

Application Number	PA/2023/0200
Location	Westover, Smarden Bell Road, Smarden, TN27 8NT
Parish Council	Smarden
Ward	Weald North
Application Description	Conversion and change of use of existing garage and workshop outbuildings to holiday lets with associated parking and landscaping including pergola
Applicant	Mr I Coppins
Agent	Mr Simon Hoyle
Site Area	0.26 Hectares

Introduction

1. This application is reported to the Planning Committee because the agent is the spouse of a member of staff.

Site and Surroundings

2. The application site comprises the main dwelling known as “Westover” which is a detached two storey grade II listed building, as well as several outbuildings in the southern section of the site (including the existing garage and workshop buildings which are the subject of this application). The site is located outside the built confines of the village of Smarden, and sited on the south eastern side of Smarden Bell Road and within the Smarden Bell Farmlands Landscape Character Area.
3. The subjects of this application are the two historic outbuildings in the south west of the overall site which are both considered curtilage listed, and currently used as a garage and a workshop. Both outbuildings are timber framed buildings with brick infills and tiled roofs. They are significant for their surviving historic fabric, character and relationship to the main house, Westover.

- There are two existing accesses serving the site; one to the southwest which provides access to the existing garage and also to a neighbouring property (Boorolong House) and one to the northwest which serves the main dwelling.

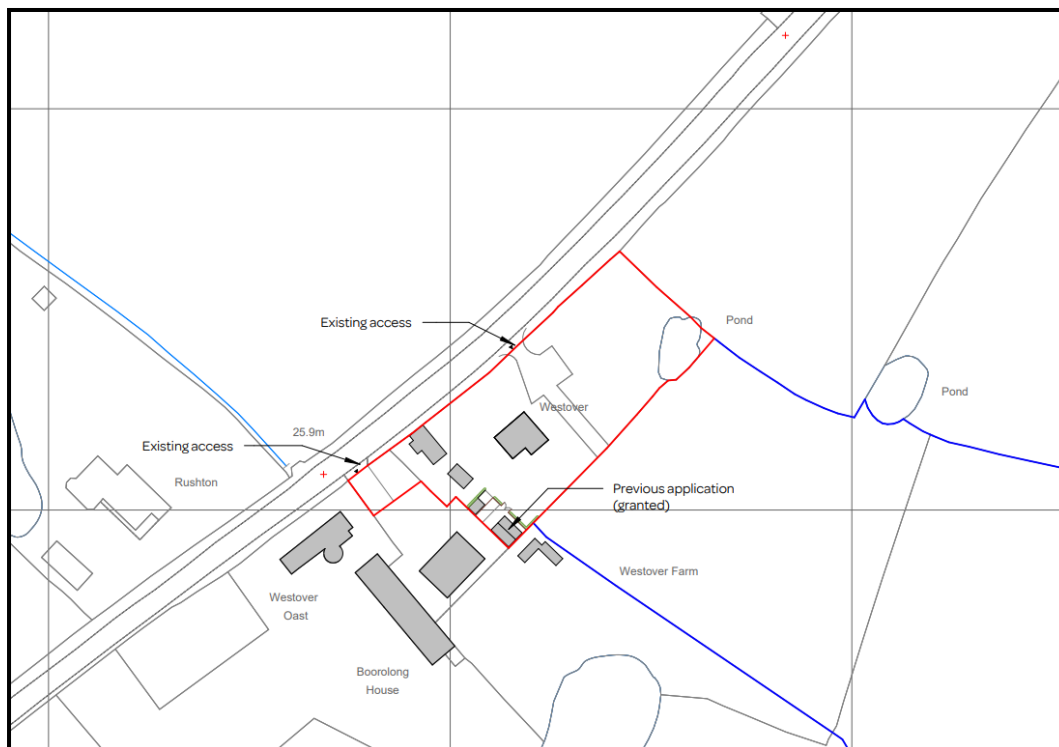


Figure 1 - Site Location Plan

Proposal

- Full planning permission is sought for the conversion of the existing garage and workshop outbuildings to holiday lets with associated parking and landscaping, including courtyards and a pergola to serve the workshop building. Each of the buildings will provide one bedspace. The workshop outbuilding would have an internal stud wall built and internal insulation added to create an open plan dining / bed space and kitchenette area and a separate wet room. The garage outbuilding would also have internal stud walls built and internal insulation added to create an open plan living / dining / kitchen area, a separate bedroom, storage and a separate wet room.
- The proposals would also make alterations to the fenestrations and doors of the garage and workshop outbuildings. Following concerns raised by officers in relation to the amount of glazing proposed in the conversion of the garage outbuilding, the applicant has reduced the amount of glazing proposed to the entrance gable end (i.e. now retaining the weatherboarding on the gable) and has also removed an additional proposed window in the north east elevation of the garage outbuilding.

