

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> December 2010
<b>Application Number</b>	E/10/1147/FUL
<b>Site Address</b>	Field Barn Off Fiddlers Hill Winterbourne Bassett Wilts
<b>Proposal</b>	Change of use of barns and conversion into three units of holiday accommodation and associated stabling
<b>Applicant</b>	Mr EJG White
<b>Town/Parish Council</b>	Broad Hinton and Winterbourne Bassett
<b>Grid Ref</b>	409950 173410
<b>Type of application</b>	Full Planning
<b>Case Officer</b>	Peter Horton

**Reason for the application being considered by Committee**

This application has been called to committee at the request of the Division Member, Cllr Mrs Milton.

**1. Purpose of Report**

To consider the recommendation that the application be refused for the reasons set out.

**2. Report Summary**

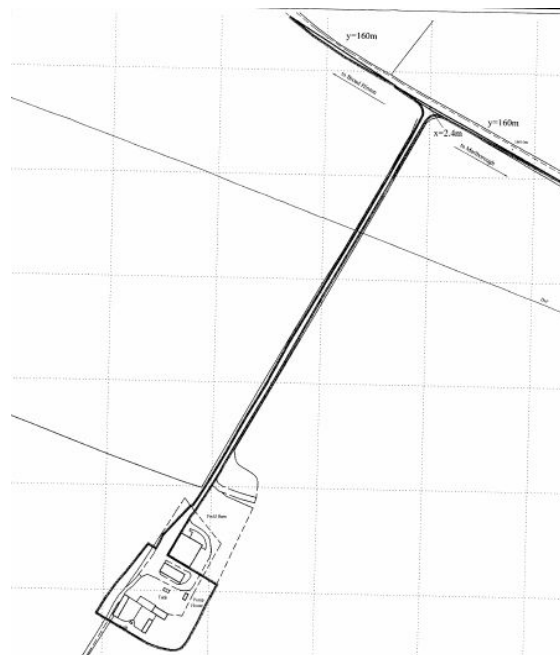
The main planning issues to consider are: the principle of conversion to holiday lets; the design of the proposed conversions; landscape impact; sustainability; highway safety.

**3. Site Description**

The application concerns a series of agricultural buildings situated 500m down an access track on the south side of the C class Broad Hinton to Marlborough road. This access track is situated 1.35km along from the junction of this road with the A4361 Avebury to Swindon road, below Hackpen Hill. It is an extremely isolated location within the arable landscape of the North



Wessex Downs AONB.



*Location Plan*

Three barns lie within the application site, two older masonry barns (barns 1 and 3) and one newer steel-framed metal sheeted barn (barn 2). A fourth barn lies just outside the red line.

The three barns are no longer required for agricultural use, being too small for modern agricultural machinery.

