

APPLICATION NO.	P20/V1706/FUL
SITE	Lock Farm Buscot Faringdon, SN7 8DA
PARISH	BUSCOT
PROPOSAL	Change of use of agricultural buildings to office space use and associated works and infrastructure. (Heritage Impact Statement rec 9 September 2020) (Proposed layout plan rec 14 Sept 2020) (Amended plans, arboricultural information, flood risk assessment and landscape proposals rec 17 March 2021)
WARD MEMBER(S)	Simon Howell Elaine Ware
APPLICANT OFFICER	National Trust Susannah Mangion

RECOMMENDATION

Planning permission subject to the following conditions:

Standard:

1. Commencement
2. Approved plans

Pre-Commencement:

3. Archaeology – written scheme of investigation
4. Tree Protection
5. Biodiversity enhancement plan
6. Surface water drainage
7. Foul water drainage
8. Levels for car park
9. Contamination
10. Security entrance gates
11. External lighting
12. Obtain derogation licence for bats
13. Obtain derogation licence for great crested newts

Prior to Occupation:

14. Specified visibility splays
15. Access parking and turning in accordance with plans
16. Turning space for emergency/servicing vehicles
17. Vehicle swept paths and passing places

- 18. Bicycle parking provision**
- 19. Refuse storage**
- 20. Electric vehicle charging points**

Compliance:

- 21. Restricted use – offices only**
- 22. Archaeology – publication of findings**
- 23. Landscaping implementation**
- 24. Development in accordance with Ecological reports**
- 25. Development in accordance with Flood Risk Assessment**
- 26. Materials in accordance with application**
- 27. Hours restriction**

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND PROPOSAL

- 1.1 This planning application come to committee at the request of the ward members, Elaine Ware and Simon Howell. It is submitted on behalf of the National Trust and seeks planning consent for the use of the existing agricultural buildings at Lock Farm, Buscot for a mix of office, co-working and meeting space. The application is submitted in order to return the presently redundant buildings to a productive economic use as they presently stand vacant and have done so for a number of years. This is due to the consolidation and amalgamation of farming practices and agricultural tenancies across the Buscot & Coleshill Estates. Potential alternative uses were assessed but it was established through engaging with local commercial agents that the proposed commercial office use is the most commercially viable option.
- 1.2 The need for the National Trust to find a viable commercial use of the buildings at Lock Farm is argued to be significant, as income from the buildings forms part of the income stream used to finance the operation, maintenance, management and conservation of the Buscot & Coleshill Estate. All buildings and land at the Buscot & Coleshill Estate are classified as inalienable assets under Section 21 of the National Trust Act 1907. This means that once an asset has been declared inalienable the National Trust is unable to sell the building, mortgage it or rid itself of any liabilities attached to the building. The building is retained within the Trust's care indefinitely with the Trust consequently being unable to sell any of the buildings located at Buscot & Coleshill Estate to raise capital to fund wider investments across the estate or assist with the estate's general maintenance, whilst redundant buildings become a financial burden. It is hoped the revenue stream from conversion of the buildings will at least fund the maintenance of the buildings themselves.
- 1.3 Planning permission for the following elements of development is proposed:
- Change of use of the existing buildings to a flexible use B1 use comprising office use under use class B1(c);
 - There will be some physical alterations to the external appearance of the existing buildings to accommodate the works necessary to implement the change of use. These comprise some new window and door openings within the existing building fabric;
 - The construction of a car park incidental to the use of the offices;

