



# ROBINSON ESCOTT PLANNING LLP



CHARTERED TOWN PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS

DOWNE HOUSE, 303 HIGH STREET, ORPINGTON, KENT BR6 ONN, TEL:01689 836334 FAX: 01689 878091

Email: [enquiries@replanning.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@replanning.co.uk) Website: [www.replanning.co.uk](http://www.replanning.co.uk)

## APPLICATION FOR FULL PLANNING PERMISSION

BY

**WILLIAMS GROUP LIMITED**

RELATING TO

**CULLS FARM  
DEAN STREET  
EAST FARLEIGH  
MAIDSTONE  
KENT  
ME15 0PS**

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**PLANNING STATEMENT**

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**OUR REF: PH/20/105**

JOHN ESCOTT BA (HONS) DipTP MRTPI PETE HADLEY BA (HONS) DipTP MRTPI JOE ALDERMAN MA MRTPI  
NEAL THOMPSON BSc (HONS) MSc MRTPI RACHEL ESCOTT BA (HONS) DipTP  
CONSULTANT: BOB MCQUILLAN BA (HONS) MCD MRTPI MRICS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. We have been instructed by Williams Group Ltd to prepare a Planning Statement to accompany an application for the demolition of existing vehicle workshops and the erection of 10 No. dwelling houses and 1 No. commercial office building on land at Culls Farm, Dean Street Maidstone Kent, ME15 0PS.
- 1.2. This application has been prepared in accordance with best practice following the guidance contained within Section 4 of the National Planning Policy Framework with pre-application advice obtained from Maidstone Borough Council in May 2020 prior to plans being finalised and additional supportive reports commissioned.
- 1.3. In accordance with pre application advice received, this Planning Statement is accompanied by the following supportive reports:
- Drainage Strategy and Maintenance Requirements – Hodel Consulting Engineers
  - Land Contamination Report – Sevenoaks Environmental Consultancy
  - Sustainability & Energy Statement – Blue Sky Unlimited
  - Transport Assessment – Motion Transport Consults
  - Landscape Visual Assessment – JFA Environmental Planning
  - Preliminary Ecological Appraisal – Native Ecology
  - Archaeological Desk Based Assessment - HCUK
  - Design and Access Statement – Offset Architects
  - Complete drawings set – Offset Architects
  - Viability Assessment – Montagu Evans
- 1.4. The case for planning permission focuses on the site comprising previously developed /brownfield land and how the development represents an acceptable redevelopment of the site in light of its position outside the limits to built development and within the countryside.
- 1.5. This statement confirms how the application plans have considered all relevant planning policy along with the Council's pre application advice was provided and confirms that the



proposals are policy compliant and that the proposals represent a sustainable form of development.

- 1.6. As part of this assessment, all relevant planning policy contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) and the Maidstone Borough Local Plan (2017) has been duly considered.

2. **THE APPLICATION SITE**

2.1. The application site measures some 0.75 hectares in size with the lawful use of land and buildings comprising a vehicle repair and sales centre including substantial buildings, along with expansive areas used for the open storage of vehicles. The existing lawful use fall under B2 Use Class (General Industrial).



Aerial image showing site

2.2. The site is located outside the limits to built development of Maidstone with the town located to the north of the site and Maidstone town centre being approximately 3.5km away. The village of Coxheath which is served by shops and local services including public transport is located 0.5 km to the south.

- 2.3. The site is currently home to 5581m<sup>3</sup> of existing building volume, 112.5m<sup>2</sup> of building footprint and the premises currently have a total gross external floor area of 1120.5m<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the site is served by some 5338m<sup>2</sup> of existing hardstanding.
- 2.4. As the Council confirmed in providing pre-application advice, the site comprises previously developed land (brownfield land).
- 2.5. In terms of land designations, the Adopted Maidstone Borough Local Plan (2017) confirms that the land is positioned outside the limits to built development but no other restrictive policy applies to the area, although this part of the Borough is defined as being within the KCC Mineral Safeguarding Area.
- 2.6. Culls Farm is located on the western side of Dean Street and is accessed via a substantial driveway leading from the highway.
- 2.7. The existing workshop buildings are positioned away from residential properties to the east which front Dean Street with the northern, western, and southern boundaries adjoining open land.
- 2.8. There are no public rights of way across the site although there is an existing footpath to the northeast. Full photographs of the site can be seen within the accompanying Design and Access Statement provided by Offset Architects.

