic use and associated developments in this sensitive location. The proposals would therefore be contrary to Core Strategy policies GSP1, GSP2, GSP3, L1 and L3, saved Local Plan policies LC4 and LC8, and national planning polices in the Framework.
2. The proposed development fails to meet criterion (ii) of Local plan policy LC12 as it does not represent the most suitable accommodation in the locality that could reasonably be made available for occupation by the worker concerned, and as submitted, the current application does not propose a sustainable form of development when taking into account the availability of a less damaging practicable option to meet the needs of the farm exists. Therefore, the proposals are contrary to the principles of sustainable development set out in Core strategy policy GSP1 and national planning policies in the Framework.

Key Issues

1. Whether principle of the proposed development meets the terms of the Authority's Core Strategy and Local Plan policies in relation to the provision of agricultural worker's dwellings.
2. The potential impact of the proposed dwelling conversion on the character and setting of the barn and the surrounding landscape.
3. Ecological issues.

History

There is no relevant planning history on the proposed barn conversion site, however, the following planning history on the Vicarage Farm Unit is considered to be relevant to this proposal.

May 1973 – Full consent for the erection of a 27.4m x 30.63m cubicle feed shed.

October 1974 – Outline approval granted for the erection of a farm worker's bungalow at Vicarage Farm. This approval was subject to an agricultural occupancy condition.

July 1976 – Full planning consent granted for the farm worker's bungalow, which was subsequently built.

June 2011 – Full planning consent granted for covered roof over a 27.5m x 13.8m silage clamp.

February 1998 – GDO Prior Notification consent for silage pit extension.

Consultations

County Council (Highway Authority) – No reply to date.

District Council – no reply to date.

Parish Council – A unanimous and comprehensive letter of support has been received. This is available to view on the public file. The Parish Council (PC) response includes the following comments:

- New Building is sited close to one side of a BOAT which runs from the road south-west of Parkhouse Hill to the road (Carr Lane). This redundant barn is one that some local people have been commented on as being a 'crying shame' that it has not been converted to a dwelling.
- This is a sympathetic scheme that requires no new openings or rooflights or requirements for a new access.
- There is a proposed gravel standing for vehicles and no special lighting requirements and therefore no additions to existing light pollution in the parish.
- The accompanying agricultural business appraisal clearly demonstrates that this is a well-established farm business where there is a clear need for a farm worker's dwelling and where local property prices are beyond the means of a farm worker.
- Vicarage Farm is complicated in that its 'partnership owners' have two farm units; one at Dale Farm, Wetton (rented) and Vicarage Farm, which they own. The two farms make for a very versatile farming business with the latter focussing on dairy farming and the former, beef and sheep.
- The development will meet the needs of the Hudson family without compromising the sense of history and tradition attached to the barn. It is a modest development with no desire to increase its size and with an agricultural occupancy restriction.
- It will improve the quality of life for those working the farm and ensure its long term management. Vicarage Farm is a well-established farming business.
- The PC is aware of the hard-working ethic of the applicants and is satisfied that the family's current situation is unsustainable and unsatisfactory.
- It is often debated whether Hollinsclough is a hamlet or a village. The parish is large with many widely dispersed dwellings but the settlement itself is small. In the centre of the settlement there is only 6 residences owned or rented by people who live there permanently, with a further 4 permanently based families living within ½ mile. Beyond that the parish is made up of hamlets. In the majority of cases, there are few people to feed into the local school and the number of properties that are second homes or holiday cottages does not help this situation.
- The concerns raised by a nearby resident must be taken into account to ensure their continued uninterrupted access along the BOAT, which provides access to their property.

National Park Authority (Conservation Architect) - The whole field barn character of the building will be lost if conversion happens, and its landscape setting with it. At present there are no windows in the building, only boarded openings or doors; this will change completely if converted, despite the drawings showing closed external. The limited plan area and the limited number of openings does not make for a good conversion. Some of the areas will be dark – the kitchen especially and may result in additional new openings being requested in the future. There is also no stove or flue indicated, no outside lights, meter boxes, soil vent pipes. There is also no provision outside storage be accommodated. Conversion to a dwelling would be very harmful for both the building and the landscape.

