

FULL PLANNING APPLICATION FOR THE ERECTION OF TWO MODULAR BUILDINGS FOLLOWING DEMOLITION AND REMOVAL OF EXISTING STRUCTURES, AND CHANGE OF USE OF SITE TO FLEXIBLE CLASS B2/B8/E(G) USE (PART RETROSPECTIVE)

PLANNING STATEMENT

PITCHKETTLE FARM, GOODBOYS LANE, GRAZELEY GREEN, READING, RG7 1ND

ON BEHALF OF PITCHKETTLE INVESTMENTS LTD

**TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED)
PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004**



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Planning Statement is prepared on behalf of Pitchkettle Investments in support of an application for full planning permission concerning Pitchkettle Farm, an existing site located to the south of Grazeley Green within the jurisdiction of West Berkshire Council.

1.2 The application comprises two elements; the erection of replacement buildings and the change of use of the whole of the application site. The application follows on from a certificate of lawfulness that was granted in October 2020 for the use of the site for a waste paper recycling business, a Sui Generis use.

1.3 The removal of the previous structures and the erection of the proposed buildings has already taken place, and the applicant has occupied these and is using part of the land for their own business purposes. The remainder of the land remains vacant; therefore the application is submitted as 'part-retrospective'. An area marked in blue on the plans that is under the applicant's ownership remains under the operation of the waste paper business and is therefore excluded from the application site.

1.4 The purpose of the application is firstly to regularise the situation with regard to the applicant's business, and also to give them flexibility to lease other parts of the site to separate businesses. It is our view that the proposal complies with the relevant local and national planning policy, and this statement will demonstrate that this is the case. In addition to this statement and completed application forms, the application is supported by the following plans:

- P21-2226_01 Location Plan
- P21-2226_02 Site Plans as previous and as proposed - Sheets 1 and 2
- P21-2226_03 Proposed Floor Plans
- P21-2226_04 Proposed Elevations

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 Pitchkettle Farm is an existing site located on the western side of Goodboys Lane to the south of Grazeley Green. It consists of two access points which previously lead to a number of dilapidated buildings forward of a main barn building, which are set out within Appendix 1. The majority of these buildings have been removed and replaced by the buildings which are the subject of this application, although the main barn building remains. The remainder of the site is mainly hardstanding.
- 2.2 The site is bordered to the south by Woodside Farm, which is occupied by Woodside Recycling in relating to their business activities. This business previously used Pitchkettle Farm for a number of activities which were confirmed by a recent certificate of lawfulness application; due to a reductio in the size of their business these have now ceased with the exception of the use the part of the main barn for their business purposes. This area is specifically excluded from the application.
- 2.3 The site is otherwise bordered by woodland to the west, the highway to the east and fields to the north. It is located outside the settlement boundary but is not within the AONB, a flood zone or a conservation area, nor is it close to any listed buildings. It is however within the inner consultation zone for the Burghfield Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE).

3.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 There are two historical planning applications concerning a mobile home for an agricultural worker which are not considered relevant due to the mobile home being located outside of the site. In any event, these applications have effectively been superseded by Certificate of Lawfulness application **20/01304/CERTE** for which a certificate was issued in September 2020, confirming that the mobile home has lawful use as an independent dwelling, it being demonstrated that it has been used as such for a period in excess of 10 years.
- 3.2 More relevant to the current application is application **20/01311/CERTE** which sought a Certificate of Lawfulness for *'Use of land for waste paper recycling business (Sui Generis Use) comprising of the staff break out room, workshop, barn, staff car park and yard for storage of items ancillary to the primary use'*. The application covered the whole of Pitchkettle Farm, and represents the current lawful position of the site.