### 3. PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

- 3.1. The application has been prepared following two detailed rounds of pre-application advice with Maidstone Borough Council. The most recent pre application advice received was obtained on 1 May 2020 following a virtual meeting on 20 April 2020. The pre application advice reference for this submission was 20/501343/PAMEET
- 3.2. A copy of the pre application advice provided can be seen in **APPENDIX 1** of this statement and the pre app layout submitted is detailed below:



- 3.3. This scheme for which pre application advice was sought proposed the demolition of the existing buildings on the site and the erection of 15 dwellings along with a Class B1 (a) commercial office.
- 3.4. The advice provided acknowledged that the site has access to Dean Street and is 0.5km away from the outer edge of Coxheath (that is defined as the larger village in the

Maidstone Borough Local Plan). It was noted that Coxheath had some local services and that the site would have access to two local bus routes.

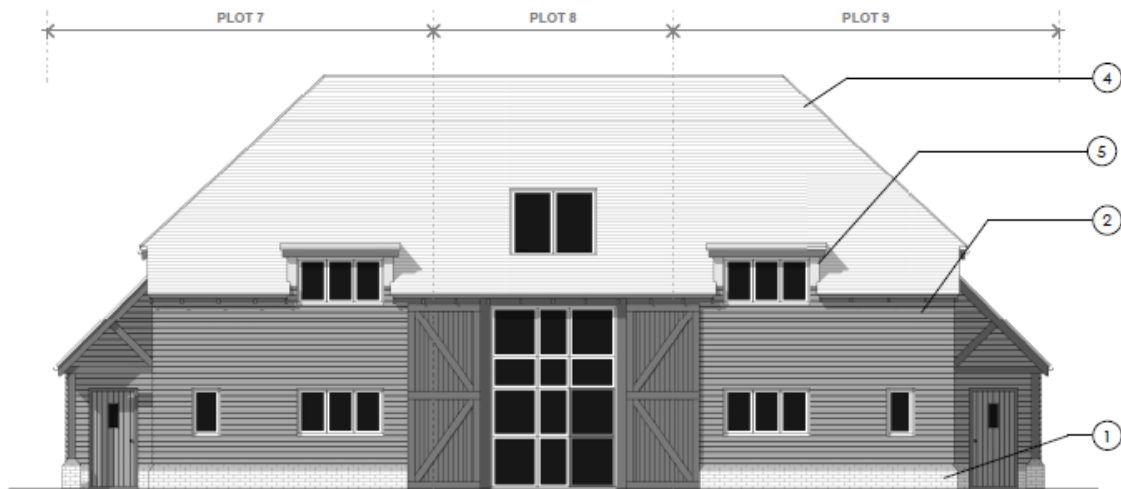
- 3.5. In relation to the principle of development, the advice confirmed the sites position within the Countryside noting the terms of policy SP17 of the Local Plan. The advice accepted that the site was previously developed land and that Policy DM5 of the Local Plan supports the proposals for residential development on this type of land which would result in significant environmental improvements to the site. This is on the proviso that the site is accessible by sustainable modes to a rural service centre or larger village and also on the proviso that the land is not of high environmental value. The Council acknowledged that this site was not of high environmental value.
- 3.6. In relation to sustainability, the advice noted that positive pre-application advice has been received previously from KCC Highways on a leaser scheme of 9 units. As this scheme proposes 15 dwelling the matter of sustainability would need to be carefully looked at.
- 3.7. In relation to the quantum of built form proposed at the pre application stage, the Council noted that there would be an increase in volume of some 12.2% an increase in footprint of some 6.2% and a significant floor space increase. The advice provided was that the volume of footprint of any proposal should not be greater than the existing, but floor area was not such a significant material consideration.
- 3.8. The advice was also provided that the development showed a greater spread of housing units onto the land that does not have buildings on it and that this would need to be justified in the context of Policies SP17 & DM6.
- 3.9. In terms of the layout, the Council wished to see an amended proposal better reflecting the positive aspects of the character and appearance of the locality, advising that the layout should be more rural courtyard and less estate like design. It was also recommended that parking should not dominate the street scene.
- 3.10. The advice recommended that a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment be undertaken in order to demonstrate that the new dwellings would not have a greater impact on the surrounding rural areas than existing buildings.