National Park Authority (Ecologist) – Given the presence of a common pipistrelle summer bat roost and nesting swallows, appropriate bat and bird mitigation is required. It is not clear from the proposals if the bat roost can be retained during works, if the roost is to be lost it is likely that

a development licence issued by natural England will need to be approved in order for the works to proceed.

A further condition is recommended requiring that a site licence be obtained from Natural England, or a letter from the relevant licensing body (NE) confirming that a licence is not required. Where a licence is not required no work shall be undertaken on the application site until a detailed working method statement and monitoring programme has been supplied and agreed in writing with the PDNPA Ecologist stating how potential threats to bats occurring at the site will be avoided. The development shall thereafter be carried out in complete accordance with the agreed details.

The proposal is considered to be acceptable subject to the attaching of conditions, including the following: submission and agreement of the exact choice, location and number of bat boxes to be installed; provision, where possible, provision for bats within the internal structure; no external lighting that directly illuminates bat boxes or bat access points, submission of details that shows the location of enhancement/mitigation features for future bat and hirundine (swallows/house martins) usage.

In principle the aims of the bat mitigation are deemed acceptable; however as stated in the bat survey report confirmation on the level and type of mitigation will be subject to agreement with the licensing authority (Natural England) and may therefore change from the submitted recommendations. Any loss or disturbance to known bat roosts is likely to require the submission of a protected species licence issued via Natural England, should Natural England deem that a licence is not necessary; confirmation in the form of correspondence from NE should be submitted to PDNPA.

National Park Authority (Landscape Architect) - The barn lies within the Upper Valley Pastures landscape character type of the South West Peak Landscape Character Area. Key characteristics of this landscape setting include undulating lower valley slopes with incised stream valleys. This is a settled landscape with dispersed gritstone farmsteads and loose clusters of dwellings with stone slate or clay tile roofs and permanent pasture enclosed by a mixture of drystone walls and hedgerows.

What makes this barn unique is that it stands in isolation separate from any farm buildings; most farm buildings in the area both modern and traditional are associated with a farm complex, such as the buildings at Vicarage farm, the main farm complex for the holding.

The barn is seen as being isolated even though it is only a short distance from Hollinsclough. It sits in a pastoral landscape with open views in particular towards Chrome and Parkhouse Hills, both iconic limestone hills. The proposed development of the barn will domesticate the landscape. The proposed development plans provided show the window openings with solid wooden shutters and doors, which in reality will be kept open. No detailed site plans have been provided it is therefore assumed that the red line will form the curtilage of the property. Even with permitted development rights removed this area around the barn will become domestic in nature requiring space for at least parking, bin stores, fuel stores and drying facilities.

There is an adjacent footpath and it is clear that the barn forms part of the landscape setting with the imposing backdrop of Chrome and Parkhouse hills.

The impact of supplying electricity and telephones to the barn is also a concern. These should be undergrounded. If services are to be undergrounded, The route of the proposed undergrounded lines should be provided as part of the application as there may be implications on ecology and archaeology.

It is recommended that this application is refused on the impact of the proposal on the setting of Parkhouse and Chrome Hills.

Representations

A letter from the owners of two of the main properties affected by the proposal has been received. They have no objections to the conversion of New Building, but they are seeking confirmation that the applicant would alter gateways and erect fencing between the field and the roadside.

The reason for this request is one of highway access issues. The enclosing of the yard in front of the barn will reduce the size of the yard by a half and would in turn cause congestion with cows on the road and in the yard when they are being taken for milking. When there are a hundred cows or so it would be impossible to get car access on to the BOAT, which serves their properties. It is suggested that an alternative access through the adjacent field is provided to create an enclosed cow handling area that would maintain a clear access over the BOAT.