7. A separate application for listed building consent is also for consideration under planning reference PA/2023/0209.

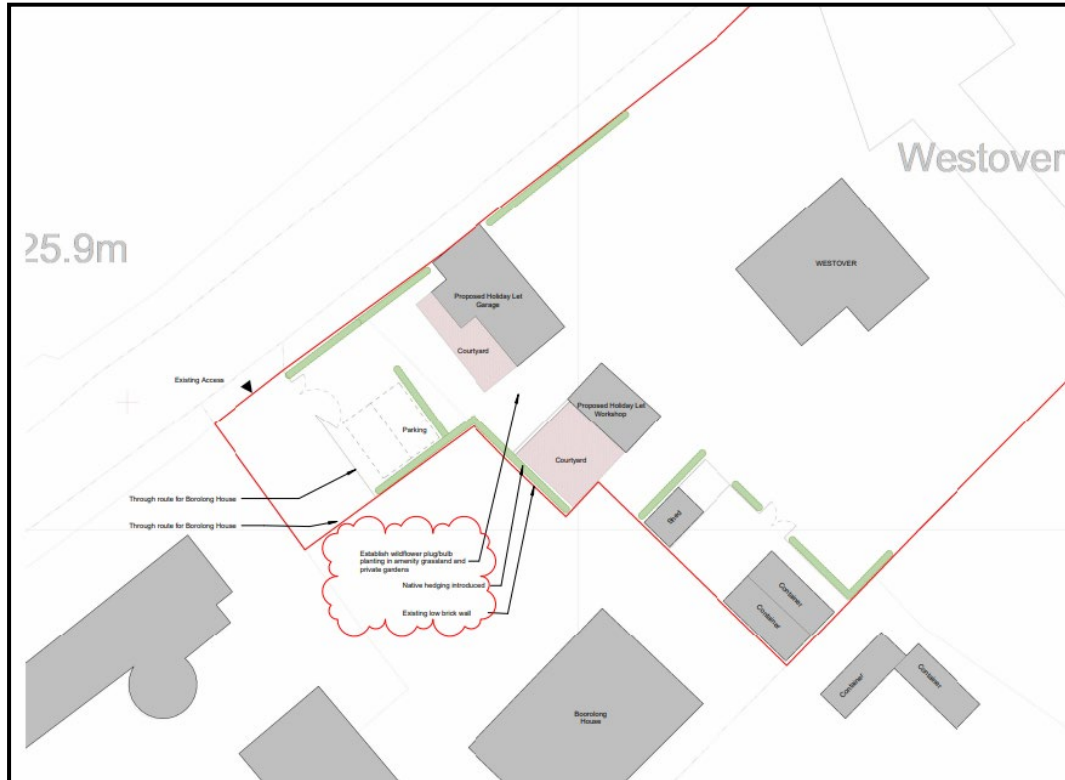


Figure 2 - Proposed Site Layout Plan

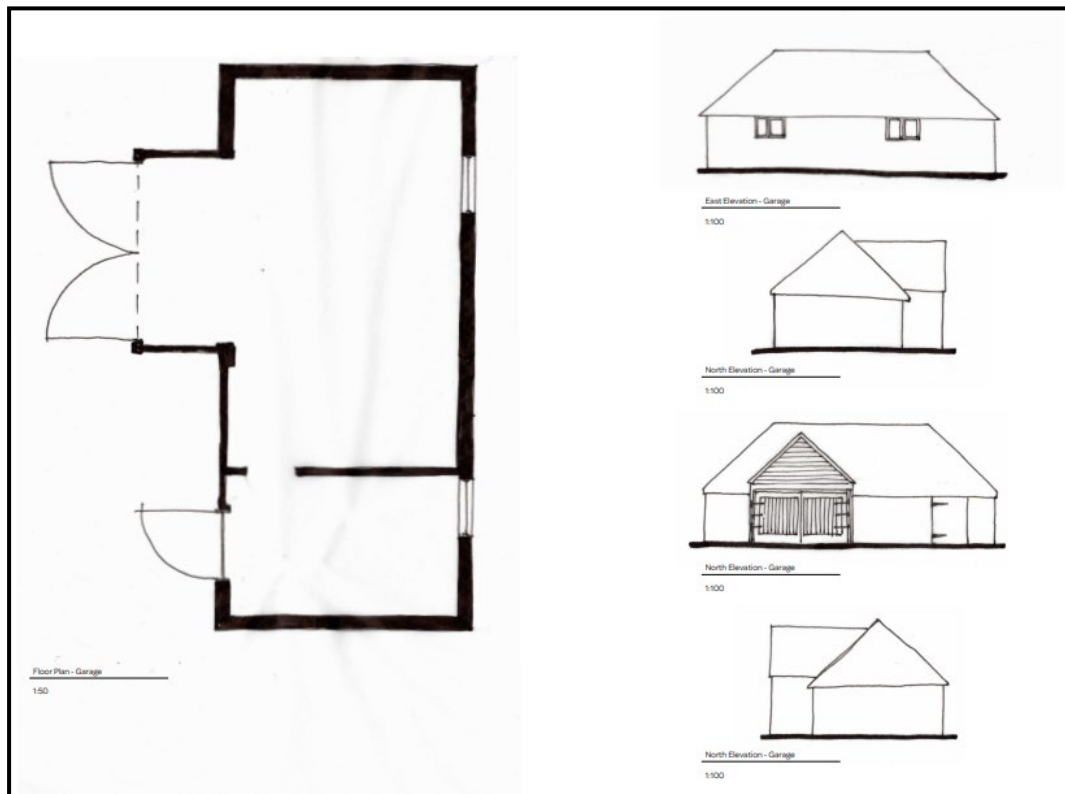


Figure 3 - Existing Garage Plan / Elevations

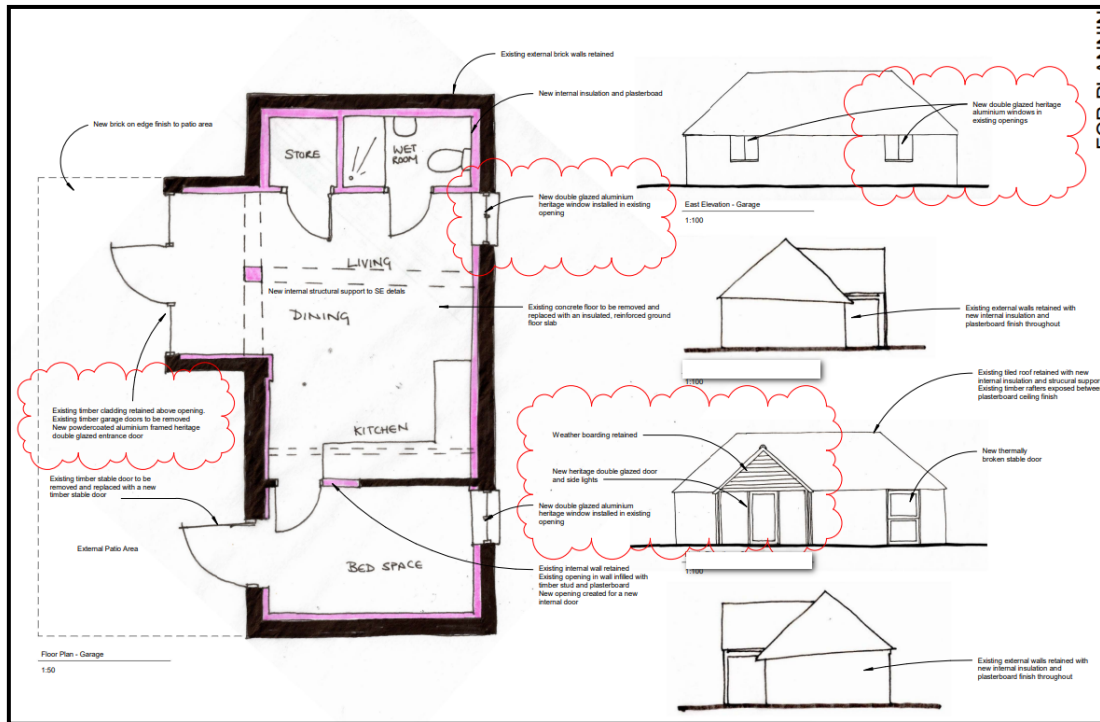


Figure 4 - Proposed Garage Plans / Elevations

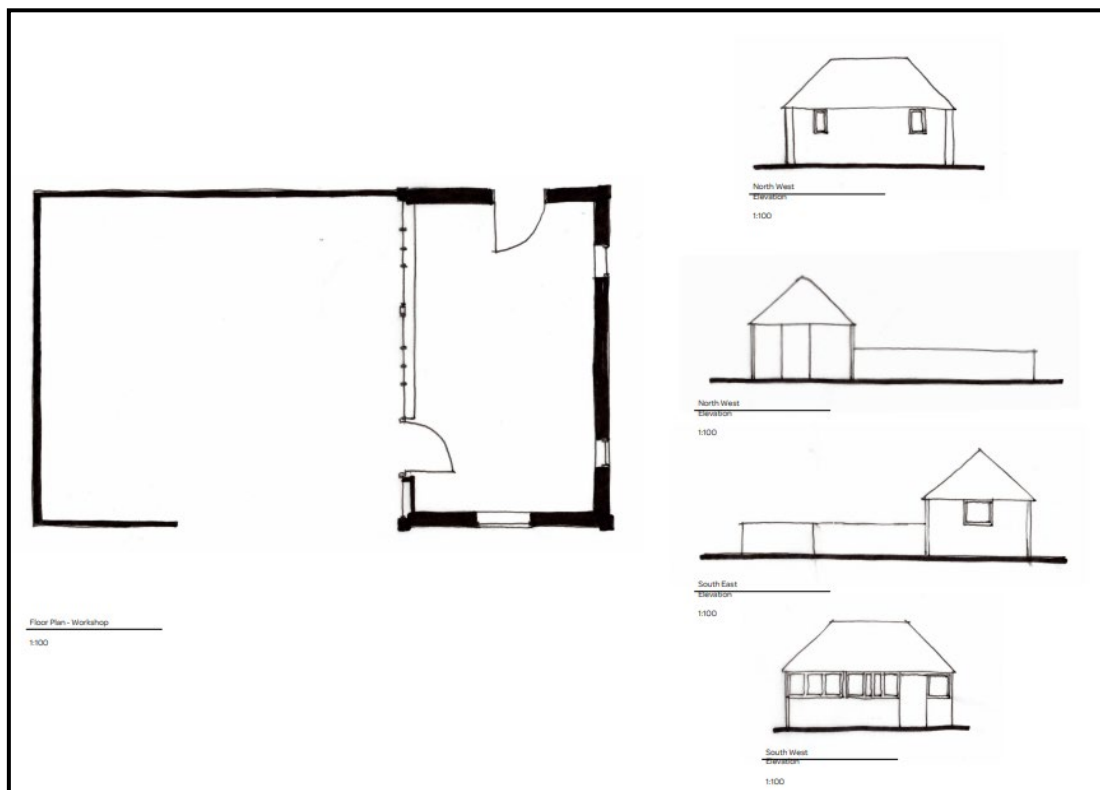


Figure 5 - Existing Workshop Plan / Elevations

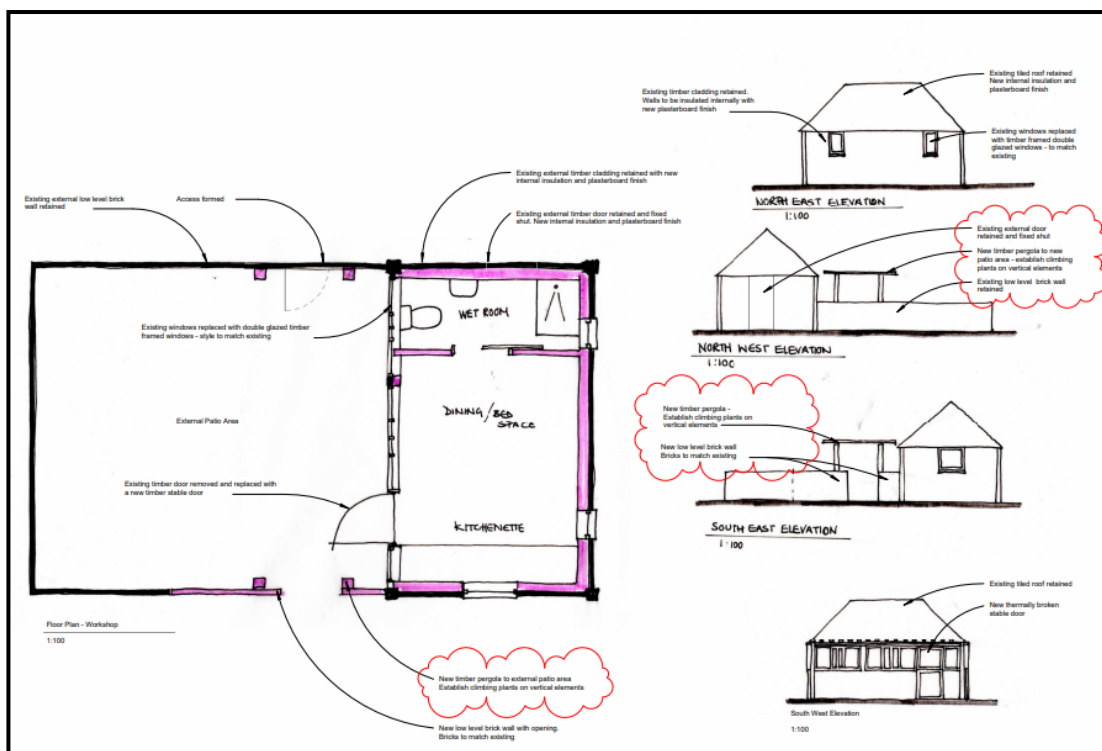


Figure 6 - Proposed Workshop Plan / Elevations

Planning History

8. The following planning history is relevant to this application:-

- 17/00491/AS “Reinstatement of vehicular access and creation of parking area” – planning permission granted 22/05/2017.

(NB – this access reinstatement relates to the main access to serve the dwelling northwest within the wider site).

Consultations