- 3.11. In terms of architectural design, a traditional vernacular was recommended with high quality materials that would appear in keeping with a 'farmstead' style.
- 3.12. Overall, it was recommended that a scheme with slightly fewer, albeit larger units might be an option worth pursuing in light of the above points that were raised.
- 3.13. The pre-app advice contained further guidance in terms of access, highway, and transport and this has been considered by the accompanying Transport Assessment by Motion. It also provided guidance in relation to affordable housing provision with this now the subject of a Viability Assessment that accompanies this Statement.
- 3.14. The advice concluded by setting the scene in terms of the reports that would need to be submitted with the formal application with these having since been commissioned and which accompany this statement.



#### 4. **THE PROPOSALS**

- 4.1. The application now submitted takes into consideration the pre application advice previously provided by the Council as detailed above with the design amended accordingly.
- 4.2. The application now proposes a reduced development of 10 dwellings including larger properties, set around a courtyard area, in conjunction with a traditionally designed office building of chalet style design incorporating 161m<sup>2</sup> of rental office space.
- 4.3. The proposal would see the use of the existing access onto Dean Street retained that will then lead into a simple loop road allowing access for residents and service/refuse vehicles alike.
- 4.4. The dwellings would comprise 5 detached four-bedroom family homes, 2 detached three-bedroom dwellings, and 2 three-bedroom and 1 two-bedroom properties contained within a single terrace.
- 4.5. The plans and elevations provided by Offset Architects detail that the dwellings have been designed to have a rural appearance in order to appear as a farmstead style development following the Council's pre application advice received in this regard. The design of the properties include a row of barn style terraced houses of two storey design, with first floor accommodation within the roof space, two storey traditional properties of brickwork and tile hanging with ragstone detailing and chalet style dwellings of a barn style design. In addition, the office suite would also have a traditional rural appearance in keeping with the Kentish vernacular.



**4 FRONT (EAST) ELEVATION**  
Scale 1 : 100

Front elevation of terrace of 3 properties (plots 7, 8 & 9) showing barn style design

- 4.6. In order to address the Council's previous concerns in terms of the pre-app scheme in relation to volume footprint and hardstanding, the revised proposal for 10 dwellings would see the following benefits:
- A 0.1 reduction in volume
  - A 14% reduction in footprint
  - A 36% reduction in hardstanding
- 4.7. The reduction in hardstanding and footprint allows for a comprehensive landscape scheme to form an integral part of the design with built form purposely set away from sensitive boundaries with open land to the north, west and south, where landscaping will be enhanced. Elsewhere on the site, existing landscaping will be preserved and also added to.
- 4.8. The plans would incorporate a communal area of open space as required by policy and the design seeks to avoid suburban style forecourt parking in order to give the proposal a less 'estate' feel.

- 4.9. The density of development with 10 dwellings provided would be 13.3 dwellings per hectare which strikes a balance between making an efficient use of the land and providing a development that responds to the rural character of the site and the farmstead feel that as recommended by the Local Planning Authority.

5. **RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 5.1. Relevant planning policy to the assessment of this application principally comprises that contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) along with the contents of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan (2017) focusing on those policies of the Local Plan that have been referenced within the Council's pre-application advice.