Main Policies

Core Strategy policies GSP1, GSP3, GSP4, DS1, HC1, HC2, L1, L2, L3, HC1, T1 & T7

Local Plan policies LC4, LC12, LC17, LT11 & LT18,

Policy LC12 of the Local Plan and Policy HC2 of the Core Strategy provide a clear starting point consistent with the National Park's statutory purposes for the determination of this application. This is because policies HC2 and LC12 set out the relevant criteria for assessing proposals for the re-use of existing buildings to meet local need.

It is considered that there is no significant conflict between prevailing policies in the Development Plan and more recent Government guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework with regard to the issues that are raised. This is because the Framework continues support the re-use of existing buildings specifically for key workers in small rural communities that would not normally be made available for the provision of open market housing subject to normal planning considerations.

Notwithstanding this general support for principle of the provision of housing for key workers, the Framework also states that the conservation of heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance forms one of the 12 core planning principles within the Framework. Paragraph 132 of the Framework states that great weight should be given to the conservation of a designated heritage asset and that the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Paragraph 115 in the Framework states that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks along with the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage.

Assessment

Issue 1 - Whether principle of the proposed development meets the terms of the Authority's Core Strategy and Local Plan policies in relation to the provision of agricultural worker's dwellings.

In assessing the principle of this proposal the key policies in relation to the provision of agricultural dwellings are Core Strategy policies HC1 (B), HC2 and Local plan policy LC12. In addition to this Core Strategy policy HC1 C I is also of relevance to this proposal.

Policy HC1 (B) of the Core Strategy allows for new residential development where it provides for key workers in agriculture, forestry or other rural enterprises in accordance with core policy HC2, which says:

- A. New housing for key workers in agriculture, forestry or other rural enterprises must be justified by functional and financial tests.
- B. Wherever possible it must be provided by re-using traditional buildings that are no longer required for their previous use.
- C. It will be tied to the land holding or rural enterprise for which it is declared to be needed.

These policies are consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework'), which says at Paragraph 55 that local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances such as the essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside.

The National Planning Practice Guidance does not contain any further information on assessing need, but Local Plan policy LC12 provides further criteria to assess the acceptability of new farm worker's dwellings including financial and functional tests. LC12 says the need for a new agricultural or forestry worker's dwelling will be considered against the needs of the farm or forestry business concerned and not the personal preferences or circumstances of any individuals involved. Development will be permitted provided that:

- i. a detailed appraisal demonstrates that there is a genuine and essential functional need for the worker(s) concerned, with a requirement that they need to be readily available at most times, day and night, bearing in mind current and likely future requirements; and
- ii. there is no suitable existing accommodation in the locality that could reasonably be made available for occupation by the worker(s) concerned; and
- iii. size and construction costs are commensurate with the established functional requirement and likely sustainable income of the business; and
- iv. it is close to the main group of existing buildings and does not require obtrusive new access tracks or driveways; and
- v. a satisfactory mechanism is put in place to secure long term control by the business of the dwelling in question and of any other dwelling that meets an agricultural need of the business; and
- vi. occupancy of the dwelling in question (and of any other dwelling that meets an agricultural need of the business) is restricted to persons solely or mainly working in the locality in agriculture or in forestry, or to the same occupants when they have stopped such work, or a widow or widower of such a person, and any resident dependants; and
- vii. stated intentions to engage in or further develop farming or forestry are genuine, reasonably likely to happen and capable of being sustained for a reasonable period of time. Where there is uncertainty about the sustainability of an otherwise acceptable proposal, permission may be granted for an appropriately coloured caravan or other temporary accommodation; and
- viii. sufficient detail is provided to enable proper consideration of these matters.