9. **Ward Member:** Cllr Kayleigh Brunger-Randall, who is a member of the Planning Committee.
10. **Smarden Parish Council** – They refer this application to Listed Buildings. *(Planning officer note: applications are considered by the Local Planning Authority and any necessary internal consultations are carried out with the Conservation Officer which would be via the associated application for listed building consent).*

11. **KCC Biodiversity** – As originally submitted insufficient information was provided. As a result further information/surveys were provided and KCC Biodiversity are now satisfied with the proposals subject to relevant conditions being imposed relating to precautionary ecological mitigation measures being undertaken during construction, external lighting and ecological enhancements.
12. **Neighbours** – 4 neighbours consulted. As well as a site notice put up and a press advert placed. No representations received from neighbours but a comment was received from Headcorn Aerodrome highlighting the proximity of the development to the aerodrome, and that there is noise connected with the aviation activity of the existing and established use/activity of the aerodrome. They do not wish to inhibit the development.

Planning Policy

13. The Development Plan for Ashford borough comprises the Ashford Local Plan 2030 (adopted February 2019), along with the Chilmington Green Area Action Plan (2013), the Wye Neighbourhood Plan (2016), the Pluckley Neighbourhood Plan (2017), the Rolvenden Neighbourhood Plan (2019), the Boughton Aluph and Eastwell Neighbourhood Plan (2021), the Egerton Neighbourhood Plan (2022), the Charing Neighbourhood Plan (2023) and the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2016) as well as the Kent Minerals and Waste Early Partial Review (2020).
14. For clarification, the Local Plan 2030 supersedes the saved policies in the Ashford Local Plan (2000), Ashford Core Strategy (2008), Ashford Town Centre Action Area Plan (2010), the Tenterden & Rural Sites DPD (2010) and the Urban Sites and Infrastructure DPD (2012).
15. The relevant policies from the Development Plan relating to this application are as follows:-
 - SP1 – Strategic Objectives
 - SP6 – Promoting High Quality Design
 - ENV1 – Biodiversity
 - ENV3a – Landscape Character Design
 - ENV4 – Light Pollution & Promoting Dark Skies
 - ENV5 – Protecting Important Rural Features
 - ENV9 - Sustainable Drainage
 - ENV13 - Conservation and Enhancement of Heritage Assets
 - EMP11 – Tourism
 - TRA3a – Parking Standards

16. The following are also material considerations to the determination of this application.

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents

Landscape Character Assessment SPD 2011
Residential Parking and Design SPD 2010
Dark Skies SPD 2014