**National Planning Policy Framework (2019)**

- 5.2. The National Planning Policy Framework seeks to encourage sustainable development and looks for local Planning Authorities to increase the supply of housing.
- 5.3. In relation to decision making, Section 4 of the Framework recognises the importance of early engagement with Local Planning Authorities. In accordance with best practice, this application has been prepared following the receipt of two rounds of detailed pre-application advice from Maidstone Borough Council.
- 5.4. Section 5 concerns the delivery of a sufficient supply of homes, with paragraph 68 recognising that small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirements of an area and are often built out relatively quickly.
- 5.5. In relation to the provision of affordable housing, this states that it should not be sought for residential developments that are not major development, and to support the reuse of brownfield land where vacant buildings are being reused or redeveloped, any affordable housing contribution due should be reduced by a proportionate amount. The matter of affordable housing provision and the fact that this application involves the redevelopment of a previously developed site has resulted in a Viability Appraisal being commissioned in this case, which accompanies this statement.
- 5.6. In relation to rural housing, Paragraph 78 seeks to promote housing delivery in sustainable rural areas stating they should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.

- 5.7. Section 9 of the Framework concerns the promotion of sustainable transport and this is duly considered by the accompanying policy assessment contained within the Transport Statement provided by Motion.

***Maidstone Borough Local Plan (2017)***

- 5.8. The spatial objectives of this document include a need to safeguard and maintain the character of the Borough's landscapes, and to ensure new development is of a high quality making a positive contribution to the area in which it is to be situated.
- 5.9. Policy SS1 sets out the Borough's spatial strategy and this includes the goal of providing at least 17,660 new dwellings by 2031. In addition to this, the Council is also looking to boost the supply of available office space within the Borough.
- 5.10. Policy SP11 was referenced in the Council's pre-application advice with this defining the nearest village of Coxheath (within walking distance) as forming one of the larger villages within the borough. Here there is a range of shops and local services and it is reasonable to describe Coxheath as being in a sustainable and accessible location as a result.
- 5.11. Policy SP17 refers to the countryside with this stating that development proposals in such locations will not be permitted unless they accord with other policies in the plan and that would not result in harm to the character and appearance of the area. The policy does however seek to support sustainable development in rural areas as well as looking to encourage the rural economy.
- 5.12. Policy SP19 concerns dwelling mix with the Council looking to seek a sustainable range of housing sizes where new development is proposed. Policy is to be read in conjunction with the Council's Affordable Housing Policies.
- 5.13. Policy SP20 relates to affordable housing and specifies this is to be sought on development of 11 residential units or more or which have a combined floor space of greater than 1000sqm. It recommends that affordable housing should be appropriately integrated within the site, but in exceptional circumstances, offsite provision will be

sought, and this can include a financial contribution towards the provision of affordable homes.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the latest guidance on affordable housing that is contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 5.14. Policy SP21 concerns economic development with this supporting the regeneration and expansion of existing economic development premises with it looking to support proposals for economic development in rural areas.
- 5.15. Policy SP22 related to the retention of employment sites, with this looking at those sites that are listed and those sites within the designated economic development areas. These designated areas do not include the application site. However, the retention of some form of employment use does form part of the proposals in light of the office provision that is included. There will therefore be no loss of employment on the site were permission granted.
- 5.16. Policy SP23 - Sustainable Development is reviewed in detail within the accompanying statement by Motion Transport Consultants.
- 5.17. In relation to development management, Policy DM1 outlines the principles of good design, with this requiring for all development to be of the highest quality responding positively to the character and appearance of the local area in which it is situated. The policy also seeks for need development to create high quality public realm whilst respecting the amenities and occupiers of surrounding properties. It states that development should have regard to the existing landscape value of the surrounding area and should also look to protect biodiversity and requires for any new proposals to provide adequate storage of waste including the provision for increased recyclable waste. It also seeks for adequate vehicular and cycle parking to meet adopted Council standards.
- 5.18. Policy DM2 refers to sustainable design measures that are sought by the local Planning Authority. Therefore, in accordance with this policy, a Sustainability and Energy Statement is provided by Blue Sky unlimited. This confirms compliance with policy DM2 is achieved.