These policies state that new housing for key workers in agriculture must be justified by functional and financial tests. If a need is subsequently demonstrated, then, wherever possible, this must be provided by re-using traditional buildings that are no longer required for agricultural purposes. Any subsequent agricultural worker's dwelling must also be tied to the land holding or rural enterprise for which it is declared to be needed.

The Authority's Local Plan policies then provide more specific requirements in respect of the siting of any new agricultural dwellings in that they should be sited close to the main farm complex and should not require obtrusive new access tracks or driveways. In addition to the policies relating to the provision of agricultural dwellings, Core Strategy policy HC1 C I is also of relevance to this proposal.

Functional Appraisal

The current farm enterprise is split between two main farm holdings, Vicarage Farm, which is the dairy enterprise, and Dale Farm at Wetton, which is the beef and sheep enterprise. The farm at Wetton is tenanted and this is where the applicants live. Vicarage Farm and the associated land is owned by the applicant, however, there is no farm dwelling on the site.

Vicarage Farm is the main dairy enterprise on the farm and on average the farm will be carrying around 120 dairy cows. Based on the day to day demands, particularly with a significant dairy enterprise, such as this, the established labour demand is equivalent to 2.1 full-time farm workers. Given that there is no dwelling on site, officers concur that there is strong and convincing functional case for a farm worker's dwelling at Vicarage Farm.

Financial Appraisal

The accompanying Agricultural Business Appraisal states that the business has been established for several years and the farm accounts demonstrate that it has made a profit in each of the last three years, which more than satisfies the requirements of the financial test. Details of the financial accounts for the last three years have been requested.

Application of Core Strategy policy HC1 C I

In addition to the agricultural considerations with respect to the principle of the barn conversion, this also has to be assessed against Core Strategy policy HC1 C I. This policy permits the conversion of 'valued vernacular' buildings where it is required to achieve conservation and/or enhancement of such buildings.

In this case, the building subject of this application is considered 'valued vernacular' by virtue of its character, form, composition and detailing, and particularly its setting against the backdrop of Chrome and Parkhouse Hills. Given this, and its prominent position and proximity to the BOAT, it contributes to the special landscape qualities of the locality. The building is in a reasonable structural condition.

In this case, therefore, it is not considered that the conversion of the buildings to an open-market dwelling would fully comply with policy HC1 C I as there is no significant conservation or enhancement of the buildings required. Notwithstanding this, however, the conversion of such traditional buildings to agricultural worker's dwellings is encouraged in Core Strategy policy HC2 and Local Plan policy LC12 in preference to the provision of new-build agricultural dwellings.

The key remaining issue in respect of the principle of the barn conversion is therefore whether there is a more suitable existing accommodation in the locality that could reasonably be made available for occupation by the worker(s) concerned, as required by criterion (ii) – (iv) of Local Plan policy LC12.

In respect of the size of the proposed dwelling (94.6m²), this is considered to be fairly modest and commensurate with the size of the farm enterprise. The agent has also submitted total construction costs of £69,750 (including electricity supply trenching and water supply from the main farm, which demonstrate that the conversion scheme can be carried out within the scope of the likely sustainable income of the business. Whilst the barn is situated about 313m east of the Vicarage Farm building complex, it is within easy walking distance and as it close to the nearby road, and there is no requirement for obtrusive new access tracks.

The applicant is also willing to complete a S.106 legal agreement relating to agricultural occupancy and is willing to tie the dwelling to the Vicarage Farm holding (i.e.).

Notwithstanding that the proposed barn conversion meets the terms of criteria (i) and (iii) – (viii) of Local plan policy LC12, it also has to comply with criterion (ii). Criterion (ii) states that such conversions to agricultural worker's dwellings will be permitted provided that there is no suitable existing accommodation that could reasonably be made available for occupation by the worker concerned. Core Strategy policy HC2 also states that wherever possible, new housing for key workers in agriculture must be provided by re-using traditional buildings that are no longer required for their previous use.

