

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

FOR

PROPOSED BARN CONVERSIONS

AT

WOLVESACRE HALL

ISCOYD

WHITCHURCH

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THE APPLICATION

The proposal is for the conversion of part of a range of traditional barns into two units of residential accommodation. The units will either be let as holiday units or as ancillary accommodation for the farmhouse and not separate units of accommodation.

SITUATION

Wolvesacre Hall consists of 190 acres of land, a recently rebuilt farmhouse, a separate barn conversion, traditional buildings and some more modern agricultural buildings.

The building to be converted is typical of the local vernacular being of brick two storey construction under a pitched roof. The building forms the end of a larger range of buildings, part single storey, part two storey. The single storey stables are in use as stables with the two storey structure at the opposite end already converted to a dwelling as approved under application P2018/0200.

The buildings are in generally good condition but could do with some minor repairs.

A separate Historic Assessment of Wolvesacre Hall including the building to be converted is provided with the application documents.

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

The requirements of a design and access statements are detailed in the Town and Country Planning Order are as follows:

(3) A design and access statement shall-

- (a) Explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the following aspects of the development
 - (i) Accessibility
 - (ii) Environmental sustainability
 - (iii) Character
 - (iv) Community Safety; and
 - (v) Movement to, from and within the development

These are detailed below as follows:

ACCESSIBILITY

The site is accessed via Wolvesacre Lane, a single width lane. From the site the lane runs south west to its junction with Higher Wych Road. It also heads to the north east but access to and from this direction is unrealistic and would never be used.

As part of application P2018/0200 for the previous barn conversion, highways did not object. However, they commented that any further development of the site would require highway improvements.

We therefore propose two improvements. Firstly we propose to improve the visibility of the junction of Wolvesacre Lane onto Higher Wych Road by moving back a section of hedge to increase the forward visibility to the north west as suggested by the highway comments. It was also suggested that the grass splitter island should be removed with surfacing and appropriate road markings. We feel this is unnecessary and would spoil the rural character of the area with the splitter island being a well known local feature.

Secondly, we propose the construction of a passing bay to Wolvesacre Lane approx. 82m from the Higher Wych Road junction. This has been positioned to fit into an existing gateway and will be convenient for the bend in the lane. The section of lane from the passing bay to Wolvesacre Hall has wider verges and gateways that could be used as informal passing places which we believe is more than sufficient.

We believe that these improvements are more than adequate for such a small increase in vehicle movements.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The scheme involves the re-development of an existing building that is currently being under used. This reduces the requirement for new building materials as the walls and roof are already in place.

The units will be highly insulated to current Building Regulation standard with heating and hot water being provided by a renewable source – air source heat pumps.

CHARACTER

External:

The buildings are typical of the local vernacular, being constructed in a local Cheshire brick under a pitched roof. Also typically, the majority of the openings face into the courtyard with far fewer doors and windows facing towards the open countryside. The doors and windows are a mix of openings and frames some of which have been built up. These are now in poor condition and are in need of replacement.

Externally, some new opening are proposed to the ground floor of the rear (east) elevation which are required to give access and to improve natural light to the living accommodation.

No extensions to the building are proposed.

General Specification:

Windows will be purpose made flush fitting timber casements.

Rainwater goods will be black painted cast iron.

Boundaries to the rear gardens will be marked by timber post and rail fences to retain an agricultural appearance.

Any further repairs to masonry will be undertaken using salvaged materials and will be undertaken using a lime based mortar in accordance with sound conservation practise.

Internal:

The internal design of the units have been determined by the existing form of the building in line with good conservation practice. Some alterations are proposed to the existing internal cross walls but only at ground floor level.

The internal layouts have also been designed so that it could be occupied as a single larger unit with interconnecting doors to the party wall.

MOVEMENT TO, FROM AND WITHIN THE DEVELOPMENT

The layout is detailed on the plans accompanying the application. The scheme has been designed to protect the amenity of the nearby Wolvesacre Hall by providing separation of the traffic to and from the proposed dwellings. This is achieved by the new dwellings having their own access and with having their parking to the east, away from Wolvesacre Hall.