Government Advice

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021

17. Members should note that the determination must be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. A significant material consideration is the NPPF. The NPPF states that less weight should be given to the policies above if they are in conflict with the NPPF. The following sections of the NPPF are relevant to this application:-

Paragraphs 84 & 85 (Supporting a Prosperous Rural Economy)
Paragraph 197 (Proposals Affecting Heritage Assets)

National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)

Assessment

18. The key areas for consideration in the assessment of this application are:

- Principle of Development
- Visual Amenity & Heritage
- Residential Amenity
- Highway Safety
- Impact on Ecology

Principle of Development

19. Central government guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) supports sustainable business, enterprise and tourism in rural areas, both through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings. This is endorsed by Local Plan policy EMP11 which seeks to encourage the sustainable growth of tourism. The preamble to EMP11 states that new initiatives must respect the character of an area and should not be harmful to the character of the rural environment. Paragraph 7.94 of the preamble states that "rural tourism development is also

encouraged in order to take advantage of the Borough's large areas of attractive countryside, where this would not be harmful to the character of the environment that attracts tourists in the first instance."

20. The two outbuildings are within the south / south-western section of the site but, given the nature of the overall site, will still be in fairly close proximity of the main building "Westover". Due to the said close proximity of the buildings in question to the main dwelling, and given the facts that the proposal would be utilising existing buildings and the holiday let accommodation proposed would be of a limited scale (i.e. 1 bedroom / bedspace units), I am of opinion that this is an appropriate location for small holiday let accommodation. The close proximity to the countryside and Smarden also makes this a good location for sympathetic tourism accommodation. A condition can be imposed to keep a register of guests using the holiday lets to enable the Local Planning Authority to monitor the occupation if required.
21. With the above discussed conditions imposed and the proposal being acceptable in terms of heritage, visual amenity, residential amenity, highway safety and ecology (as demonstrated later in the report). I am of the opinion that the principle of the proposed holiday let accommodation is acceptable.

Visual Amenity/Heritage

22. Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that in considering whether to grant planning permission for any works the local planning authority or the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
23. The buildings are curtilage listed existing outbuildings within the site. The use of the buildings as holiday let accommodation can be carried out without any physical extensions to the buildings which would, for example, extend their footprints. With the amended plans provided to retain the weatherboarding to the gable end entrance of the garage outbuilding and the information submitted to ensure heritage compliant glazing, the change of use of the outbuildings can be undertaken with limited intervention and less than substantial harm to the curtilage listed buildings and the Grade II listed main dwelling. The limited scale and nature of the proposed pergola and wall enlargement associated with the workshop outbuilding would ensure that these elements of the scheme would not harm the character and appearance of the curtilage listed buildings or the wider countryside. Overall, the proposal would allow the outbuildings to continue to be used in a manner consistent with their conservation and which provides a public benefit in the form of tourist accommodation, which in turn is also likely to provide some positive

gains for the local economy, in terms of sustaining facilities and services in Smarden Village and elsewhere in the borough.

24. I am satisfied there would be no visual harm to the surrounding countryside as a result of the development. Likewise no harm would be caused to the curtilage listed outbuildings or the setting of the main listed building, Westover, whilst continuing to preserve their significance. Therefore, it is considered that the development complies with policies.

Residential Amenity

25. Given the distance to and the relationship with neighbouring dwellings, combined with the limited scale and intensity of the works and use proposed, there would be no significant harm caused to the residential amenity of adjoining occupiers as a result of the development.

Highway Safety

26. The proposal would provide a single parking space for each of the holiday lets which would comply with local plan parking standards and would be acceptable. The proposed holiday lets would utilise an existing access off Smarden Bell Road currently used by the garage outbuilding on site and Boorolong House. Given the limited scale and intensity of use of the said holiday lets, I do not believe that the proposal would generate any highway amenity or highway safety issues with regards to the use of the existing shared vehicular access.
27. Therefore, I do not consider that the proposal would generate any highway safety issues.