- 5.19. Policy DM3 concerns the boroughs natural environment requiring the landscape character of important areas within the Borough to be recognised and it also seeks to ensure that no unacceptable harm to any protected species is caused. In accordance with the terms of this policy, this application is accompanied by a detailed landscape Character Appraisal in conjunction with a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.
- 5.20. Policy DM5 is a key policy to the Council's assessment as outlined within pre application advice. This focuses on development on brownfield land. It is accepted by the Council that the site comprises brownfield land, in accordance with the definition contained within the Annex of the National Planning Policy Framework (previously developed land).
- 5.21. This policy prescribes that exceptionally the residential redevelopment of brownfield sites in the countryside which are not residential gardens will be permitted provided the redevelopment will result in a significant environmental improvement to the site, and provided the site is accessible by sustainable modes to Maidstone urban area, a rural service area or a larger village. In providing pre-application advice, the Council noted the sites proximity to the defined larger village of Coxheath.
- 5.22. Redevelopments of this nature are only acceptable where the site is not of a high environmental value. If the scheme is for residential development the density of new housing should reflect the character and appearance of the individual locality in question and be of an appropriate design having regard to its context.
- 5.23. Policy DM12 concerns the density of housing development and seeks in principle for sites around the rural service areas and larger villages to achieve a density of 30 dwellings per hectare. However, this is to be read in conjunction with policy DM5 where sites in countryside locations are being considered. Here, a lower density of development is to be expected which explains and justifies the density proposed in this case of 13.3 dwellings per hectare. This strikes a balance between making an efficient use of the land and appearing in keeping with the rural setting of the site and its surroundings.

- 5.24. Policy DM19 focuses on open space and recreation with provision expected to be provided on a new development unless a financial contribution in lieu of open space provision is agreed. In this case, the plans would incorporate the provision of an area of communal open space to the north of plot 6 and south of plot 7.
- 5.25. Policies DM21 & DM23 focuses on assessing the transport impact of the development and the Council's parking standards. The accompanying report by Motion Transport Consultants sets the scene in this regard and confirms the sites acceptability on both of these issues.



## 6. PLANNING ASSESSMENT

- 6.1. As detailed in the introduction to this statement, the application has been prepared in accordance with best practice with pre-application advice sought from the Local Planning Authority prior to the final plans now being submitted.
- 6.2. In providing pre-application advice, the Council accepts that the site comprises previously developed land within a rural area and that policy support exists for the redevelopment of such sites for housing where they can be justified in accordance with policy DM5 & all other relevant policy considerations. Within this context, there is no objection in principle to the redevelopment of the site to provide new homes.

### *Layout*

- 6.3. It is acknowledged that the redevelopment of brownfield land will only be acceptable where proposals are sensitively designed and where a proposal would result in an improvement to the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings.
- 6.4. At pre-application stage the Council raised concerns that 15 dwellings on the land could amount to an overdevelopment of the site and concerns were also expressed that the footprint of the 15 houses and office space shown was larger than existing built form and footprint to be removed.
- 6.5. The application now submitted reduces the number of dwellings to 10 which in turn significantly reduces the density of development to reflect the sites rural context. The plans will now see an overall reduction of 0.1% in terms of volume compared to existing buildings to be demolished along with a 14% reduction in footprint. In addition, compared to the existing uses on the land, the plans would incorporate a 30% reduction in hardstanding that would in turn benefit how the site can be sensitively landscaped.
- 6.6. The density proposed considers the terms of policy DM5 with it being 13.3 dwellings per hectare. The low-density development is to be positioned around a central courtyard

area with the design of the proposed dwellings now reflecting the farmstead style development as recommended by the Council during the pre-application advice process.

### ***Design***

- 6.7. The Council will see that the farmstead style design incorporates the provision of dwellings of bespoke and traditional rural design. This will include the use of weatherboarding, traditional bricks, tile hanging and flagstone. The varied architectural detailing for the houses and the office suite that has been employed incorporates barn style dwellings and properties that would appear in keeping with a “farmstead” style development in order to ensure that development is in keeping with the rural vernacular and the density of surrounding built form that can be seen within this part of Dean Street.
- 6.8. The density and style of development would also reflect and respond to the character of existing residential properties located immediately to the east.