- Upgrades to the existing track to accommodate vehicles utilising the offices.
- 1.4 The application was submitted prior to the alterations to the Use Classes Order in 2020 which introduced a more general class E which covers a wide range of commercial uses. The applicant has indicated they would be willing to accept a condition to limit the use of the complex to offices only.
- 1.5 In addition to the plans, the application was supported by the following documentation:
- Bat survey
 - Flood risk assessments parts 1 and 2
 - Great Crested Newt survey report
 - Heritage Impact Statement
 - Landscape and visual impact assessment
 - Phase 1 Habitat survey report
 - Planning Statement
 - Transport Statement
 - Travel Plan Statement
 - Tree Survey Schedule.
- 1.6 Amended plans including soft landscape proposals and additional information were submitted in response to consultee comments. The additional reports comprised:
- Arboriculture Statement
 - Flood risk assessment.
- 1.7 Lock Farm is a complex of attractive barn buildings constructed of Cotswold stone coursed ashlar with Cotswold stone quoins and lintels and slate roof with an internal central concreted farm yard. It is located at the northern edge of the estate village of Buscot. The buildings comprise former stables, storage space and a milking parlour located around central concrete courtyard area in a U-shaped configuration. The buildings are predominately single storey with a section of 2-storey building on the northern side of the yard. The first-floor element is accessed via an external stone staircase. Access to the yard is gained at three locations via field gates located on the southern, western and eastern sides of the yard. To the south is the remnants of a former cart shed/garage building and to the north of the site is an existing field which is laid to grass, the southern boundary of which is defined by three existing mature trees.
- 1.8 Access is proposed to be taken from the A417 to the west of the site. There is an existing junction on the A417 which provides access to the Church of St Mary and to Old Parsonage. The existing access to the application site from the west is off a spur from the road which connects the Church of St Mary and the Old Parsonage. The track leads through a field via a field gate and approaches the application site from the south west. At present the single width track is comprised of a loose bound gravel surface but it is proposed to have concrete wheel tracks with a grassed centre.

- 1.9 There are no designated heritage assets on the site. However, the site sits in the wider setting of the Grade I listed Church of St Mary and a series of chest tombs and monuments that are separately Grade II listed in the church yard as well as The Old Parsonage to the west of the church that is Grade II* listed and the Grade II listed summerhouse within its grounds. Approximately 125m to the east of the application site is the Grade II Lock Keepers Cottage.
- 1.10 The closest residential property to the application site is the farmhouse traditionally linked to Lock Farm. This is located adjacent to the eastern boundary of the application site and is also owned by the National Trust but occupied under residential tenancy.
- 1.11 Buscot village is located to the south east of the application site and is accessible from the application site by an existing road. The main part of Buscot village is entirely within the Buscot Conservation Area and a number of the houses within the village are also listed. A public footpath runs along the northern boundary of the application site.
- 1.12 The application site lies within flood zones 2 and 3.
- 1.13 A site location plan, which includes the locations of the nearby listed buildings, is below and the application drawings are **attached** at Appendix 1.



2.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

Full copies of all representations that have been made can be viewed on the council's website www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk

2.1

<p>Buscot Parish Council</p>	<p>Would like the following issues considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of additional traffic movements on setting of the church and Old Parsonage • Adequacy of access from A417, having regard to increased movements • Prevention of the additional car-parking being used by visitors: increases in visitor numbers has led to anti-social behaviour.
<p>Local Residents</p>	<p>14 households have written to object to the proposal on the following grounds:</p> <p><u>Flooding:</u> Concerned the area floods, including the track. Contamination could impact on flood waters.</p> <p><u>Setting of listed buildings:</u> The development will harm the setting of nearby listed buildings including the church and old parsonage.</p> <p><u>Character of the area:</u> The setting of Lock Farm will be impacted. Scale of proposed car-park is out of keeping with area. Concerned about light pollution especially at night-time during the winter. The development will suburbanise and damage the local riverside area. Harmful to visual amenity and tranquillity of countryside and the River Thames. The peace of the churchyard and wider area will be disturbed. The track will be visually intrusive to footpath users.</p> <p><u>Wildlife:</u> Concerned about impact on wildlife including protected species.</p> <p><u>Highways, access and parking:</u> Concerned about increased traffic generation at a dangerous junction on A417 where there is poor visibility. Commercial vehicles may use the track 7 days a week, disturbing church services. Car parking in the local area is already a concern and the new track may be used for overflow parking. The access road to the church may become congested and used for parking.</p>