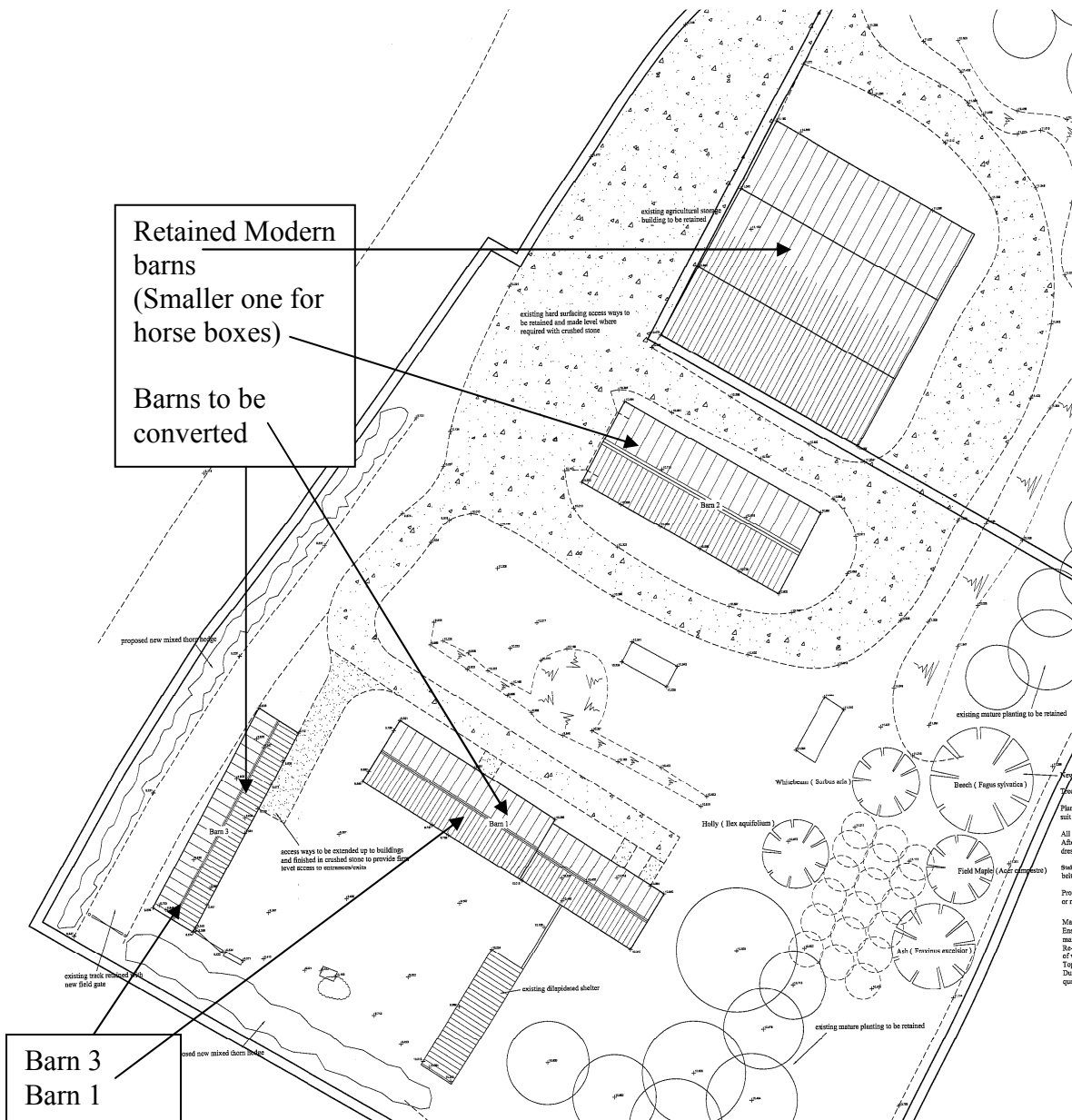
The buildings are partially surrounded by young and semi-mature trees but are generally exposed to views from Hackpen Hill and the Ridgeway and from the A4361 and minor roads and public rights of way in the vicinity.

#### **4. Planning History**

E/10/0025/FUL: Planning permission was refused in February 2010 for change of use of barns into live/work unit on the grounds of: (a) lack of agricultural justification for a dwelling in the countryside, and; (b) the proposed creation of a residential curtilage would be detrimental to the landscape character of the AONB.

#### **5. The Proposal**

The two older barns would be converted to provide three units of holiday accommodation (Two in barn 1 and one in barn 3). The newer metal sheeted barn would be adapted to provide for stabling horses (and the storage of any horseboxes) enabling those using the holiday accommodation to bring their horses with them and to ride on the local bridleway network. A fourth building, an open sided dutch barn, which lies just outside the red line, would be retained in agricultural use.



Site Plan

The applicant argues that the proposal would bring benefits to the local rural economy. He also argues that the conversion of the buildings would enhance the appearance of traditional vernacular barns.

There is an existing belt of trees on the eastern side of the site. This would be reinforced by additional planting, and native hedging planted around the perimeter of the site.

**6. Planning Policy**

Kennet Local Plan: - policies PD1, HC26, NR6 and NR7.

The Kennet Landscape Conservation Strategy and Landscape Character Assessment SPG.

Wiltshire & Swindon Structure Plan policy C8.

Central Government policy: PPS1, PPS4, PPS7, PPG13.

**7. Consultations**

Parish Council: - Objects. This is a residential development outside the current planning boundaries and would be to the detriment of the agricultural landscape and character of the AONB in which it sits. This is a large site in full view of the Ridgeway Path and has potential for

significant future development. The increase in traffic would be unwelcome. The habitat of the resident barn owls would be disturbed.

Wiltshire Council highways - No objection subject to a condition requiring the improvement of the existing visibility splays. This would require the removal of short lengths of hedging either side of the access.

AONB Officer: No comment subject to suitable conditions to control the use to holiday accommodation only.

Wiltshire Council Environmental Health: Requires conditions covering the storage and removal of manure, and prohibiting the burning of manure.