### ***Accessibility***

- 6.9. In order to ensure compliance with policy relating to the redevelopment of previously developed land is achieved, it is necessary to demonstrate that the site is sustainable and appropriate to the development as proposed.
- 6.10. The accompanying report by Motion Transport Consultants confirms that the application represents a sustainable form of development particularly when compared to the likely vehicle movements etc associated with the existing car workshop and showroom.
- 6.11. The report details the sites proximity to local shops and services and confirms that acceptable access to the site will be achieved as will appropriate car parking provision.
- 6.12. The report confirms that the proposals will result in a reduction in traffic flow on the surrounding highway when compared to the existing use and there are therefore no reasons why the proposal should be resisted on traffic or transportation grounds.

- 6.13. It is reasonable to conclude that the application represents a sustainable form of development that is worthy of support in this regard. This conclusion is further supported by the reduction in the number of dwellings that was sought by the Local Planning Authority in the most recent round of pre-application advice.

### ***Employment***

- 6.14. It is acknowledged that the application involves the redevelopment of a current site in business use. The retention of some kind of employment use on site has therefore formed an integral part of the development proposals.
- 6.15. The high-quality office space which forms part of the development plans would accord with the thrust of the Council's strategic policies which seek to increase the availability of office space within the Borough. The provision of the office units would ensure that there is no loss of employment use on the land and the proposed new offices will support the rural economy in this location.

### ***The Landscape***

- 6.16. In order for the application to be supported by officers it is necessary to assess the landscape impact of the proposed development when compared to sites current appearance.
- 6.17. This statement is therefore accompanied by a detailed Landscape Appraisal. This concludes that the impact of the proposal on the wider landscape have been duly considered and the sensitive design approach employed represents a development that is appropriate to the sites rural setting.
- 6.18. This, coupled with the reduction in volume, footprint and hardstanding taking into consideration the business uses to be removed and the additional landscaping to be introduced would ensure that the redevelopment of the site enhances its appearance and the rural setting of this location. The development will therefore have an acceptable relationship with the surrounding landscape and would also improve the appearance of the site.

### ***Amenity***

- 6.19. All of the dwellings proposed have been prepared to comply with the Nationally Described Space Standards in terms of their overall internal layout. Furthermore, all dwellings would be afforded their own rear gardens and an acceptable degree of outlook from all habitable windows.
- 6.20. The development has been designed in order to ensure that no dwellings would overlook one another with sufficient space standards preserved. Furthermore, none of the proposed new dwellings would overlook any existing residential properties, and therefore no harm to the amenities and privacy of existing homes would be caused.
- 6.21. Taking these factors into account, compliance with development management policy DM1 is achieved.

### ***Affordable housing***

- 6.22. This statement is accompanied by a detailed Financial Viability Appraisal that has been undertaken by Montagu Evans. The report acknowledged that the application would in policy terms trigger a requirement for provision to be made towards affordable housing.
- 6.23. The report comprehensively reviews the financial viability of the scheme and confirms that in order to comprise a viable development, the development is unable to support the provision of any affordable housing.

### ***Other Matters***

- 6.24. In accordance with pre application advice, this statement is accompanied by a comprehensive Drainage Strategy along with a comprehensive Sustainability and Energy Statement.
- 6.25. The application is also accompanied by a comprehensive preliminary Ecological Report with this confirming that no harm to any protected species would occur and that the

redevelopment of the site would provide opportunities for ecological enhancements that can be secured via planning condition.

- 6.26. The Archaeological Appraisal provided confirms that no harm to matters of significance in this regard would be caused.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The application has been prepared in accordance with best practice and the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework with pre-application advice obtained from the Council prior to the submission of the application.
- 7.2 Pre-application advice received has guided the nature of the design with the plans now proposing a residential development with a farmstead appearance. The density of development has been reduced in order to accord with the thrust of local planning policy whilst having regard to local context.
- 7.3.1 The plans include the provision of office floor space in order to ensure there isn't a loss of employment on site.
- 7.4 The development is sustainable as supported by the accompanying Transport Statement which also confirms the use of the access is acceptable and parking will be provided in accordance with the Council's adopted standards.
- 7.5 The proposals would not harm the amenities of any existing properties and the supportive information provided demonstrates that no harm to the character and surrounding landscape would occur.
- 7.6 The application would enhance the site and deliver new family homes towards to the Council's housing target.