4.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Since the certificate of lawfulness was issued under application **20/01311/CERTE**, the applicants have removed the majority of the dilapidated buildings that were previously located in the eastern part of the site and replace these with two modern modular buildings. These are set out on the submitted plans and photos at Appendix 2.
- 4.2 The main building (referenced Building A on the plans) has a width of 16.3m with a depth of 12.5m and a height of 3.9m. It contains office and breakout space associated with Associated Industrial Control Solutions (AICS), an electrical engineering company owned by the applicant. The second building (Building B) has a width of 9.1m, a depth of 5m and the same height of 3.9m, and is used as a workshop also related to this business. Neither building has planning permission, and the application seeks to regularise this situation.
- 4.3 The remaining parts of the site are mainly hardstanding and are either currently vacant or used for parking or storage. At present the lawful use of the site the Sui Generis Use associated with the waste paper recycling business that is specified within the certificate of lawfulness, however the use of the site the applicant's business would not fall within this use and is considered to be under Use Class E(g). As such, a change of use is also required for the occupation of the site by this business, which this application also seeks to regularise.
- 4.4 Finally, the use of the site by AICS only takes up a small portion of Pitchkettle Farm, and the applicant wishes to retain the option of leasing parts of the site lawfully to other businesses. As such, permission for a flexible mixed use of Use Classes B2 and B8 as well as Class E(g) is sought for the whole site under this application. As parts of the proposed development have been implemented and others have not, the application is referred to as 'part retrospective'.

5.0 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

5.1 The Development Plan for West Berkshire currently comprises the following:

- Core Strategy DPD (July 2012)
- Housing Site Allocations DPD (May 2017)
- Saved Policies of the West Berkshire District Local Plan

5.2 In addition, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) are material considerations in the assessment of all planning applications. The following sections set out the policies and guidance that is considered relevant to the proposed development.

Core Strategy

5.3 **Policy ADDP1 (Spatial Strategy)** sets out that development in West Berkshire will follow the existing settlement pattern and that most development will be within or adjacent to the settlements contained in the settlement hierarchy. The scale and intensity of development will be related to the site's accessibility, character and surroundings.

5.4 **Policy CS8 (Nuclear Installations)** is relevant due to the location of the site within the inner consultation zone for Burghfield AWE. The policy sets out that residential development in the inner consultation zone is likely to be refused planning permission for the Council when the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) has advised against the development. All other development proposals will be considered in consultation with the ONR having regard to the scale of development proposed, its location, population distribution of the area and impact on public safety. Consultation is made where one or more additional person may live, work or shop on the site.

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- 5.5 **Policy CS9 (Employment and the Economy)** directs business development to the District's employment areas, together with existing employment sites and premises. It is also states that *'A range of types and sizes of employment sites and premises will be encouraged through the District to meet the needs of the local economy. Proposals for business development should be in keeping with the surrounding environment, not conflict with existing uses, and promote sustainable transport.'*
- 5.6 **Policy CS10 (Rural Economy)** states that proposals to diversify the rural economy will be encouraged, and that existing small and medium size enterprises within the rural area will be supported to provide local job opportunities and maintain the vitality of smaller rural settlements.
- 5.7 **Policy CS14 (Design Principles)** states that new development must demonstrate high quality and sustainable design that respects and enhances the character and appearance of the area, and makes a positive contribution to the quality of life in West Berkshire. Good design relates not only to the appearance of a development, but the way in which it functions. Development shall contribute positively to local distinctiveness and sense of place.

Housing Site Allocations DPD

- 5.8 The document mainly relates to residential development and as such is not applicable to the proposals, however **Policy C7 (Replacement of Existing Dwellings)** is considered to have some relevance as it relates to housing in the countryside. The Council does not have a policy that relates to the replacement of existing commercial buildings; however it is considered that some of the principles of this policy can be applied to such a proposal, particularly in a countryside location.
- 5.9 The policy states that the replacement dwelling must be proportionate to the size and scale of the existing, uses appropriate materials and does not have an adverse impact on the character and local distinctiveness of the rural area, individual heritage assets, and its setting in the wider landscape. The key

components of proportionality are stated to be scale, massing, height and layout. Replacement dwellings should be located on the footprint of the existing building unless alternative siting has a positive benefit on the impact on the countryside.

West Berkshire District Local Plan

- 5.10 None of the saved policies within the plan are considered applicable to the proposals, however Appendix 5 sets out parking standards for commercial uses which are relevant. For the uses relevant to the application, these are typically 1 per 25m² of floorspace.