Wiltshire Council Ecologist: -Barn owl roosts would be lost from the conversion of barns 1 and 3. The submitted ecology report includes a number of recommendations for barn owls, including the provision of alternative roost features in the site. No objection subject to a planning condition to secure delivery of this.

Wiltshire Council Landscape Consultant: - Recommends refusal as the proposal will inevitably have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the landscape and AONB. The site is isolated from any other residential development. Therefore, the proposal does not comply with guidance contained in the Landscape Conservation Strategy and Landscape Character Assessment SPG which recommends that, where acceptable, residential development should be accommodated in conjunction with existing settlements. One of the Council's objectives for protecting the landscape set out on page 27 of the Landscape Conservation Strategy is "*to safeguard areas of special landscape quality from damaging change*". The site and surrounding fields are strictly in agricultural use and any residential development (whether holiday accommodation or other) resulting in the domestication of the farm yard would inevitably impact on the character and visual qualities of the area. Residential paraphernalia, the nature of the development, vehicular access and light spill would all contribute to detrimental impacts on the area. The proposal is thus contrary to guidance and policy contained in PPS7 relating to the protection of the AONB, and falls foul of the structure plan policy C8 relating to the protection of the AONB, and landscape protection policies NR6 and NR7 of the local plan.

## **8. Publicity**

The proposal has been advertised with a site notice.

## **9. Planning Considerations**

### **Principle of Conversion to Holiday Lets**

The site lies in the open countryside, where long standing national and local planning policies have laid down a general presumption against new residential development in the countryside unless to provide for the essential needs of agriculture or other employment essential to the countryside. For this reason, the previous application for residential development on the site was refused.

Apart from for the essential needs of agriculture, local plan policy HC26 provides for two other instances where residential development in the countryside may be acceptable: the conversion of a listed building at risk and the conversion of existing buildings to holiday accommodation: provided that the development does not affect the character of the local landscape.

Hence policy HC26 does not rule out the conversion of rural buildings to holiday accommodation. However whether this particular scheme is acceptable depends on compliance with other policies, particularly relating to landscape impact.

### **Highway Safety**

The proposal raises no highway safety concerns.

### **Design of the proposed conversions**

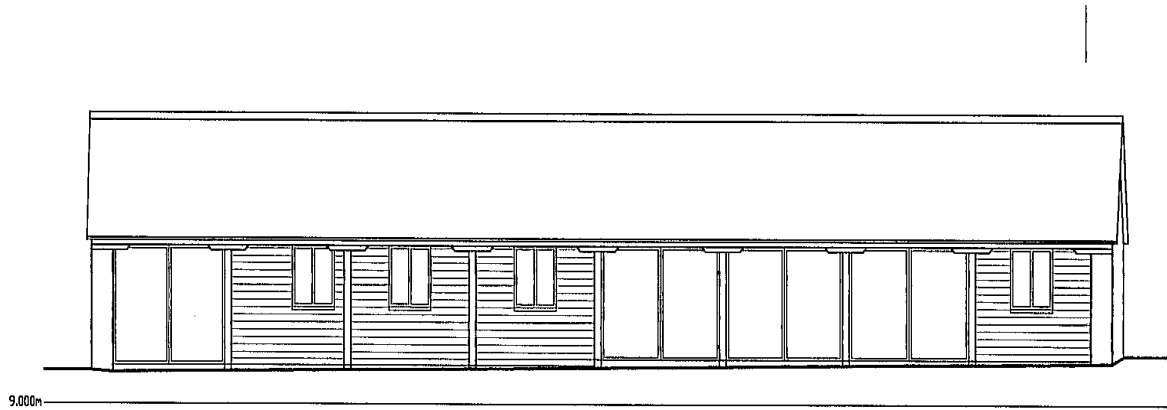
Local plan policy PD1 lays down a requirement for good design. The older barns would be converted within their existing footprints, with no extensions.

In order to retain the traditional feel of older barns, it is essential to minimise the amount of structural intervention, particularly with regard to whether conversion can be achieved without large scale reconstruction and also by minimising the insertion of new openings.



***Barn 3 – Existing, as viewed from the front***

Barn 3 is entirely open to the front and has a metal sheet roof held up by timber posts. The amount of work required to effect what the applicant calls a 'conversion' would require the construction of a completely new front and new roof, enclosing what is essentially an animal shelter to provide a unit of accommodation that would be out of character both with the original building and the surrounding landscape.



