OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 25/00940/FUL Full Planning Application

Proposal: Proposed conversion/change of use from storage outbuilding to dwelling

Location: 6 Abbey Rooms Lane Ramsey Huntingdon

Applicant: Mr Robert Hodder

Grid Ref: 528919 285079

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

This application comprises a residential outbuilding associated with No.6 Abbey Rooms Lane, Ramsey. No.6 is a residential dwelling set back from Abbey Rooms Lane behind the Residential Dwelling No.5. The building subject of this application is detached from the host dwelling but is attached to a separate storage outbuilding to the north. This attached storage building is not associated with the application. The building is a single storey and constructed with bricks, timber and terracotta roof tiles. The eastern wall of the outbuilding also forms the common boundary with Flat 9, 101 High Street. This application site is located in the centre of the market town of Ramsey. It should also be noted that this application also relates to a separate parcel of land approximately, 50m west from the outbuilding which is proposed as a vehicle parking space.

No. 6 is located within the Ramsey Conservation Area and lies in Flood Zone 1, according to the latest Environment Agency mapping and the 2024 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. Whilst the site is not at risk of groundwater flooding, areas of hard surfacing within the application site are susceptible to surface water flooding. The outbuilding, currently used for storage, is situated near several Grade II listed building, the closest being 'Abbey Terrace' approximately 53 metres to the east, and 89 High Street around 40 metres to the west. There are no other statutory heritage or ecological designations within or near the site.

The application seeks to convert the residential outbuilding into a one-bedroom single storey residential dwelling which would include alterations to the fenestration on the southern and western elevations of the building. The barn style garage door on the southern elevation would be replaced with floor to ceiling glazing and a door on the western elevation would be replaced with a window. A small patio to the front of the building would be provided to offer private residential amenity space.

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 15th May 2019)
*LP1: Amount of Development
*LP2: Strategy for Development
*LP4: Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
*LP5: Flood Risk
*LP6: Waste Water Management
*LP7: Spatial Planning Area
*LP11: Design Context
*LP12: Design Implementation
*LP14: Amenity
*LP15: Surface Water
*LP16: Sustainable Travel
*LP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
*LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
*LP31: Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows

There is no 'made' or emerging Neighbourhood Plan for Stilton.

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

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and Guidance:
Huntingdonshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document 2017
Developer Contributions SPD 2011
Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD (2022)
Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024)
Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD 2017
LDF Developer Contributions SPD (2011)

PLANNING HISTORY
20/00143/CLED- The continued use of No.'s 5 & 6 Abbey Rooms Lane Ramsey as separate dwellings.- Consent 26.03.2020

0702490FUL- Alterations and change of use to form separate dwelling with ancillary residential accommodation- Permitted 25.09.2007

CONSULTATIONS
Highways Officer- Objection. The access from the B1096 High Street is insufficiently wide to accommodate two-way vehicular movement and provides limited visibility for both drivers and pedestrians, with an estimated visibility of approximately 12 metres in each direction. Situated around 45 metres from the junction with Hollow Lane, an area that experiences significant pedestrian and vehicular activity during school hours due to the proximity of Abbey College, adequate visibility is essential. A previous planning application (20/00496/FUL) for an adjacent site was withdrawn following the Local Highway Authority's (LHA) assessment that the access was unsuitable for intensified use without appropriate mitigation. The building's current intermittent use for storage results in minimal traffic generation; however, its conversion to residential use would lead to a notable increase in vehicle movements. Consequently, due to the constrained width and restricted visibility, the access is deemed inadequate to support any further intensification of use.

Ramsey Town Council - No objection. Ramsey Town Council voted 12 for and 2 against for the district council to approve this application. There are no neighbour objections.

The Town Council's consultation response in support of the proposal was not accompanied by any material planning considerations to justify their position.

Conservation Officer-Neither objecting nor supporting the application. An initial review of the application for the conversion of the outbuilding at 6 Abbey Rooms raises concerns about the accuracy of the proposal. The Google Street View image clearly shows a significant lean in the west wall, which is not reflected in the submitted drawings, where only the east wall is marked as "to remain." If the west wall is intended to be demolished and rebuilt, this should be explicitly stated, and the application may more appropriately be described as a demolition and new build within a conservation area. As such, there is concern that the proposal does not accurately reflect the existing condition of the structure.

REPRESENTATIONS

No third-party representations in support or objection to the development proposal have been received 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 on the Conservation Area
- Highways and Parking
- Residential amenity
- Biodiversity
- Other material considerations

*Principle of Development

The application site is located within the built-up area of the Market Town of Ramsey, which is defined by the Local Plan as a 'Spatial Planning Area'.

