

ARD/507/1 – The Lockinge Trust
Retrospective application for the change of use of three barns from agricultural to Class B8 storage
Red Barn Farm, Ardington.

1.0 **The Proposal**

- 1.1 The application site is located within the open countryside and within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The site is located between the villages of Ardington and West Hendred. There is no usable link road between the site and West Hendred to the east; therefore access to the A417 must be taken through the village of Ardington which is itself 1km away. There are currently 4 large modern agricultural buildings on the site with a lawful agricultural use which cumulatively have a floor area of 2,466 square metres. The application states that these buildings were used as part of an intensive pig rearing unit. These operations have now ceased on the site.
- 1.2 The site can be found on grid A3 of page 216 of the Philips Street Atlas of Oxfordshire.
- 1.3 This application is for the retrospective change of use of one and a half agricultural buildings to Class B8 storage use which cumulatively have a floor area of 732 square metres.
- 1.4 Extracts from the application plans are at **Appendix 1**.
- 1.5 The application comes to Committee as the Parish Council supports the application.

2.0 **Planning History**

- 2.1 ARD/507 - Pig fattening houses and ancillary building. Permitted in September 1974.

3.0 **Planning Policies**

Adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011

- 3.1 Policy GS7 enables the reuse and adaptation of vernacular buildings outside the built up areas of settlements provided the building is of permanent and substantial construction and is capable of conversion, the proposal would not adversely affect the character and appearance of the building and its setting, and any services and facilities, including access roads, are available or can be provided without overall harm to the rural character of the area.
- 3.2 Policy GS8 only enables the reuse and adaptation of non-vernacular buildings outside the built-up areas of settlements providing that: i) the form, bulk and general design of the building is in keeping with the character and appearance of its surroundings ii) it is sustainably located for the scale and type of use proposed iii) it would not result in the creation of a dwelling, and iv) where conversion to business use is proposed the total business floorspace would not exceed 500 square metres in the group of buildings within which it is located, unless it forms part of a farm diversification scheme.

- 3.3 Policy GS9 relates to the use of conditions or planning obligations being sought when granting planning permission for the re-use of a building in the countryside. These cover the following i) to tie the building to the holding ii) in a mixed use scheme, to tie a proposed dwelling conversion to the other uses on the site iii) where business use is proposed, to ensure that the accommodation remains available for small firms (up to about 500 square metres) or for firms whose sources of supply, commercial linkages, labour supply and markets make specific location necessary for them iv) to remove permitted development rights to extend the building and/or change uses between different Classes of the Use Classes Order v) to withdraw permitted development rights for new farm buildings on the holding or part of the holding where the scheme may lead to a proliferation of buildings, and vi) to secure improvements to the appearance of the building and its surroundings.
- 3.4 Policy DC1 requires development to be of a high design quality in terms of layout, scale, mass, height, detailing, materials to be used, and its relationship with adjoining buildings. Policy DC5 requires safe and convenient access and parking.
- 3.5 Policy DC6 requires all proposals for development to include hard and soft landscaping to protect and enhance the visual amenities of the site and its surroundings, and to maximise the opportunities for nature conservation.
- 3.6 Policy DC9 seeks to ensure development will not unacceptably harm the amenities of neighbouring properties and the wider environment.
- 3.7 Policy E9 enables the development or redevelopment of a site not identified under specific policies of the local plan for business purposes provided that i) it is on a site within the development boundaries of the 5 main settlements ii) or it is for small firms requiring no more than 500 square metres gross floorspace on a site within the built-up area of a village listed under Policy H11 iii) or in locations outside the built-up areas of the 5 main settlements and the villages listed in Policy H11 it is for the expansion on the site of an existing industrial or commercial enterprise whose sources of supply, commercial linkages, labour supply and markets make the specific location necessary, unless the enterprise is known to be unneighbourly or badly sited, and iv) it does not generate the demand for housing which cannot be met by existing or planned housing provision.
- 3.8 Policy NE9 seeks to ensure development conserves or enhances the natural beauty of the landscape within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Development which would be visually prominent, would detract from views from public vantage points or would spoil the appreciation of the landscape quality of the AONB will not be permitted.

Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016

- 3.9 Policy G1 provides the framework for development which is to a) deliver the level of development required to meet the objectives of the Plan whilst protecting and enhancing the environment b) concentrate development in locations where i) a reasonable range of services and community facilities exist or can be provided; and ii) the need to travel,

particularly by private car, can be reduced and walking, cycling and the use of public transport can be encouraged c) make the best use of previously developed land and buildings within urban areas to reduce the need for development of greenfield sites. The larger urban areas will be the main focus for development. In smaller towns and villages, development will be of an appropriate scale and type to meet the social and economic needs of the local community.