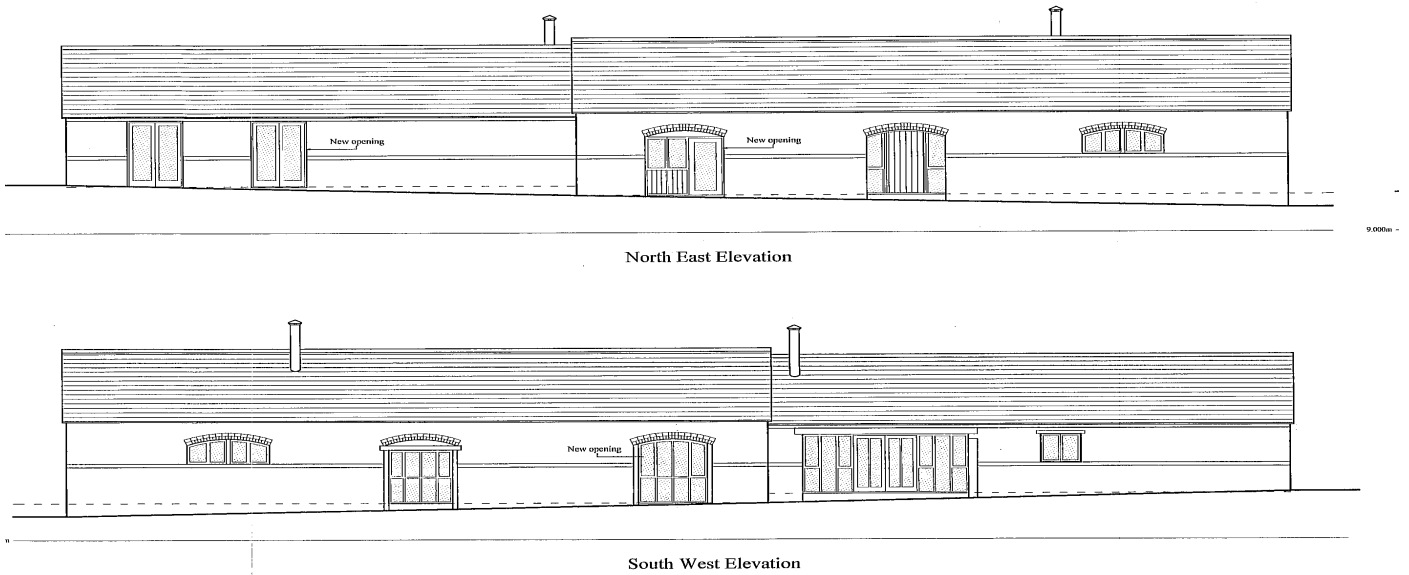
South East Elevation

***Barn 3- Proposed front***

Barn 1 is the larger of the older barns and would provide two units of residential accommodation. It is of more substantial construction than barn 3 and conversion could be achieved with less intervention. 3 new openings are proposed and the replacement of the existing corrugated roof with reconstructed slate. Whilst the replacement of the roof would be a visual improvement, the proposed new openings would result in a more domestic appearance to the building.



***Barn 1 – as existing***



***Barn 1, as proposed***

**Landscape Impact**

The site is extremely isolated from any other residential development and all the surrounding area is in arable production. It lies in the AONB so is extremely sensitive. Although the existing buildings are partially surrounded by various young and semi-mature trees, the site is generally exposed to views from Hackpen Hill and The Ridgeway and from the A4361 and minor roads and public rights of way in the vicinity.



***View of the site from Hackpen hill***

The site and surrounding fields are strictly in agricultural use and any conversion (whether

holiday accommodation or other) resulting in the domestication of the farm yard would inevitably impact on the character and visual qualities of the area.

The existing buildings, though not intrinsically attractive, have an agricultural character and are not out of place in the wider landscape. However the changes resulting from use for holiday purposes would have an impact on this part of the landscape where there is a notable absence of both buildings and residential uses. The addition of glazed doors and windows would introduce a domestic character and it would be difficult to eliminate light spilling into a whole swathe of the AONB currently free of artificial light.

One of the concerns with the previous application was that the creation of a residential curtilage in such an otherwise exclusively agricultural landscape would be detrimental to the landscape character of the area. Although no curtilages are specifically proposed for the holiday lets, it would be difficult to prevent occupiers and their visitors from extending their activities outdoors, perhaps using their own equipment. Such activity would add to the domestication of the site.

