

Planning Application 23/00580/F: Conversion of existing agricultural barns including change of use (C3) to a private detached dwelling and associated works at Barns North of Thornham Road, Holme-next-the-Sea Norfolk

Planning Committee, Thursday 16 November 2023

Holme-next-the-Sea Parish Council

Late correspondence for the attention of Members

1.1 Consultation and planning policy issues

- 1.1.1 Members may already be aware that the PC has raised concerns that the recommendation to approve this application was made prior to the end of the consultation period and prior to the PC's consultation response.
- 1.1.2 In these circumstances it appears that within the Officer Report
- i) Comments made on behalf of the community providing local knowledge and perspective have been (partially) listed but not addressed
 - ii) An inaccurate view of reality has been accepted
 - iii) A misinterpretation of key planning policies is presented – especially Core Strategy CS06 and NDP policy HNTS5.
- 1.1.3 The Officer Report requests that in determining the application *“Members should consider whether the retention and reuse of a non-designated heritage asset and the provision to the housing supply would outweigh the risk of flooding associated with the addition of a new dwelling in this position”* (page 88 – Conclusion).
- 1.1.4 This is a narrow view and the PC respectfully requests Members to consider **all** of the relevant policy issues when reaching a decision bearing in mind that:
- i) The Borough has a 5 year housing land supply and there is no established local housing need for this dwelling (indeed the resident population of Holme declined by 37% between 2002 and 2021).
 - ii) The Environment Agency have advised the BC that they offer *“no objection to this proposal providing that you have taken into account the flood risk considerations which are your responsibility”* (Letter dated 7 August 2023).
- 1.1.5 In this respect, and taking account of the devastation caused by flooding of new homes now frequently evidenced in the media, Members are asked to consider whether it would be consistent with this advice to support construction of a new dwelling in an inaccessible, environmentally sensitive location which:
- i) Is inadequately defended from tidal flooding under the existing policy of Managed Realignment
 - ii) Is c 300m from a road and has no safe access for emergency services in a flood event
 - iii) Can be expected to revert to intertidal mud flats in the foreseeable future based on the management approach set out in the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP)
 - iv) Has habitable accommodation with floor levels substantially below those required by the EA for development in flood risk areas and which would flood to a depth of over 4 feet in a 1:200 flood event and over 5 feet in a 1:1000 event including Climate Change
 - v) Relies entirely on a small (12 sqm) bedroom space at the top of a 'Dovecote' as a safe refuge

- vi) Results in a flood hazard that the EA judge to be a *'danger for all including emergency services in the 0.5% (1 in 200) annual probability flood event including climate change'*

1.1.6 In support of the PC's position, relevant background information and wider policy issues are considered below.

1.2 What is the heritage significance of the asset?

1.2.1 The conclusions in the Officer Report state *"The proposal seeks consent for the conversion of an existing 18th Century cattle shed, bothy and pole barn to use as a two-bedroom dwelling"*. Based on the Applicant's Heritage Statement the Officer also concludes that *"the overall structure is considered to have merit and the retention of the building as a non-designated heritage asset has weight in any decision"*.



1.2.2 ***This statement is incorrect and potentially misleading when judging heritage significance.***

As evidenced from the maps in the Heritage Statement no part of the structure is 18th Century – the oldest part (less than 20 % of the structure) is mid to late 19th century. More than 80% of the building is a crude, corrugated iron barn erected in the late 20th century after the applicant acquired the site (see above, local knowledge confirms it to be post 1970).

1.2.3 Para 2.18 of the Heritage Statement claims *"The extended shelter provided in the mid-twentieth century, built of timber poles and corrugated sheeting is, despite its appearance, of some significance, representing increased use of the shelter for cattle at a point just before the sudden decline in husbandry in the second half of the century. The entire yard is a summary of the history of grazing on the coastal pastures. It has historic and social value and its significance is increased by the increasing rarity of such structures, which no longer have any agricultural use and as a result decline or sadly disappear"*.

1.2.4 This claim does not stand up to scrutiny. Similar barns are not rare in the area - indeed there are three more close to the application site (see below - the two leftmost photos show one just 500m away). They all have the same form incorporating an animal enclosure and a shelter.