- 3.10 Policy G2 seeks to resist proposals unless it has been demonstrated that the necessary infrastructure, on or off-site transport measures etc. are available or will be provided. In determining infrastructure and other requirements, the local planning authorities will take into account the cumulative impacts of the development.
- 3.11 Policy G5 seeks to protect the countryside from harmful development. Special consideration will be given to development for agricultural, forestry or outdoor recreational needs or for other uses appropriate to a rural area which cannot be reasonably accommodated in a nearby settlement.
- 3.12 Policy T1 requires development proposals to give emphasis to the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport and balance these against ease of traffic movement, thereby improving travel choice and reducing dependence on private motorised travel.
- 3.13 Policy T2 requires a comprehensive approach to the provision and management of car parking space with the aim of promoting sustainable travel choices.
- 3.14 Policy T8 requires development proposals to provide adequate access and mitigation of adverse transport impacts.
- 3.15 Policy EN1 seeks to ensure that proposals for development contribute to the protection, maintenance and, where possible, enhancement of Oxfordshire's landscape character, in particular the natural beauty of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to reflect their national importance. Development will be permitted only if it does not unacceptably damage the local landscape.
- 3.16 Policy E1 seeks developments for employment to a) provide for the requirements of activities which contribute to the regional and local priorities for economic development b) be located mainly in or adjoining urban areas or in existing concentrations of employment with good accessibility from residential areas, particularly by non-car modes and transport c) as far as practical incorporate measures to encourage shorter journeys to work and travel on foot, by cycle or public transport, and d) not be of a scale or character that gives rise to large increases in commuting in the area or low intensity uses of land which generate heavy traffic on local roads
- 3.17 Policy E4 enable developments of small scale business premises (up to 500 square metres) including proposals that encourage farm or rural diversification.

National Policy Guidance and Statements

- 3.18 Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas. The key principles of PPS7 are i) to raise the quality of life and the environment in rural areas ii) to promote more sustainable patterns of development iii) to promote the development

of the English regions by improving their economic performance so that all are able to reach their full potential, and iv) to promote sustainable, diverse and adaptable agriculture sectors.

- 3.19 Planning Policy Guidance 13: Transport. The main objectives of PPG13 are to integrate planning and transport and to promote more sustainable transport choices both for carrying people and for moving freight. It also aims to promote accessibility to jobs, shopping, leisure facilities and services by public transport, walking and cycling and to reduce the need to travel, especially by car. To deliver these objectives, the guidance says that local planning authorities should actively manage the pattern of urban growth, locate facilities to improve accessibility on foot and cycle, accommodate housing principally within urban areas and recognise that provision for movement by walking, cycling and public transport are important but may be less achievable in some rural areas.

4.0 **Consultations**

- 4.1 Ardington and Lockinge Parish Council – “The Parish Council fully supported this planning application for the change of use of the barns but the arising traffic should be subject to some restriction on speed and size of vehicles for the following reasons: 1) The width of the approach road at the pinch point between house numbers 53 – 57 Ardington is 3 metres whereas the applicant’s “Transport Statement” paragraph 2.6 gives the general indication of a road width of 4.1 metres, and 2) the applicant has more than 20 references to lighter traffic flows arising from warehouse use of the barns compared to the use as a piggery. The piggery was closed several years ago and this ended the passage of the long, heavy vehicles used to transport pigs. Residents on the approach roads accepted this as a consequence of living in a farming community. Since then, traffic has been very light until the increase arising from the use of the barns as warehouses. It is this change in flow that is important in the context of this planning application.”
- 4.2 Principal Planning Officer (Policy and Strategy) – Object to the proposal. The full consultation is at **Appendix 2**.
- 4.3 North Wessex Downs AONB Planning Adviser – Object to the proposal. The full consultation is at **Appendix 3**.
- 4.4 County Engineer – Object to the proposal. The full consultation is at **Appendix 4**.
- 4.5 A Planning Policy Statement has been submitted in support of the application. The conclusions of this are at **Appendix 5**. A Transport Statement has been submitted in support of the application. The conclusions to this are at **Appendix 6**. Furthermore, the applicant’s response to the comments received from the Principal Planning Officer (Policy and Strategy) is at **Appendix 7**.

5.0 **Officer Comments**

- 5.1 Officers consider that the key issues to consider are the principle of Class B8 storage

use in this location, the impact on the rural character and appearance of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, highways issues including access, parking and transport movements, and the impact of the scheme on the amenities of local residents.