LANDSCAPING

The landscaping and surface treatments will reflect the rural environment and respect the former agricultural use. The existing courtyard will be retained and not subdivided. The new drive close to the proposed dwelling will have a gravel finish.

The new boundaries will be created with post and rail fences to reflect the rural character. There could be some tree planting to the drive and gardens but this can be conditioned on any approval. Only native species will be used.

WILDLIFE

A Phase 2 Environmental Bat Survey has been prepared by Arbor Vitae which is included in the application documents. This confirms that there is no evidence of bats using the buildings.

CONTEXT

These aspects of the development have been considered in relation to the following physical social, economic and policy contexts. These have been reviewed and evaluated as part of the design process to determine the most beneficial use of the building and the specific design detail.

Social – The conversion will have a positive affect on people in the locality and will provide a beneficial use for the buildings that is in keeping with the area.

The building is currently unsuitable for modern agricultural purposes. They are also unsuitable for commercial use due to the proximity of Wolvesacre Hall. Commercial use is also completely unviable financially.

Economic – The conversion represents an economic and sustainable form of housing provision, minimising the use of new resources through the re-use of an existing structure and materials. The proposal will not result in the loss of any agricultural land.

PLANNING

Local Planning Guidance Note 3 gives advice on the conversion of rural buildings and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. The proposal accords with the guidance as follows.

Justification against Industrial Use:

The agricultural farm buildings are not suitable for industrial use for the following reasons:

Traditional buildings of this nature are often at odds with the requirements of modern commercial occupiers. In the experience of local agents in letting of industrial and commercial properties, the following features are cited by prospective occupiers as being particularly relevant:-

Floor plan - both industrial and commercial operators require clean large floor areas.

As far as industrial operators are concerned these must be on a single level, save the introduction of minor mezzanines for light storage.

Good eaves height for industrial properties - these are to be at least 4.5m - 4.8m clear span. Clearly this is not feasible using the existing openings. To form new openings to this height to take roller shutter doors for trade vehicles would be out of character with the historic listed buildings.

Easy access to main roads and to public transport for the workforce.

The proximity of the buildings to the nearby house would cause conflict between the industrial and residential uses.

Even if demand could be proved the weakness of covenant strength of small businesses coupled with the conversion costs would make the project unviable.

The rural location of the buildings is unsuitable for industrial use. The higher volume of traffic that an industrial use would entail, and often causes conflict with nearby residential properties.

The remote location of the buildings also has implications in respect of security. The lack of neighbours reduces the level of natural surveillance. This often results in occupiers installing high wattage security lighting that are out of context with the rural landscape. Occupiers also prefer purpose built Business parks as they provide secure facilities often with entrance barriers and secure compounds. Again, these are out of context with the rural location and are expensive to install on small sites.

Experience has shown that a high percentage of rural businesses are start-ups, resulting in an above average turnover of tenants, either because they are expanding or have failed. Therefore, premises layout and design has to be flexible enough for a number of different use types, if lengthy rental voids are to be avoided. That flexibility is lacking with these proposed sites.

Justification against Office Use:

There is little demand for office use in the area. Whilst most prefer to be part of a larger commercial site such as on an industrial estate or larger developments, some tenants are attracted to a rural location. However this demand is very limited and has reduced even further by Covid-19 and improved technology making home working much more preferred.

Under current Building Regulations if the buildings were to be converted to commercial use then they would have to be designed to meet the requirements of disabled access. Employers are also required to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act. Buildings of this nature do not easily lend themselves to access for disabled owing to their layout and the restrictions imposed by an existing structure. One requirement, that is both difficult and expensive to install, is a personnel lift to any first floor accommodation.

The higher volume of traffic that a commercial use would entail, and often causes conflict with nearby residential properties. Even assuming that this was acceptable, conversion to office use is completely financially unviable.

Structural Appraisal:

The buildings are in sound condition with only localised repairs required.

CONCLUSION

The building is of architectural and historical merit as explained in the Historic Assessment

Residential conversion is the most suitable way of protecting the building and bringing it back into a viable use. The scheme has been designed to retain the historic integrity of the building.

We therefore urge that the application is supported.