	<p><u>Sustainability:</u> Will rely on private transport, contrary to sustainable principles. There is no bus service.</p> <p><u>Amenity impacts:</u> Concerned about noise disturbance during construction and from use of the offices.</p> <p><u>Tourism/visitors:</u> Development may encourage more visitors to the area with concerns of littering and inconsiderate parking. Development will encourage crime and anti-social behaviour in the locality, including theft, littering and drug taking.</p> <p><u>Other:</u> Concerned development may disturb plague spores. Concerned about National Trust(applicant) maintaining buildings adequately. The National Trust (applicant) should uphold the site as an agricultural estate. Question need for offices when covid has created a reduced requirement for office space. If offices are needed, these should be in towns or at Coleshill National Trust where there are existing offices. Proposal brings little benefit to the village</p>
Economic Development Team	Support the proposal
Conservation Officer	No objections on heritage grounds.
Countryside Officer	No objection subject to conditions
Drainage Engineer	No objections subject to conditions
Highways Liaison Officer	No objections subject to conditions.
Contaminated Land	No objection subject to conditions
Environmental Protection Team	No objections.

Environment Agency	No objection subject to conditions
County Archaeologist	No objection subject to conditions.
Forestry Team	No objection subject to conditions.
Historic England	Content for the application to be determined by the local planning authority following its own specialist conservation advice.

3.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

3.1 [P88/V1874/COU](#) - Approved (11/08/1988)

Change of use of warehousing to office together with alterations.

[P70/V0681/O](#) - Refused (12/03/1970)

Change of use of a barn to a dwelling.

3.2 **Pre-application History**

[P18/V0906/PEM](#) – Pre-app response (21/05/2018)

Convert the barns into lettable rural business units, with associated staff facilities. The associated threshing barn to be converted into a dedicated conference meeting room facility.

4.0 **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

4.1 The proposal does not fall within a category of development that would be subject to EIA.

5.0 **MAIN ISSUES**

5.1 **Current Policy**

The application relates to the conversion of existing buildings for use as office accommodation and comprises the following elements.

- Refurbishment of space to enable an office, co-working and meeting space activities;
- There will be limited physical alterations to the external appearance of the existing buildings to accommodate the works necessary to implement the change of use;
- Internal alterations to the buildings will also be necessary along with the construction of a new car park and upgrade of the existing track;
- Introduction of substantial planting and green infrastructure enhancements as shown on the soft landscape proposals.

5.2 Rural diversification proposals are supported by policy DP7 of LPP2 where they relate to an existing business enterprise. The policy confirms that the re-use, conversion or adaption of suitable existing buildings will be determined in accordance with the policy CP28 of LPP1. Policy CP28 relates to new employment development on unallocated sites and the policy supports the re-

use and conversion of an existing building for employment purposes subject to the proposal complying with tests relating to amenity, safe and sustainable access, and the scale of the proposal being appropriate. Policy CP6 of LPP1 is concerned with meeting business and employment needs and supports development that is compliant with policy CP28.

- 5.3 Paragraph 83 b of the NPPF, seeks to support a prosperous rural economy and states that planning decision should enable the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. At paragraph 84, it gives support to the general principle of improving the self-sufficiency of rural areas as it states ‘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 less well served by public transport...’. Since the existing buildings at Lock Farm are non-designated heritage assets, policy CP39 of LPP1 is also relevant as it seeks to ensure vacant historic buildings are appropriately re-used to prevent deterioration of condition.
- 5.4 The buildings were previously leased by tenant farmers. However, agricultural activities have been consolidated across the Buscot and Coleshill Estate and the buildings are now vacant and of a size and scale of the buildings making them unsuitable for modern agricultural practices.
- 5.5 Given that the buildings will be used in order to create some revenue to re-invest in the upkeep of the buildings and the wider economic productivity of the estate for the National Trust, the proposal would help preserve the non-designated heritage assets. The Council’s Economic Development Team supports the proposal and officers consider the proposal is acceptable in principle, providing it is compliant with all other relevant plans of the policy as assessed further below.
- 5.6 **Residential Amenity**
Although the barns and proposed car park area are in relatively close proximity to the existing dwelling at Lock Farm, officers consider the hours of use and levels of noise associated with offices should not give rise to any harmful impacts in terms of impacts on amenity. It is important to note the buildings were part of a working farm, and it is reasonable to expect that associated levels of activity and traffic would have brought about a level of impact on the locality. Having regard to the limited alterations to the buildings and the planting of additional hedgerow to enclose the car park area, officers consider there would be no unacceptable impacts from overlooking or loss of privacy. As such the proposal complies with policy DP23 of LPP2.
- 5.7 **Landscape and Visual Impact**
Officers note the objections to the impact on the character and appearance of the area. However, it has to be recognised that the buildings exist and have a historic level of activity associated with them. Of the range of potential commercial uses, the proposed use as offices is likely to generate activity that is principally comprised of smaller vehicles, mainly cars, that have the least impact on their surroundings. The site is well contained by established riverside