- 5.2 The application site is located within the open countryside where Local and National Policies place specific restrictions on the type and amount of development allowed. Particular reference should be paid to Local Plan Policy GS8 which relates to the conversion of non-vernacular farm buildings. This policy has a number of criteria and Officers consider that this application is contrary to this policy. The site itself comprises 4 large non-vernacular farm buildings, and this application retrospectively proposes the change of use of one and a half of these buildings, which cumulatively have a floor area of 732 square metres. The other buildings on the site are currently unused. Local Plan Policy GS8 and Structure Plan Policy E4 both place a restriction on the total floor space to be used for business use to 500 square metres. Local Plan Policy GS8 states “where conversion to business use is proposed the total business use would not exceed 500 square metres in the group of buildings within which it is located.” This restriction is to prevent the large floor spaces of the many non-vernacular agricultural buildings being used for employment purposes which would in total introduce a large amount of employment development into areas where development is strictly controlled in accordance with PPS7. Officers, therefore, consider that the introduction of large floor areas for business use into the open countryside could lead to the “overheating” of the local economy and would undermine the policies of overall restraint within the Oxfordshire Structure Plan and the Local Plan. Any business development of this size should be directed towards the main settlements, the larger villages or established designated business sites. Officers do not consider that the applicant’s case overrides the relevant Local and National Policies which this application contravenes. Furthermore, Officers do not consider that the condition proposed by the applicant to control the businesses which would occupy the premises is enforceable. In any event, it is considered that if permission was granted it would be difficult to resist any business in Class B8 storage use using the buildings, and it would also be difficult to resist any further conversion of the other buildings on the site to business use. In this regard, it is noted that the ‘other half’ of the building now proposed to be converted was recently being used for an unauthorised business use, but that business has since vacated this half of the building. In addition it is considered that the granting of this application would set a precedent for similar applications for the conversion of large non-vernacular farm buildings within the open countryside, which the policies referred to above seek to resist.
- 5.3 Intrinsically linked to the principle of Class B8 storage use on this site, as discussed above, is the issue of sustainability. The site is located 1km from Ardington which is a small village as set out in Local Plan Policy H12, and access to the site is taken through the village of Ardington. Given the isolated nature of the site, Officers do not consider that the site is a sustainable location for the scale and type of use proposed. Whilst the Transport Statement submitted with the application compares the vehicular movements relating to the previous uses of the buildings as an intensive pig fattening/rearing unit to the Class B8 use now proposed, this use ceased in 2000, and therefore this comparison is not considered to be a suitable means of assessing the sustainability of the site, as stated within the County Engineer’s comments. It is considered that such an intensive agricultural use of the site is unlikely to resume

given that the previous intensive use ceased a number of years ago and the other buildings on the site have remained vacant since then. The proposed Class B8 storage use which would generate a significant number of vehicle movements by cars and larger vehicles in this unsustainable location. This site has no footway links, no cycle links, is not served by public transport, and the road network leading to the site is narrow, winding, and unsustainable for a large number of vehicles.

5.4 When large non-vernacular buildings within the open countryside are used for agricultural purposes, they are seen in the context of a working farmyard and are therefore part of the rural scene. However, when buildings in a farm complex change to business use they can take on the character and appearance of an industrial estate within the open countryside. It is appreciated that the buildings themselves which are proposed to be converted would not differ in terms of their appearance. However, the associated activity in terms of vehicular movements and on-site parking provision, and the nature of this type of use in this location is considered to be harmful to the open and rural character of the North Wessex Downs AONB. The AONB's Planning Adviser has objected to the application in this regard. Furthermore, if such a use was established in this location it would be difficult to resist the conversion of the other large non-vernacular buildings on the site, which would have a cumulatively harmful impact on the AONB.

5.5 There are no residential properties in the near vicinity of the site, therefore Officers consider that the proposed use of the site would not cause any noise or disturbance to neighbours. Officers appreciate that the proposed use would generate vehicular movements from cars and larger vehicles which would have to pass residential properties along the only logical route. However, Officers do not consider that this impact would be so harmful to residential amenities to justify a reason for refusal on these grounds.

6.0 **Recommendation**

6.1 *It is recommended that planning permission be refused for the following reason:*

1. *The proposal is for the conversion of one and a half large non-vernacular agricultural barns to Class B8 storage use, which are sited within a larger group of farm buildings within the open countryside. Given the amount of floorspace proposed to be converted is 732 square metres, the proposal is considered to introduce a level of employment and business use into the open countryside which is unacceptable, and would undermine the policies of overall restraint within the adopted Vale of Horse Local Plan and the Oxfordshire Structure Plan. Furthermore, the establishment of the proposed use in this location is likely to set a precedent for further development on the site, and in other isolated locations elsewhere within the District. In addition, given the isolated location of the site and the nature of the proposed use, the proposal would generate a significant amount of vehicular traffic to and from a site which is in an unsustainable rural location. The proposal is therefore considered to be harmful to the strategy of overall restricted employment growth, is located in an unsustainable location for such a use, and would be harmful to the open and rural character of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural*

Beauty. Accordingly, the proposal is contrary to Policies GS8 and NE9 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2001, Policies G1, G5, T1 and T8 of the adopted Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016, Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, and Planning Policy Guidance 13: Transport.