In respect of this requirement, officers acknowledge, that the option of purchasing a property in this small hamlet is prohibitive in terms of the lack of available properties within the close proximity of the farm and the likely purchase costs. As can be seen in issue 2 of this report, however, officers consider that the proposed impacts of the proposed barn conversion are significant and harmful to the character and landscape setting of the barn and the national park.

Consequently, officers visited the main Vicarage Farm complex with the applicants to determine whether there was a more appropriate option to the current proposal. This site inspection revealed that there is a traditional stone barn at the southern end of the farm building complex, which is situated close to the southern entrance to the farm in the centre of the hamlet. This is a pleasant traditional building of some architectural merit and given its position within the farm yard is considered to be a more appropriate location for animal husbandry purposes, as it is on the farm building complex itself.

Whilst the applicants maintain that this building is still being used for agricultural purposes, it was not being used intensively at the time of the site inspection. Officers also acknowledge that this barn is attached to the adjacent modern farm building complex on two sides and the building at immediately to the rear of the barn contains the refrigeration compressors for the dairy enterprise, which are noisy when operating.

The applicants have also submitted a letter from the installers of the refrigeration compression units and consider that sound-proofing is not an option as adequate air circulation is paramount to the running of this equipment. Re-siting is not considered to be cost effective as the refrigeration compressors need to be within close proximity to the dairy to main the efficiency of the refrigeration. Officers acknowledge that there are difficulties in soundproofing the compressors; however, whilst there would be a cost implication in re-siting them, it is still considered that this is a more appropriate option than the current barn conversion proposal. Moreover, it is understood that the 'personal preference' of the applicant's partner is to live in the barn, which is the subject of the current application rather than close to the existing farm buildings.

Consequently, whilst the principle of the provision of the agricultural worker's dwelling conversion scheme meets all the other criteria stated in Local Plan policy LC12, it is considered that it fails to meet criterion (ii) as it does not represent the most suitable existing accommodation in the locality that could reasonably be made available for occupation by the worker concerned.

Issue 2 - The impact of the proposed dwelling conversion on the character and setting of the barn and the surrounding landscape.

Local Plan policy LC4(a) says where development is acceptable in principle, it will be permitted provided that its detailed treatment is of a high standard that respects, conserves and where possible it enhances the landscape, built environment and other valued characteristics of the area. Local Plan policy LC4(b) goes on to say, amongst other things, particular attention will be paid to scale, form, mass and orientation in relation to existing buildings, settlement form and character, landscape features and the wider landscape setting.

Local Plan policy LC4 is now also supported by the more recently adopted policy GSP3 of the Core Strategy which says development must respect, conserve and enhance all valued characteristics of the site and buildings that are subject to the development proposal. GSP3 goes on to say, amongst other things, particular attention will be paid to:

- A. impact on the character and setting of buildings
- B. scale of development appropriate to the character and appearance of the National Park
- C. siting, landscaping and building materials
- D. design in accordance with the National Park Authority Design Guide

GSP1 states that all development in the National Park must be consistent with the conservation purpose of the National Park's statutory designation and where national park purposes can be secured, opportunities must be taken to contribute to the sustainable development of the area.

GSP2 says that opportunities for enhancing the valued characteristics of the National Park will be identified and acted upon but proposals intended to enhance the National Park will need to demonstrate that they offer significant overall benefit to the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area, and they should not undermine the achievement of other Core Policies.

L1 says that development must conserve and enhance the valued characteristics and landscape character of the National Park in accordance with the priorities for landscape conservation set out in the Authority's Landscape Strategy and Action Plan.

