OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 24/02183/FUL Full Planning Application

Proposal: Proposed conversion of disused barn to residential dwelling and associated change of use of land shown as public highway to land within residential curtilage

Location: Palmers Barn Two Pole Drove Farcet

Applicant: Mr G D'Amore

Grid Ref: 521903 294362

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The application site is located to the east of the Key Service Centre of Farcet, is located in the open countryside and comprises an L-shaped single storey brick and tile/slate building. The site is surrounded by agricultural fields with sporadic agricultural buildings. The site is accessed off Two Pole Drove and access to the site is already established in the south-west corner of the site.

The building subject to this application is a large, single storey L-shaped structure which is set back from the road frontage by approximately 3 m. The site is primarily bereft from vegetation however, sporadic trees are planted along the north/east boundary.

The proposal seeks to convert the disused agricultural barns to a two-bedroom residential dwellinghouse. No extensions would be required to convert the building and therefore the proposal would remain within the existing building footprint. External alterations to the fenestration are sought as part of the proposal and include the replacement of open bays with bifold doors and replacement of windows with new aluminium powder coated windows. The application also seeks to change of use of land shown as public highway to land within residential curtilage.

The site is within Flood Zone 1 according to Environment Agency Mapping and therefore at lowest risk from fluvial flooding. The site is not at risk from surface water flooding however, is susceptible to ground water levels being 0.025m and 0.5m below the ground surface in the 100-year return period event. There are no designated heritage or ecological assets within or in the vicinity of the site.
Officers have scrutinised the plans and have familiarised themselves with the site and surrounding area.

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

The National Planning Policy Framework (12th December 2024) (NPPF 2024) sets out the three objectives - economic, social and environmental - of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF 2024 at paragraph 10 provides as follows: 'So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 10).'

The NPPF 2024 sets out the Government's planning policies for (amongst other things):
* delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
* building a strong, competitive economy;
* achieving well-designed, beautiful and safe places;
* conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.

For full details visit the government website: https://www.gov.uk

PLANNING POLICIES
Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 - adopted May 2019
*LP1: Amount of Development
*LP2: Strategy for Development
*LP4: Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
*LP5: Flood Risk
*LP6: Waste Water Management
*LP8: Key Service Centres
*LP10: The Countryside
*LP11: Design Context
*LP12: Design Implementation
*LP14: Amenity
*LP15: Surface Water
*LP16: Sustainable Travel
*LP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
*LP25: Housing Mix
*LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
*LP31: Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and Guidance:
*Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD (2017)
*Huntingdonshire Townscape and Landscape Assessment SPD (2022)
*Developer Contributions SPD (2011)
*Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024)
*Huntingdonshire Tree Guidance Note 3
*Annual Monitoring Report, regarding housing land supply.

Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

PLANNING HISTORY
24/00919/CLED- Commencement of building works for conversion of disused barns to residential dwelling pursuant to 20/00319/FUL-Refused

23/01940/CLPD- Lawful development certificate for proposed conversion of disused barns to residential dwelling.-Withdrawn

23/80317/COND- Discharge of Conditions 4 parts A & B (Site Investigation and Remediation Scheme) and 5 (Boundary Treatment) of 20/00319/FUL-Condition acceptable but not discharged.

20/00319/FUL- Conversion of disused barns to residential dwelling.- Permitted

13/01118/FUL - Rebuilding of Palmers Barn - Permitted

12/00051/REFUSL - Rebuild of main annexe sections of barn - Appeal Allowed

11/01563/FUL - Re-build of main and annexe sections of barn - Refused

10/00616/FUL - Re-building of an open sided agricultural barn - Permitted

CONSULTATIONS
Farcet Parish Council -No comment at the time of determination.

Environmental Health Officer- No objection. If minded to approve this application, please repeat Condition 4 of 20/00319/FUL relating to land contamination.

Cambridgeshire County Council Highways- No objection.

During the course of the application the Highways Officer noted the redline boundary of the application site includes an area of land owned by the Local Highways Authority. It should however be noted that planning permission can be sought on land outside of the applicant's ownership providing notice has been served to all relevant landowners. In this case, a Land Ownership Certificate B has been submitted, and the relevant notice has been served on Cambridgeshire County Council Highways.

REPRESENTATIONS

No third party representations received in support or objection to the proposal at the time of determination.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

The main issues to consider in the determination of this application are:

- Principle of Development
- Design, Visual Amenity and Impact upon the Character of the area
- Residential amenity
- Highway Safety, Parking Provision and Access
- Biodiversity
- Flood Risk and Drainage
- Water Efficiency
- Developer Contributions

*Principle of development

It is noted that there have been several Certificate of Lawfulness applications on the site seeking to confirm whether permission 20/00319/FUL has been implemented in accordance with the statutory time limitations imposed and that the permission remains extant. Certificate of Lawfulness (existing) application ref 24/00919/CLED was refused on the 23rd January 2025 as the applicant has failed to demonstrate that a material operation has been carried out to constitute the commencement of development and consequently has failed to demonstrate that the development lawfully commenced on or before 14th August 2023.