Local Plan Policy LP7 supports proposals for housing development (class 'C3') or for a residential institution use (class 'C2') will be supported where it is appropriately located within a built-up area of an identified Spatial Planning Area settlement.

The application site is visually, physically, and functionally integrated with the built-up area of Ramsey, surrounded by a mix of residential, leisure, and commercial uses. As such, the Local Planning Authority (LPA) is satisfied that the principle of converting the existing residential outbuilding into a one-bedroom dwelling within this sustainable settlement is acceptable. The proposal aligns with the objectives of sustainable development as set out in Local Plan Policies LP2 and LP7, as well as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

*Design, Visual Amenity and Impact on the Conservation Area

This application seeks to change the use of the residential outbuilding to the east of No.6 Abbey Rooms Lane in the Ramsey Conservation Area, whereby special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area as per Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. NPPF advice and Local Plan Policy LP 34 aligns with this statutory duty. Additionally, the building is located in proximity to several Listed Buildings whereby special regard shall be paid to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, as per Section 16(2) of the Planning (LBCA) Act 1990 (as amended).

Additionally, development proposals will be supported where it is demonstrated that it responds positively to its context (Local Plan Policy LP 11), is well designed and demonstrates that it contributes positively to the area's character and identity and successfully integrates with adjoining buildings and landscape (Local Plan Policy LP 12).

The Conservation Officer was also consulted on the application. Whilst the Officer did not raise an objection or support for the proposed change of use, the Officer did however note the proposal appears inconsistent with the building's current condition, as the west wall shows a significant lean not reflected in the drawings. If reconstruction is intended, the application should clarify this, potentially requiring reclassification as a new build within a conservation area. Due to the highways objection clarification was not sought as part of the application.

Notwithstanding this, the application proposes the conversion of a residential outbuilding into a single-storey, one-bedroom dwelling. This includes modifications to the southern and western elevations, such as replacing the barn-style garage door with full-height glazing and substituting a door on the western side with a window. Additionally, a small patio area is proposed at the front of the building to provide private outdoor amenity space. The full-height glazing proposed would be screened from public vantage from Abbey Rooms Lane via hedgerow planting. In the event this decision were challenged and overturned at appeal, details of boundary treatments would need to be secured by way of a planning condition.

The submitted elevation details indicate that the existing brick walls will be retained, with feather-edged boarding and softwood joinery stained black to match the existing finishes. A clay pantile roof is also proposed to reflect the existing roof material. Officers consider the proposed material palette to be sympathetic to the character and appearance of the conservation area. To ensure consistency, a condition is recommended requiring that all materials used in the fenestration alterations match those of the existing building.

Bin storage is proposed to be located at the front of the dwelling, beyond the private residential amenity space, and would be visible from the public realm. In the interest of preserving visual amenity, Officers recommend that a condition be imposed on any planning consent requiring the submission and approval of detailed bin storage arrangements.

Given the above, Officers consider the alterations to the building minor and therefore not considered to harm the setting of the nearby listed buildings and the character of the conservation area. The proposal is therefore considered to be in accordance with Local Plan Policies LP11, LP12 and LP34, Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and the NPPF.

*Highways and Parking
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.

Furthermore, Paragraph 116 of the NPPF states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.

The building subject to this application is located to the east of No.6 and is accessed off Abbey Rooms Lane. Abbey Rooms Lane accessed off the B1096 services various residential dwellings and businesses, some of which have their frontages along the B1096. As the application seeks to intensify the Abbey Rooms Lane/B1096 junction, Cambridgeshire County Council as the Local Highways Authority have been consulted on the application.

The LHA raised an objection to the proposal. The Officer raised concerns the proposed access from the B1096 High Street is inadequate, as it lacks sufficient width to support two-way vehicular movement and offers limited visibility, approximately 12 metres in each direction, for both drivers and pedestrians. Located just 45 metres from the Hollow Lane junction, which experiences high volumes of traffic and pedestrian activity during school hours due to the proximity of Abbey College, the need for clear visibility is critical. A previous application (20/00496/FUL) for a nearby site was

withdrawn after the Local Highway Authority (LHA) deemed the access unsuitable for intensified use without mitigation. Whilst the building is currently used intermittently for storage, generating minimal traffic, its conversion to residential use would significantly increase vehicle movements. Given the restricted width and poor visibility, the access is considered unsuitable for any further intensification.

During the course of the application, the applicants suggested that the conversion of the Sergeant's building (ref. 21/00138/P3JPA) and the closure of the golf club car park may have led to a reduction in traffic along Abbey Rooms Lane. However, the Highways Officer noted that, at the time of the Sergeant's change of use, the Local Highway Authority (LHA) had already deemed Abbey Rooms Lane unsuitable for further intensification. Moreover, the potential remains for the golf club car park to be reinstated in the future, which could increase traffic levels once again.