- 1.2.5 Whilst these barns may look ‘scruffy’, they are visually low impact and are still in use for farming related activities. The notion that they are redolent of some *past* farming activity is fanciful. Cattle farming on the marshes *remains* an important traditional activity and is important for habitat management and landscape conservation in this part of the AONB. There is still a clearly demonstrated and valuable use for these structures.
- 1.2.6 The claim that they have heritage significance and are threatened due to no viable use is unfounded. If they are threatened – the threat is from replacement by houses in the countryside and this is a threat to the continuation of this important farming activity.
- 1.2.7 Whilst it is accepted that the bothy/cattle shed element of the structure is older – it is certainly not 18th century and its level of significance has not been demonstrated. Given the scrutiny that archaeologists have devoted to Holme over the years (see for example – English Heritage’s comprehensive survey in Robertson et al, 2005) it is surprising that the structure has remained undiscovered if it has any significance. It has no entry in the NHER.
- 1.2.8 A ‘Bothy’ is widely understood to be a small, rudimentary building in the countryside where people can take refuge free of charge. Regardless of any significance the structure might or might not have, it is clear from the Applicant’s photographs below that conversion to a dwelling does not preserve the existing building’s significance or character. The original structure is no longer identifiable. There are other potential uses for the structure (including repair and use as a bothy or continued use as a farm store) which would better preserve its significance.



1.3 Significance balanced against flood risk – the question for Members

- 1.3.1 The flood risk issues affecting this development are set out in paragraph 1.1.5 above. The SMP places 80 homes along the Holme Sea Defence Frontage at risk. Granting permission for this application would make the number 81.
- 1.3.2 The Neighbourhood Plan recognises this issue and contains policies which aim to promote resilience and adaptation to flood risk (HNTS2 and HNTS4) - in part by directing development away from the flood risk areas. The Officer recommendation to approve the development is counter to this objective and undermines these policies.
- 1.3.3 Because the NDP makes more than sufficient provision to accommodate growth in housing within the Development Envelope (HNTS2) it is impossible for this development to pass the Sequential Test. The Officer Report accepts that a Sequential Test is not applicable in this case but that an Exception Test (as indicated by the EA) is required. It argues that the Exception Test is passed by virtue of the development being (i) safe for its lifetime and (ii) of benefit to

the community by adding another house to Parish housing stock and (iii) preserving a non-designated heritage asset.

1.3.4 However, as the map below shows, the SMP envisages that the application site will become



The SMP envisages that over 40% of Holme will revert to intertidal mud flats under the policy of Managed Realignment (purple shaded area). Development on the application site (shown in red) would add to the 80 houses already threatened in this area. The Officer Report is silent on this issue.

intertidal mudflats sometime between now and 2105. This means that at best, the development has a maximum lifetime of c. 80 years. This is 20 years less than the 100 year lifetime assumed by Planning Guidance (PPG 006 Reference ID: 7-006-20220825). Given the finished floor level heights and limited refuge it is highly improbable that the development will be safe for its lifetime as tidal inundation of the building will become a frequent event.

1.3.5 In the NDP Referendum the community voted not to build houses in locations that were subject to flood risk and to make a specific allocation of housing on a site free from flood risk. It is impossible to see how building a new dwelling at the proposed location could do anything other than increase exposure to flood risk which is

already far too high in the Parish (c 80 houses at risk of loss). Given there is no demonstrated need for this house, it is difficult to see how the wider sustainability benefits for the community could outweigh the flood risk.

1.3.6 The proposal fails the Exception Test and is thus contrary to NPPF Paragraph 164.

1.3.7 In relation to the question posed to members, risk of flooding is shown to be very high and the proposal fails to meet NPPF and NDP policies on flood risk. The significance of the non-designated heritage asset is limited and the benefits of converting it to a house clearly do not outweigh the impact on the community caused by increased exposure to flood risk.

1.4 Sustainability of the location

1.4.1 The Officer Report suggests that this Application should be determined by weighing the benefits from the development against the harm related to flood risk. However, this narrow view ignores a range of other important issues. These can best be highlighted by drawing Members attention to the recent refusal for a new dwelling at Waxwings (23/00422/F) c. 300m away from the proposed development site.