vegetation and existing structures at the Lock Farm site, thereby limiting direct open views to walkers along the public right of way. The proposed barn conversions will be undertaken with limited external alterations to the built form and the greatest visual impact will be from the introduction of a car parking area. The proposed car park area is mitigated by reinforcing characteristic field boundaries through the introduction of new hedgerows along the western boundary and along the proposed entrance track. In addition, there is proposed to be new planting of bulbs and new trees. Officers consider the proposed mitigation will help to soften the impact of the use and that the proposals will not harm the character and appearance of the area, in accordance with policies CP37 and CP44 of LPP1.

5.8 Flood Risk and drainage

The flood risk information submitted with the application identifies that the proposed development is located within flood zones 2 and 3. The proposed use of the building falls into the 'less vulnerable' category of development and due to this classification and on the basis that the proposal is for the change of use, there was no requirement to carry out either a sequential test or an exception test.

5.9 A proposed drainage scheme has been designed in order to manage surface water run-off to accord with current climate change guidance. This will provide an 88% betterment compared with the existing situation which may be of benefit in limiting flood risk elsewhere. Flood mitigation measures are also proposed in order to ensure that the development is resilient to the impacts of flooding through demountable flood barriers, raising electrical sockets and designing the proposal so that the materials used in the conversion of the buildings are flood resilient. In addition, a flood evacuation plan was produced to address times of increased flood risk.

5.10 The Environment Agency and the Council's drainage engineer are satisfied with the proposals, subject to conditions. The conditions will require the development to be undertaken in accordance with the Flood Risk Assessment; will ensure there is no land raising within the 1% annual probability flood extent; and will require the submission of satisfactory surface and foul water drainage schemes. As such, the proposal is considered to comply with policy CP42 of LPP1.

5.11 Traffic, parking and highway safety

The application was accompanied by a Transport Assessment and Travel Plan. The review of the highway network and accident data found no apparent problems in relation to safety and the projected trips numbers confirm there will not be a material impact on the safe operation of the highways network. However, improvements to the access with the A417 are proposed to improve the existing access for 2 vehicles to pass. The proposal will create a car-park area to include 2 spaces for disabled use and 26 standard spaces. Passing places will be created both on the highway and the private track to allow vehicles to pass each other. The County Highways Officer acknowledges that the site is relatively isolated with no realistic transport options other than the private car, but policy support for small-scale, sustainable growth in rural

employment opportunities via the use of existing buildings outweighs this concern. He has no objection to the proposal subject to conditions.

- 5.12 The travel plan will encourage staff car sharing. The proposal will provide 3 electric vehicle charging points and secure cycle storage for 10 cycles. Although it is acknowledged that the site is at an unsustainable location and does not benefit from public transport links, officers consider the above measures will ensure the proposal will be as sustainable as possible. Since the proposal concerns the re-use of redundant buildings, it is supported by the wider aims of the NPPF regarding securing a viable use for heritage assets, support for the rural economy and for rural enterprises and for agricultural diversification. The proposal is considered to comply with policy CP35 of LPP1 and policy DP16 of LPP2.