Notwithstanding the above, a material consideration in the determination of this application is the planning history on the site. On the 14th August 2020 the barns obtained planning permission for the "Conversion of disused barns to residential dwelling." There is no change in planning policy between the determination of the original application and now that would warrant a different decision being made. It has therefore been established that the principle of converting the existing barns in the countryside into a residential dwelling is acceptable, subject to the following material planning considerations.

*Design, Visual Amenity and Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area

Local Plan Policy LP10 states that all development proposals in the countryside should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Policies LP11 and LP12 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 state that developments should respond positively to their context, draw inspiration from the key characteristics of its surroundings and contribute positively to the area's character and identity.

The application site is located in the open countryside and within the character area of the Fens in the HDC Townscape and Landscape SPD (2017). The landscape is primarily characterised by an expansive landscape of flat land below sea level, with long views to distant horizons. The landscape is predominantly used for arable agriculture and given the flat and horizontal nature of the landscape can give vertical features an unusual prominence.

The single storey barn as existing has an agricultural appearance as it is constructed in brick and tile/slate. The barn as existing is not considered to be a prominent feature within the landscape given its height and partial screening from the sporadic trees to the north and east boundaries.

The proposal seeks minor exterior amendments to the fenestration of the barn subject of this application which would have limited visual impact, given the majority of the works would be internal. As a change to the building footprint is not sought as part of the proposals the building would retain the same scale, mass, height and agricultural appearance.

The application also seeks to change of use of land shown as public highway to land within residential curtilage. The red line area is drawn relatively close to the existing barn. Therefore, the residential curtilage would not extend significantly into the open countryside and would ensure the agricultural practices on adjoining land are not compromised.

Subject to a condition seeking soft landscaping measures to further screen the barn from the open countryside, it is considered the proposed conversion would assimilate well with the rural character of the area in accordance with Policies LP10, LP11, LP12 and LP33 of the Local Plan to 2036.

*Residential Amenity
Policy LP14 of the Local Plan to 2036 states a proposal will be supported where a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of the proposed development and maintained for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings.

Policy LP10 part c of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan Policy LP10 'The Countryside' states that development in the countryside should not give rise to noise, odour, obtrusive light or other impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.

The barn subject of this application is relatively isolated in the countryside. The closest residential dwelling to the site is Bull Barn Farmhouse which is approximately 450m northeast from the application site. As such, the development is considered acceptable in terms of overshadowing, overlooking, loss of privacy, overbearing impact and loss of light and would not have a significant impact upon residential amenity.

Consideration shall also be given to the residential amenity of the future occupants of the converted barn. The adjacent land uses of the land surrounding the barn is agricultural which may lead to amenity issues for future residents in terms of dust, noise and light emanating from agricultural practices.

The submitted location plan has a red line area drawn relatively close to the existing barn which offers a degree of separation between the adjacent agricultural fields. The separation distance in addition to condition securing the details of boundary treatments would reduce the potential for land use conflicts and amenity issues between differing land uses.

Given the existing use of the site as an agricultural barn future occupants of the converted barn maybe at risk from residual contamination from the previous use (such as agrochemicals, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, fuels, lubricants, buried animal carcasses, areas of waste incineration, asbestos containing materials, etc). As such, the Environmental Health Officer was consulted as part of the application. The Officer raised no objection to the development proposal subject to the imposition of a land contamination condition.

Subject to conditions, the proposed development would provide a high standard amenity for users and occupiers of the development in accordance with Policy LP14 and LP37 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and the NPPF (2024) in this regard.

*Highway Safety, Access and Parking Provision

Policy LP17 of the Local Plan to 2036 seeks to ensure that new development incorporates appropriate space for vehicle movements, facilitates access for emergency vehicles and service vehicles and incorporates adequate parking for vehicles and cycles.

The application seeks to use the existing and established access off Two Pole Drove to serve the proposed barn conversion. Two Pole Drove is a single lane track which services Palmers Barn and a couple of other barns.

Cambridgeshire County Council have been consulted on this application as the Local Highways Authority. The Highways Officer raised no objection to the proposal from a highway's safety perspective. It is considered that the proposal would not have an adverse impact on highway safety.

The application also seeks to change of use of land shown as public highway to land within residential curtilage. The relevant notice has been served on Cambridgeshire County Council given some of the land within the application site is within the ownership control of the local highway's authority.