Ecology

28. The applicant has submitted a preliminary ecological appraisal and an ecological survey in relation to bats. The bat survey highlights that the buildings are unlikely to be used by roosting bats but confirmed that at least 3 species of foraging/commuting bats have been recorded within the site. As a consequence KCC Biodiversity highlight that any external lighting to be installed must be designed to minimise light spill as lighting can have a negative impact on bats (and other nocturnal species). Therefore, a condition relating to external lighting is to be imposed on the permission in order to protect foraging bats.
29. The submitted information has also detailed that there is potential for Great Crested Newts and other reptiles to be present. However, KCC Biodiversity have confirmed that as the works proposed relate to the refurbishment of the

existing outbuildings and do not include any changes to the hard standing and only require the clearance of small areas of sparse vegetation and a rubble pile, they are satisfied that the precautionary approach recommended for reptiles is appropriate. This will be secured by the imposition of an appropriate ecological mitigation condition during the proposed works. A precautionary mitigation approach should also be taken with regard to ensuring that any vegetation clearance does not impact any potential nesting birds.

30. One of the principles of the National Planning Policy Framework is that “opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design”. The proposed site plan has confirmed that wildflower and wild grassland areas will be created, and climbing plants and native species hedgerow planted. Whilst this planting would have some ecological benefit, KCC Biodiversity advise that more could and should be done across the site to benefit biodiversity. I would therefore suggest that an ecological enhancement condition is imposed on any permission in order to agree and secure a schedule of enhancements.
31. Overall subject to the imposition of the above mentioned conditions, I am satisfied that the proposal would not harm biodiversity on site and would actually enhance ecology within the site.

Flooding and Drainage

32. The NPPF seeks to direct development away from areas of highest flood risk. Policy ENV9 of the Local Plan 2030 requires development to include appropriate sustainable drainage systems for the disposal of surface water where it is practical to do so, to avoid any increase in flood risk or adverse impact on water quality.
33. The application site is located within an area of ‘low’ probably of flooding being located within Environment Agency Flood Zone 1.
34. In terms of surface water drainage, given the limited degree of the proposed external works, and the fact that existing hard surfacing can drain off within the site, I do not believe that further surface water drainage information is required. For sewerage disposal, the development will connect to the mains drainage system which serves the nearby properties.

Human Rights Issues

35. I have also taken into account the human rights issues relevant to this application. In my view, the “Assessment” section above and the Recommendation below represent an appropriate balance between the

interests and rights of the applicant (to enjoy their land subject only to reasonable and proportionate controls by a public authority) and the interests and rights of those potentially affected by the proposal (to respect for private life and the home and peaceful enjoyment of their properties).

Working with the applicant

36. In accordance with paragraphs 38 of the NPPF, Ashford Borough Council (ABC) takes a positive and creative approach to development proposals focused on solutions. ABC works with applicants/agents in a positive and creative manner as explained in the note to the applicant included in the recommendation below.

Conclusion

37. In conclusion, the proposed development would make a positive contribution to local tourism and the rural economy, and would be a sensitive re-use of rural outbuildings. I do not consider that the proposal would result in any significant or unacceptable visual harm or adversely impact on the listed buildings and their settings. In addition I believe that the proposal would not result in highway safety issues, or harm any residential amenity, and would not harm any biodiversity at the site whilst at the same time providing the opportunity for ecological enhancement at the site. The development poses no unacceptable flood risk. The development is therefore considered acceptable. The proposal would comply with national policy as set out within the NPPF/NPPG and the Development Plan as a whole. Accordingly, I recommend that planning permission is granted subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

Recommendation

Permit

- A** With delegated authority to the Planning Applications and Building Control Manager or the Strategic Development and Delivery Manager to add, amend or remove planning obligations and/or planning conditions as they see fit to secure the required mitigation and any associated issues relating thereto; and,
- B** Subject to planning conditions and notes, including those dealing with the subject matters identified below, (but not limited to that list) and

those necessary to take forward stakeholder representations, with wordings and triggers revised as appropriate and with any 'pre-commencement' based planning conditions to have been the subject of the agreement process provisions effective 01/10/2018.

1. Standard 3 year time limit
2. Approved plans
3. Use as holiday let accommodation only
4. Register of guests
5. Ecological construction mitigation measures
6. Provision of ecological enhancements
7. Landscaping details
8. No lighting unless approved by LPA and as per ecological guidance
9. Retention of parking for holiday lets

Notes to applicant

- Working with the Applicant
- Precautionary approach – nesting birds

Background Papers

All papers referred to in this report are currently published on the Ashford Borough Council web site (www.ashford.gov.uk). Those papers relating specifically to this application may be found on the [View applications on line](#) pages under planning application reference PA/2023/0200)

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