In terms of the Authority's Landscape Strategy and Action Plan, the barn conversion site is situated within the Upper Valley Pastures landscape character type of the South West Peak Landscape Character Area. Key Characteristics include undulating lower valley slopes with incised stream valleys; a settled landscape with dispersed gritstone farmsteads and loose clusters of dwellings with stone slate or clay tile roofs; and permanent pasture enclosed by a mixture of drystone walls and hedgerows. In this landscape setting, field barns are identified in the Landscape Strategy and Action Plan as landscape features to be conserved and enhanced

However, it should also be noted that the barn lies within the imposing and iconic backdrop of Chrome and Parkhouse hills and the site can be seen from these hills, which are popular visitor destinations. Therefore, the landscape setting of the barn is especially sensitive to change and this is reflected in a recent appeal decision where the creation of a natural burial ground close to the application site was refused planning permission on the basis of the adverse visual impact of the creation of a new track and changes to the vehicular access.

LC8 and L3 otherwise set out further guidance relating to any new use of a traditional building with vernacular merit. L2 and LC17 promote and encourage biodiversity within the National Park and seek to safeguard nature conservation interests. LT11 and LT18 otherwise require development to be provided with appropriate access and parking provision that would not harm the environmental quality of the National Park. Further detailed advice on the conversion of buildings to other uses is provided in the Authority's supplementary planning documents: the Design Guide and its appendix, the Building Design Guide.

These policies and the Authority's adopted supplementary planning documents are considered to be consistent with the Framework because they promote and encourage development proposals that would be of a high standard of design and sensitive to the valued characteristics of the National Park.

In respect of this current proposal, officers concur with the views of the Authority's Landscape Architect and Building Conservation Officer that what makes this barn unique is that it stands in isolation separate from any farm buildings, most farm buildings in the area both modern and traditional are associated with a farm complex, such as the buildings at Vicarage farm, the main farm complex for the holding.

The barn is seen as being isolated even though it is only a short distance from Hollinsclough. It sits in a pastoral landscape with open views in particular towards Chrome and Parkhouse Hills, both iconic limestone hills. It is visible from close views from the adjacent road and BOAT and from the wider landscape when approaching Hollinsclough on its southerly approach road. Consequently, it is considered that the proposed conversion of the barn to a dwelling would have a significant adverse impact, not only the character and immediate setting of the barn itself, but its wider landscape setting and its contribution to the iconic setting of Chrome and Parkhouse Hills.

Officers acknowledge that the physical building conversion scheme is sympathetic to the character and appearance of the existing barn and involves no new openings and a restricted curtilage contained by new sections of drystone walling. However, it is considered that the building is in such an exposed and prominent position that that the changes to the barn through the introduction of a residential use into the building, such as the glazing of openings and the activities generated around the barn would significantly and adversely impact upon the character and setting of the barn and the surrounding landscape.

Even at a distance, the visual effect of the works proposed, together with that of vehicles parking at the site and using the access, would be clear. Moreover, the domestication of a building that occurs from a residential use and associated domestic paraphernalia are difficult to control by condition and the domestication of an isolated field barn would have a significant and adverse impact on the landscape setting of the barn. Therefore, the character and appearance of the area and the valued scenic qualities of Chrome and Parkhouse hills would be significantly harmed by the proposed conversion of the barn and the proposed conversion would detract from the valued characteristics of the local area.

For these reasons it is considered that even though there is a strong and convincing justification for the principle of the conversion of the barn to an agricultural worker's dwelling, the proposal would still be open to strong landscape objections and would be contrary to Core Strategy policies GSP1, GSP2, GSP3, L1 and L3, saved Local Plan policies LC4 and LC8, and national planning policies in the Framework.

Sustainability

In this case, it is an inescapable fact that the barn occupies a remote location within a locally distinctive landscape setting and an especially sensitive location within the National Park. Therefore, the benefits of the scheme are not considered to offset or outweigh objections on landscape and visual impact grounds especially where there is a less damaging practicable option available to the applicant. In this respect, it is notable that the barn within the existing group of farm buildings is clearly within sight and sound of the livestock kept by the applicant and this building, if it were to be converted to a dwelling, would meet the needs of the business.