5.13 **Historic Environment**

The application was accompanied by a Heritage Assessment has been undertaken to assess the proposed impact of the development directly upon the non-designated heritage and also in terms of potential buried archaeology. It also considered effects in relation to the setting of the Church of St Mary (grade I listed) and associated listed assets and the Old Parsonage (grade II* listed). The access track which is proposed to be upgraded is located closest to these and the proposed alterations to the track will be limited. It is proposed to erect a new steel security 5-bar field gate to limit access to the site, and the track upgrade will comprise concrete wheel tracks with grass to the centre and either side New native hedge will be planted alongside the track. This will reinstate traditional field boundaries. Additional planting in the vicinity of the existing farm buildings will help to screen the development and reduce the inter-visibility between the Church and Old Parsonage and the proposed new car park.

- 5.14 The historic interest at the application site has also been a key consideration and the proposals for Lock Farm retain the site's historic value and interest with limited physical alterations to the building that allow their re-use.

- 5.15 In accordance with paragraph 196 of the NPPF, and since it is considered there is less than substantial harm to the heritage assets both at the site and the nearby listed buildings, the public benefits of the proposal must be considered and weighed in the balance. Officers consider that allowing the sympathetic re-use of vacant historic buildings to prevent their deterioration together with the wider economic benefits that will be generated for the Buscot & Coleshill Estate (which is maintained and managed for the benefit of the general public by The National Trust) by allowing the proposal would outweigh the less than substantial harm. The proposal is considered to comply with policies DP36 and DP38 of LPP2.

5.16 **Biodiversity**

Surveys were undertaken with respect to the presence of protected species. No reptiles were found to be present. However, Bats and bat roosts have been recorded at Lock Farm and as such a Natural England licence will be required prior to works commencing at the site to ensure that impacts upon the existing

bat populations are mitigated. A detailed mitigation strategy comprising a range of measures including installation of new bat boxes to replace lost roosts, the retention of existing roosts and roost modification are proposed and planning conditions will ensure these are implemented effectively so as to minimise impacts on the bat population.

5.17 The ecological survey also identified the need to provide a Barn Owl box and to undertake measures relating to the bird nesting season.

5.18 Measures to mitigate any potential adverse impacts upon Great Crested Newt populations have also been incorporated into the proposal and a further licence from Natural England will be required prior to commencement of development.

5.19 The ecological survey submitted with the application established that mainly common habitats were recorded at the site, although a single length of hedgerow qualifies as a Habitat of Principal Importance. This section of hedgerow is located at the northern boundary of the site, and extends to approximately 50m. The ecological appraisal and subsequent species-specific surveys have identified that the proposed development will not have an adverse impact upon habitats of importance and the council's Countryside Officer is satisfied with the proposals, subject to conditions. In this regard, the proposal is considered to comply with policy CP46 of LPP1.

5.20 **Trees**

The application was accompanied by an Arboricultural Statement, a Tree Protection Plan and a Tree Survey. These documents conclude that no trees are required to be removed to facilitate the proposals. The revised proposals ensure there are also no direct impacts on retained trees. The Council's Tree Officer had no objection to the revised proposals and tree protection measures are proposed to be put in place to ensure construction works do not give rise to damage to retained trees and the proposed landscaping scheme will secure gains through additional planting, in accordance with policy CP44 of LPP1.

5.21 **Other – Visitor Economy; Effective Use of Land; Archaeology; Contamination; Anti-social Behaviour**

Visitor Economy

Policy CP31 of LPP1 encourages development to advance the visitor economy, including farm diversification in the open countryside. Since the National Trust brings visitors to the district and intends to re-invest revenue from the re-use of the agricultural buildings, including for the maintenance of the vacant buildings, the proposal will support the enjoyment of the established Buscot and Coleshill Estates. The proposal is supported by the council's Economic Development team.

5.22 Effective Use of Land

Policy CP43 of LPP1 encourages the effective use of natural resources and seeks to avoid the use of the best agricultural land. The area of agricultural land to be lost to car-park area has been graded as generally poor (under the

Agricultural Land Classification) and has traditionally been used for pasture land and additionally is not in active use as part of the current farm tenancy.