The applicants did however note that the Local Highway Authority (LHA) did not object to a previous application along Abbey Rooms Lane (ref: 18/02504/FUL), which proposed replacing a B2 industrial use with a single residential dwelling, resulting in an estimated 75-85% reduction in traffic generation. However, this application was determined on 18 March 2019, prior to the LHA's comments regarding the change of use of the Sergeant's building. It is also important to emphasise that each planning application is assessed on its own merits, and in that instance, the proposal involved the replacement of a commercial use, rather than the conversion of a residential outbuilding.

During the course of the application, the applicants also asserted that the outbuilding has been used for commercial storage. However, during the site visit, Officers observed that the building is currently divided in use: one section is utilised in connection with the applicant's construction business, while the other serves as a residential outbuilding associated with No. 6, which is let by the applicant. There is no planning history on record to confirm a lawful commercial use of the building. Therefore, for the purposes of this application, the building will be assessed as a residential outbuilding.

The submitted block plan does however delineate a space for the secure storage of one cycle, in accordance with Local Plan Policy LP17.

With regard to vehicle parking, the proposal includes the change of use of a small parcel of land located approximately 50 metres west of the outbuilding to serve as a dedicated parking space. The parcel is of sufficient size to accommodate a single vehicle, which is considered appropriate for the proposed one-bedroom dwelling. However, Officers have concerns regarding the large separation distance between the dwelling and the designated parking space and its lack of security and natural surveillance, and as such this could lead future occupants choosing to park in unsafe locations in closer proximity to the property causing further highway safety dangers.

In light of the above, the proposed intensification of use at the junction of Abbey Rooms Lane and the B1096 High Street is considered unacceptable. The site also lies in close proximity to Abbey College, where the B1096 experiences significant vehicular and pedestrian traffic during school start and finish times, making clear visibility and safe access essential. The existing junction is constrained by insufficient width for two-way vehicle movement and limited visibility, which poses a risk to highway safety. The proposal would result in an increase in vehicle movements of this substandard access, exacerbating these existing safety issues. As such, the development would have an unacceptable impact on highway safety due to the substandard access width and visibility and fails to provide adequate space for a safe vehicle parking to serve the needs of the dwelling, contrary to Policy LP17 of the Local Plan and Paragraph 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

*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.

Residential amenity for adjacent dwellings

The proposal includes replacing a door on the western elevation of the building with a window. Given the single-storey nature of the structure, this alteration is considered to have a negligible overlooking/privacy impact on neighbouring properties. However, as the window would serve a bathroom and be positioned along a route regularly used by the occupants of No. 6 to access their home, it is recommended that a condition be imposed, should the development be permitted, requiring the window to be fitted with obscure glazing to protect privacy.

Residential amenity for future occupants
In regard to the residential amenity for future occupants, all proposed habitable rooms of the property would be served with windows which offer acceptable levels of daylight and sunlight. It is also considered the proposed dwelling would provide a high standard of amenity for future residents in regard to internal and external residential amenity space for the following reasoning.

It is acknowledged by Officers that the new dwelling would have a shallow and narrow front garden of 3.4m in width and 4.8m in depth. Whilst the council does not have minimum standards for rear amenity space, page 237 of the HDC design guide raises questions to consider when designing single dwellings including 'has an adequate amount of amenity space been provided for each residential unit and is it of a shape, size and location to allow effective and practical use by residents?' The submitted site plan (dwg no. RH6/1B) demonstrates that there remains sufficient space for bin and cycle storage to accommodate the needs of future occupants of the proposed one-bedroom dwelling.

In addition to the bin and cycle storage the front/side garden would also provide some space, albeit limited, for wall mounted clothes dryers and outdoor seating (e,g bistro set). Furthermore, the proposed conversion would be a 1-bedroom dwelling meaning the number of occupants using the outdoor space would be limited. Officers are therefore satisfied sufficient outdoor amenity space would be provided for and would accord with LP12 and LP17 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan.

The proposal would have a gross internal area (GIA) of 37.2m² including a shower room, which accords with the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) for a 1-bedroom, 1-storey, 1-person dwelling. It should also be noted this application relates to the conversion of an existing building, rather than the construction of a new dwelling. In this context, and given the constraints of converting an existing structure, the internal space proposed is acceptable.

Overall, the proposal is not considered to have an unacceptable impact on the residential amenity of neighbours or the future occupants of the dwellinghouse and therefore accords with Local Plan Policy LP14.

*Biodiversity
Paragraph 187 of the NPPF (2024) states planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. Policy LP30 of the Local Plan dovetails this and 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.