Whilst the applicant's intention to direct parking to within barn 2 is welcomed, this would be impossible to enforce and some vehicles would inevitably park in the open, to the detriment of the rural character of the area. In conclusion, the domesticating effects of use as holiday lets would detract from the qualities the AONB designation is intended to preserve.

The applicant has sought to address these concerns by proposals to reinforce the existing tree belt with 5 standard trees, as well as the planting of mixed native hedging along the southern and western boundaries of the site. However the Council's Landscape Consultant considers that this would have little mitigating impact for many years. Even when mature, the use of the agricultural track and parking areas by domestic vehicles would not be ameliorated.

There is no justification under current landscape policy and guidance for allowing the development of holiday accommodation on the site, which would inevitably have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the AONB.

### **Sustainability**

The application raises the question of whether this is a suitable or sustainable location for holiday accommodation.

PPS1 para 3 states that "sustainable development is the core principle underpinning planning".

PPS4 sets out central government planning policy on "sustainable economic growth". It replaces previous government planning policy on economic development in rural areas which was set out in PPS7. PPS4 indicates that tourism proposals are economic development. PPS4 policies EC6, EC7 and EC12 are particularly relevant.

Policy EC6.2a states that local planning authorities should control economic development in open countryside away from existing settlements.

Policy EC6.2c states that local planning authorities should: "support the conversion and re-use of appropriately located and suitably constructed existing buildings in the countryside (particularly those adjacent or closely related to towns or villages) for economic development".

However policy EC7.1b does not rule out conversions of existing buildings outside of existing settlements, stating that local planning authorities should "wherever possible, locate tourist and visitor facilities in existing or replacement buildings, particularly where they are located outside existing settlements". Furthermore, policy EC12.1b recognises that "a site may be an acceptable location for development even though it may not be readily accessible by public transport".

So whilst PPS4 favours the concentration of economic development in sites in or closely related to existing settlements, it does not rule out developments in more remote locations. It is for local planning authorities to assess each case on its merits and to make a reasoned judgement when assessing individual planning applications.



The site is in an extremely isolated location, being located 500m down a farm track off a minor C Class Road. There is no public transport provision. All people renting the properties would drive there. Further trips would be needed for day to day shopping needs and for trips out for anyone using the site as a base for longer tourism visits.

Broad Hinton is located some 2.5km away along roads not benefiting from pedestrian footways or street lighting. These factors would deter occupants of the proposed holiday accommodation from cycling or walking to access local services: the use of motorised transport would predominate. Irrespective of the length or duration of such trips, this would be inconsistent with the underlying sustainability objectives of government planning policy.

This particular site is not an inherently sustainable one. It is just so isolated and remote and is considered irreconcilable with the overarching requirement to uphold the principles of sustainable development which pervade prevailing planning policy.

**10. Conclusion**

Barn 3 is inappropriate for a residential conversion, as the works required are so extensive and the character of the building so altered by them that the proposal is unacceptable.

Barn 1 has more merit, in that the building is more solid and can be converted without an adverse impact on the appearance of the building.

However, the overall impact on the character and appearance of the landscape from the conversion of these buildings, particularly at this density, is unacceptable and the isolation of the buildings makes the proposal unsustainable.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That planning permission be refused for the following reasons:

1	The 'conversion' of the building identified as barn 3 would have a fundamental and adverse impact on its character and appearance, changing it from an open fronted shelter to a fully enclosed building. The proposed use of barns 1 and 3 for holiday purposes would have an adverse visual impact on this remote and exclusively agricultural landscape within the North Wessex Downs AONB where there is a notable absence of both buildings and residential uses, to the detriment of the landscape character of the area. The domesticating effects of the proposed use of such inappropriately located buildings would therefore detract from the qualities the AONB designation is intended to preserve, particularly when viewed from Hackpen Hill and The Ridgeway. The proposal is therefore contrary to policies NR6 and NR7 to the Kennet Local Plan, to the adopted "Kennet Landscape Conservation Strategy" supplementary planning guidance, to Wiltshire & Swindon Structure Plan policy C8 and to central government planning policy set out in PPS7. It therefore follows that the proposal is also contrary to Kennet Local Plan policy HC26, which does not permit the conversion of existing buildings to holiday accommodation when there is harm to the character of the local landscape.
2	The use of such a remote, isolated and generally inappropriately located site for holiday accommodation would be inconsistent with the underlying sustainability objectives of central government planning policy, which sets out a clear preference for the location of economic development in rural areas to sites in or closely related to established settlements.

**Appendices:**  
**Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:**

None.  
 Application particulars and policy documents.