1.4.2 The Waxwings site is in an isolated group of dwellings on the A149 and lies outside the flood risk zone. The reasons for refusal were:

- i) Outside the Development Envelope (NDP Policy HNTS2)
- ii) Development in the countryside not related to agriculture (HNTS 5)
- iii) Not in a sustainable location - significant distance from facilities and services and no footpath access to surrounding villages (NPPF 176, CS06, CS07)
- iv) Adds to built form in the generally open landscape and

- v) Visually out of keeping with the AONB and the wider Countryside (NPPF 176, CS06, CS07, CS08, DM15, HNTS10, ... and HNTS20)
- 1.4.3 As stressed above, the development site proposed here lies in the flood zone in even more isolated, open countryside. It is some 300m along an unmade track which joins the A149 close to Waxwings. Against this background and given the additional issue of flood risk, it is difficult to understand how the Officer Report could reach such a different conclusion and recommend approval based on the same policy framework.
- 1.4.4 It is suggested that the Report's conclusions are inconsistent with this previous decision and also inconsistent with the policies listed above in the NPPF, Core Strategy, SADMP and NDP.
- 1.4.5 Almost all the policies cited in support of the Waxwings refusal apply in greater measure to the present application. ***Clearly this is not a sustainable development site.***

1.5 Key policy reasons why this application should be refused

- 1.5.1 The application is contrary to Core Strategy Policy CS06 - Development in Rural Areas. This policy specifically considers conversion of existing buildings to residential use. It clearly states that '*...in the Countryside...*' '*Conversion to residential use will only be considered where:*
- *the existing building makes a positive contribution to the landscape;*
 - *a non-residential use is proven to be unviable;*
 - *the accommodation to be provided is commensurate to the site's relationship to the settlement pattern; and*
 - *the building is easily accessible to existing housing, employment and services*
- 1.5.2 Despite the arguments in the Officer Report it is clear that the proposed conversion does not satisfy any of the above requirements:
- The existing building certainly does not make a positive contribution to the AONB landscape (see for example the photos in Section 1.2 above)
 - The same photos show the barns have a current use for storage. Alternative non-residential uses have not been considered as part of the application.
 - The site is isolated and has no relationship to the village or settlement pattern
 - The building is 300m along an unmade, unlit farm track - off the fast-moving A149 Coast Road which has no public footpaths. It is 1km to the edge of the village and 1km to the nearest bus stop. By no stretch of the imagination could it be considered '*easily accessible to existing housing, employment and services*'.
- 1.5.3 The Officer Report considers that the proposed development accords with the aims and purpose of NDP Policy HNTS5: Countryside Zone. This is most definitely not the case. HNTS5 requires that ***development in the Countryside Zone should demonstrate a need that is clearly related to agricultural activities*** (this was clearly set out in the Waxwings decision).

Speculative development such as that proposed here is not related in any way to agriculture and is therefore not supported by the Policy. The NDP makes provision for development of housing in the Development Envelope.

1.6 Conclusion

- 1.6.1 In conclusion there are many more issues at stake in determining this application than weighing the benefits of protecting a Heritage Asset by converting it to a house against the resulting harm arising from increased exposure to flood risk.
- 1.6.2 All the policy issues raised in the context of Waxwings plus flood risk weigh against the Heritage argument.
- 1.6.3 In terms of the planning balance the proposed house is in an unsustainable location for residential development, does not have a 100 year lifetime, impacts negatively on the special qualities of the AONB, is unsafe for both potential occupants and the emergency services and increases existing exposure of parish property to flood risk.
- 1.6.4 These impacts are not considered to be outweighed by the benefits of preserving the non-designated asset through conversion to a new dwelling for which there is no demonstrated need.
- 1.6.5 For all of the above reasons Members are urged to refuse this application. However, if despite the arguments presented here Members are minded to approve the application the PC regards it as imperative that the Principal Homes Policy requirement (HNTS18) for a Section 106 legal agreement is adhered to and not downgraded to a planning condition as (once again) recommended by Officers.