5.23 Archaeology

The site is located in an area of archaeological interest. The earlier farm at the site may have medieval origins. Although of a small scale this development could impact on archaeological remains related to the earlier farm as well as any medieval use of the site. The County Archaeologist had no objection to the proposal subject to a planning condition requiring an archaeological watching brief during any development and the submission of a report of the findings.

5.24 Contamination

Since the application site was formerly used as agricultural land, there is potential for a range of contaminants that could be present. The council's Environmental Protection Officer had no objection subject to conditions to ensure a risk assessment is undertaken and any contamination is remediated prior to occupation.

5.25 Anti-social Behaviour

Concerns have been raised by members of the public with regard to the proposal giving rise to littering, inconsiderate parking and criminal activities. However, officers are not aware of any reason why the proposal should give rise to such behaviour. The site and car-park will be accessed via security gates, there will be provision for refuse and recycling storage and having the redundant buildings in active use will give rise to better surveillance of the area which would be expected to deter criminal or anti-social behaviour.

6.0 **CONCLUSION**

6.1 Officers consider the proposal will be of benefit to the rural economy and rural employment. The sympathetic re-use of the non-designated heritage assets will ensure the buildings have a viable use and are maintained in good order. The harm to the setting of the nearby listed buildings will be mitigated by landscaping measures and the wider public benefit of the proposal is considered to outweigh the less than substantial harm. The proposal for office use of the site will not give rise to any unacceptable harm to residential amenity and the Highways Officer is satisfied the increased traffic generated is not a constraint to the development in association with the improvements proposed to the access and the proposed new passing spaces. Although not at a sustainable location, three electric vehicle charging points will be provided together with secure cycle storage. The protected species present on site will be protected and planning conditions will ensure net biodiversity gains. Tree protection measures will ensure no harm to existing trees to be retained and the planting of new trees is proposed within the landscaping scheme, which will also involve the planting of new hedgerows to reinstate characteristic field boundaries thereby enhancing the landscape. The flood risk and drainage mitigation measures will ensure the proposal benefits from effective drainage and does not exacerbate flooding elsewhere. An archaeological watching brief will ensure all archaeological findings are competently dealt with and subsequently fully reported on. Officers consider that the proposal accords with the aims of the development plan and

the National Planning Policy Framework and planning permission should be granted.

The following planning policies and legislation have been taken into account:

Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1 (LPP1):

- CP01 - Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- CP03 - Settlement Hierarchy
- CP06 – Meeting Business and Employment Needs
- CP20 - Spatial Strategy for Western Vale Sub-Area
- CP28 - New Employment Development on Unallocated Sites
- CP31 - Development to Support the Visitor Economy
- CP33 - Promoting Sustainable Transport and Accessibility
- CP35 - Promoting Public Transport, Cycling and Walking
- CP37 - Design and Local Distinctiveness
- CP39 - The Historic Environment
- CP40 - Sustainable Design and Construction
- CP42 - Flood Risk
- CP43 – Natural Resources
- CP44 – Landscape
- CP45 – Green Infrastructure
- CP46 - Conservation and Improvement of Biodiversity

Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2 (LPP2):

- DP7 - Re-use, Conversion and Extension of Buildings for Dwellings
- DP12 – Rural Diversification and Equestrian Developments
- DP16 - Access
- DP21 - External Lighting

DP23 - Impact of Development on Amenity

DP28 - Waste Collection and Recycling

DP29 - Settlement Character and Gaps

DP30 - Watercourses

DP31 - Protection of Public Rights of Way, National Trails and Open Access Areas

DP36 - Heritage Assets

DP38 - Listed Buildings

DP39 - Archaeology and Scheduled Monuments

Neighbourhood Plan

The site is not within a neighbourhood plan area.

Vale of White Horse Design Guide (SPD, 2015)

National Planning Policy Framework, 2019

Planning Practise Guidance

Equality Act 2010

The application has been assessed against section 149 of the Equality Act. It is considered that no recognised group will suffer discrimination as a result of the proposal.

Human Rights Act, 1998

The application has been assessed against Articles 1 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The impact on individuals has been balanced against the public interest and the officer recommendation is considered to be proportionate.

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