The accompanying application form details that 2 vehicle parking spaces are proposed as part of the development. As the Council does not have a parking policy stipulating the number of vehicle parking spaces to bedroom numbers, Officers are satisfied 2 vehicle parking spaces sufficient for a two-bedroom property. The submitted site layout is considered suitable for two vehicles to rotate and enter and exit the site in a forward gear.

A condition will be imposed to ensure the provision of secure and covered cycle storage at a rate of one cycle space per bedroom; to accord with Policy LP17 of the Local Plan to 2036 and the Huntingdonshire Design Guide (2017).

*Biodiversity
Policy LP30 of the Local Plan requires proposals to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity have been investigated and ensure no net loss in biodiversity and provide a net gain where possible.

The application is accompanied with a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal dated Jan-Feb 2025. The report concluded the barn hold negligible potential to support roosting bats, nesting birds or barn owls given the inertial roof structure is relatively new and there are no gaps between beams or in the lining. The report confirms no further ecological surveys are required and recommends installing three swift boxes, one house sparrow box and two bat boxes to enhance biodiversity. The biodiversity enhancement measures detailed in the report can be secured by condition.

As of the 2nd April 2024, mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) is applicable on small sites as per paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)). In this instance, the submitted application form states the application falls within the self-build exemption. The evidence confirms the applicants have had the primary input into the final design and layout of a house and would occupy the proposed dwelling themselves. Officers are satisfied the proposal is exempt from a mandatory net gain as the development is self-build. As it is on this basis only that 10% BNG is not to be secured, a condition shall be imposed on any consent to ensure the property is a self-build property.

The application has demonstrated the proposal would not result in adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity and any impacts which may arise can be mitigated. The proposal is considered to accord with the objectives of Policy LP30 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan and Section 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 in this regard.

*Flood Risk and Drainage
National guidance and Policy LP5 of the Local Plan seek to steer new development to areas at lowest risk of flooding and advises this should be done through application of the Sequential Test,

and if appropriate the Exceptions Test (as set out in paragraphs 172-179 of the NPPF (2024)). The site is located within Flood Zone 1 and less than 1 hectare and therefore, a flood risk assessment is not required for this proposal.

The accompanying application form details that foul sewage would be disposed of via a septic tank and surface water would be disposed of through soakaways. As the proposed development is minor and is at a low risk of flooding, Officers are satisfied that drainage details can be secured as part of building regulations and other relevant legislative requirements.

Overall, the proposal is considered to be acceptable with regard to its impact on both flood risk and water drainage and therefore accords with Policies LP5, LP6 and LP15 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and Section 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework in this regard.
*Accessible and Adaptable Homes
Policy LP25 of the Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals that include housing to meet the optional Building Regulation requirement M4(2)" Accessible and adaptable dwellings" unless it can be demonstrated that site specific factors make this unachievable.

A condition could be imposed upon any consent to ensure that the development is built in accordance with these standards and maintained for the life of the development.

*Water Efficiency
Policy LP12 of the Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals that include housing to comply with the optional building regulation for water efficiency, as set out in Approved Document G.

A condition could be imposed upon any consent to ensure that the development is built in accordance with these standards and that they are maintained for the life of the development.

*Developer Contributions
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL):
The development will be CIL liable in accordance with the Council's adopted charging schedule; CIL payments will cover footpaths and access, health, community facilities, libraries and lifelong learning and education.

Unilateral Undertaking for Wheeled Bins:
The application is accompanied by a completed Unilateral Undertaking for the provision of wheeled bins dated 21.05.2025 and therefore accords with part H of the Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (2011) and Policy LP4 of the Local Plan to 2036.

Conclusion and Planning Balance:
In this instance, a proposal for converting an existing agricultural barn to a residential dwelling in the countryside, is not considered to cause significant and demonstrable harm that would outweigh the economic, social and environmental benefits of the proposal and the proposed development is considered to be compliant with relevant national and local planning policy as:

*The principle of the development of converting an existing agricultural barn to a residential dwelling in the countryside has already been established by previous decisions on the application site. There is no change in planning policy between the determination of the original application and now that would warrant a different decision being made.
*The proposal would not have a significantly adverse impact on the overall character of the area.
*The proposal is designed satisfactorily to safeguard the amenities of neighbouring dwellings and future occupants.
*There are no overriding highway safety issues.
*The proposal will not impact existing ecology.
*Is acceptable in regard to flood risk.

Taking national and local planning policies into account, and having regard for all relevant material considerations, it is recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

CONTACT OFFICER:
Enquiries about this report to **Charlotte Dew**