However, the applicant is unwilling or unable to countenance this option noting that the building does not appear to be used for agricultural purposes, would normally be no longer considered to be capable of properly meeting the needs of modern farming practices, and the issues of noise and disturbance from the refrigerators is not an insurmountable problem. Moreover, it is also understood there is an element of personal preference when considering the suitability of this barn compared to the barn, which is the subject of the current application.

Notwithstanding the availability of the barn closer to the existing farm buildings, and the likelihood proposals to convert this barn would be supported by officers, given the harm that would result from conversion of the building proposed in this application, officers would recommend that a new-build farm worker's dwelling should be considered if the barn closer to the existing farm buildings is not considered to be viable rather than grant planning permission for this application. A newly-built farm worker's dwelling closer to the existing farm buildings can be justified with reference to the financial and functional tests relevant to these proposals, and would be less open to objection on landscape and visual impact grounds subject to normal planning considerations such as design and neighbourliness, for example.

As submitted, the current application does not propose a sustainable form of development when taking into account the availability of a less damaging practicable option to meet the needs of the farm exists. In this respect, whilst officers can accept the proposed conversion would benefit the appellant's business, in this case the agricultural need does not outweigh the significant adverse effect that the proposal would have on the landscape quality of the National Park. The application site is set in a landscape of exceptional value that should be safeguarded because of its intrinsic scenic beauty. The current proposals would fail to achieve this objective and therefore any benefits of granting planning permission for the current application would be significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the adverse impacts of doing so, when these proposals are assessed against the policies in the Framework and Development Plan.

Consequently, the proposals are contrary to the principles of sustainable development set out in Core strategy policy GSP1 and national planning policies in the Framework.

Issue 3 – Ecological issues

Core Strategy policy L2 and Local Plan policy LC17 state, amongst other things, that development must conserve and enhance any sites, features or species of biodiversity importance and where appropriate their setting. National planning policies in the Framework promote and encourage the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment.

A bat and bird survey has now been undertaken on the barn. Based on the results of the activity surveys, this found that the building is being used by local bats, and it is thought that the building houses a common pipistrelle male summer roost. Additionally, there were four swallow nests, one of which was active, suggesting that the building was a valuable habitat for this species. In terms of mitigation, the bat and bird survey advises that if the bat roost can be retained throughout the proposed works (i.e. by leaving the gaps in the stone walls), there will be no need to apply for a Natural England Development Licence. Any subsequent bat mitigation could also include the incorporation of bat boxes into the fabric of the building.

In respect of birds, four swallow nests were identified upon the wooden purlins within the building. As these would inevitably be lost the report recommends that four swallow boxes are incorporated into the proposed works. The Authority Ecologist has been consulted on the findings of the bat and bird survey report and any comments will be reported at the committee.

Conclusions

Officers acknowledge that the proposed agricultural worker's dwelling will be occupied by the applicant's son who works full-time on the farm at Vicarage Farm. It is also acknowledged that the position of the barn and the fact that as it is owned and is situated within the applicant's owned parcel of land this would be the preferred option. It is considered, however, that even though there is a strong and convincing justification for the dwelling; there is a more appropriate option available to provide the required agricultural worker's dwelling on the farm building complex. Therefore, the proposals are contrary to the principles of sustainable development set out in Core strategy policy GSP1 and national planning policies in the Framework.

Moreover, even if this alternative option was not considered to be suitable, the current proposals cannot be accepted 'in their own right' because the proposals conflict with landscape conservation objectives and the proposed barn conversion would significantly detract from the scenic beauty of the National Park. Therefore any approval for the current application would be contrary to Core Strategy policies GSP1, GSP2, GSP3, L1 and L3, saved Local Plan policies LC4 and LC8 and national planning policies in the Framework, which individually and collectively say great weight should be afforded to the conservation and enhancement of the valued characteristics of the National Park.

Accordingly, the current application is recommended for refusal because the proposals do not comply with the relevant policies in the Development Plan or national planning policies in the Framework.

Human Rights

Any human rights issues have been considered and addressed in the preparation of this report.

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

Nil