Given the application site primarily comprises of unsealed and sealed hard surfaces, the site is of low ecological value. The application does not seek to extend the existing residential outbuilding, however, may form approximately 12m2 additional hard surfacing to accommodate the single vehicle parking space. The proposal would therefore not result in adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity and accord with the objectives of Policy LP30.

As of the 2nd April 2024 mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) was imposed on small sites. As the application does not seek to extend the existing annex or create additional hardstanding areas, the Council are satisfied the development would not impact a priority habitat and impacts less than 25 square metres (e.g. 5m by 5m) of onsite habitat, and 5 metres of linear habitats and is therefore BNG exempt per the de minimums threshold.

*Other material planning considerations
Wheeled Bins
Part H of the Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (2011) requires a payment towards refuse bins for new residential development. A Unilateral Undertaking to secure the provision of wheeled bins does not accompany this application. The proposal therefore fails to accord with Policy LP4 of the Local Plan and the Developer Contributions SPD (2011).

*Other matters
A revised NPPF was published in December 2024, introducing a substantially revised methodology for calculating local housing need and the reimposition of this as a mandatory approach for establishing housing requirements. This has resulted in the Council being unable to demonstrate a 5 Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS). While no 5YHLS can be demonstrated the Local Plan policies concerned with the supply and location of housing as set out in the Development Strategy chapter (policies LP2, LP7, LP8, LP9 and LP10) of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 are considered to be out-of-date (at the time of writing) and can no longer be afforded full weight in the determination of planning applications.

As a result of this, the presumption in favour of sustainable development is applied for decision-taking in accordance with paragraph 11 (d) and footnote 8 of the NPPF in relation to applications involving the provision of dwellinghouses. This is generally referred to as 'the titled balance'.

NPPF para 11 states:
'Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.
For decision-taking this means:
d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance (7) provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed; or*
ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.

7 Foot note 7 states: The policies referred to are those in this Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 194) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, a National Landscape, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 75); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.'*

The Council is able to proceed to the second stage of assessment, commonly referred to as the 'tilted balance', as outlined in paragraph 11(d)(ii) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This is because the proposed development is not considered to result in harm to habitat sites (including those listed in paragraph 194), Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Green Spaces, irreplaceable habitats, designated heritage assets (or other heritage assets of archaeological interest as referenced in footnote 75), or areas at risk of flooding. Accordingly, the application is deemed to satisfy the first test set out in paragraph 11(d)(i) of the NPPF.

Conclusion and planning balance
Planning law requires that applications for planning permission are to be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

In terms of the economic dimension of sustainable development, the proposal would contribute towards economic growth, including job creation - during the construction phase and in the longer term through the additional population assisting the local economy through spending on local services/facilities. Moderate weight is afforded to this.

The application site constitutes a sustainable location for the scale of development proposed in respect of access to local employment opportunities, services and facilities within Ramsey; and is accessible by sustainable transport modes. Moderate weight is afforded to this.

The proposed conversion to a single residential dwelling would contribute to the districts housing supply. Limited weight is afforded to this.

Notwithstanding the above, the proposed intensification of use at the junction of Abbey Rooms Lane and the B1096 High Street is considered unacceptable and would pose significant and demonstrable harm. This identified harm is considered to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

Having regard for all relevant material considerations, it is concluded that the proposal would not accord with local and national planning policy. Therefore it is recommended that planning permission be refused for the following reason.

1. The proposed intensification of use at the junction of Abbey Rooms Lane and the B1096 High Street by this additional dwelling is considered to be unacceptable in highway safety terms. The existing access from the B1096 is of insufficient width to allow two way vehicle movements and has limited pedestrian and vehicle visibility. The site lies in close proximity to Abbey College, the B1096 experiences significant vehicular and pedestrian traffic, and in particular during school start and finish times, making adequate visibility and a safe width of accesses essential. The proposal would result in an increase in vehicle movements, intensifying this use of the existing substandard access. In addition, the single parking space to serve the proposed dwelling would be positioned too far from the house, with limited natural surveillance, which would likely lead to users of the dwelling parking choosing to park in unsafe locations in the vicinity of the site, leading to further highway safety dangers. As such, the development would have an unacceptable impact on highway safety due to the substandard access width and visibility and fails to provide adequate space for safe vehicle parking to serve the needs of the dwelling, contrary to Policy LP17 of the Local Plan and Paragraph 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

2.In the absence of a signed Unilateral Undertaking, the application fails to make an adequate provision for Wheeled Bins. The proposal therefore fails to accord with Policy LP4 of the Local Plan and part H of the Developer Contributions SPD (2011).

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