NPPF

- 5.11 **Paragraph 11** confirms the presumption in favour of sustainable development, which for decision-taking means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay. **Paragraph 47** states that planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with an up-to-date development plan.
- 5.12 **Paragraphs 84 and 85** relate to 'Supporting a prosperous rural economy'. Paragraphs 84 states that planning decisions should enable such development, including:
- 'a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of businesses in rural areas, both through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings'*
- 5.13 Paragraph 85 states that planning decisions should recognise that sites the meet local business needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In those circumstances it is important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings and does not have an unacceptable impact on

local roads. The use of previously developed land should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.

5.14 **Paragraph 130** states that planning decisions should ensure that developments will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, are visually attractive and are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, whilst not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change.

5.15 **Paragraph 174(c)** states that planning decision should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

6.0 ASSESSMENT

Principle of the Development

- 6.1 Due to the location of the development, an assessment needs to be made with regards to whether it is appropriate development in the countryside, and also within the inner consultation zone for the Burghfield AWE.
- 6.2 It terms of its location within the countryside, the development is considered to be in accordance with Policy CS9 which, as well as the District's employment areas, also directs business development to *'existing suitably located employment sites and premises'*. The existing lawful use of the site has been confirmed via a Certificate of Lawfulness application to be for a Waste Paper Recycling Business, within Sui Generis use, which is an existing business use.
- 6.3 It is considered that the location is suitable for a small business use, being an existing business use with an existing access, and as acknowledged by Paragraph 85 of the NPPF businesses in rural areas can be found beyond existing settlements, in areas not well served by public transport. The use of previously developed land, such as an existing business use like Pitchkettle Farm, is also encouraged.
- 6.4 Additionally, the policy encourages a range of types and sizes of employment sites *'throughout the District'* and that more efficient use of existing sites and premises should be made with the Council promoting the intensification, redevelopment and upgrade of existing, vacant and/or derelict employment sites and premises for business development. The site was previously run down, with a number of dilapidated buildings which is evident from the photographs at Appendix 1.
- 6.5 It is therefore considered that the proposal represents an upgrade in comparison to the site that existed previously, in particular with the removal of the existing buildings and their replacement with more modern and better

quality buildings. This has had further benefits for the character and visual amenities of the area, which are discussed further below.

- 6.6 In addition, Policy CS10 has support for proposals to diversify the rural economy and protects existing sites and premises. The proposal has come about as a result in a reduction in the size of Woodside Recycling's business, so that whilst their business remains, they no longer have any need for Pitchkettle Farm. The proposed development has therefore diversified an existing rural site by retaining the existing business on a smaller scale, and retaining local job opportunities within the site through a new business.
- 6.7 The application also proposes a flexible use throughout the site, which would give the applicant the flexibility to lease parts of the site to different businesses within these use classes if such a need arises. This would be a more efficient use of the land, and would also result in a more diversified offering that could also assist with job opportunities in the local area.
- 6.8 However, the support for job opportunities within the rural area needs to be balanced with the proximity of the site to the Burghfield AWE. The site is located within the 'Inner' consultation zone, which means that the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) would be consulted on any development where one or more additional person may live, work or shop.
- 6.9 As set out above, the occupation of the site by AICS is due to a reduction in the size of Woodside Recycling's business and that they no longer have use for the buildings or land at Pitchkettle Farm. Historically the site was used for the parking of vehicles, storage of items, a staff breakout room, on site workshop and other activities related to the running of the business. However due to the downsizing of their business, there is now space on Woodside Farm to accommodate these elements.
- 6.10 In respect of the number of employees using Pitchkettle Farm, this is currently 11 and would have historically been much more than it is today when both Pitchkettle Farm and Woodside Farm were under the operation of Woodside

Recycling. The use of the other areas of the site by other businesses would involve additional people, however it is likely that such uses would be temporary and the number of employees low.

- 6.11 Due to the nature of the historic and proposed operations, it is difficult to place a finite number on historic and proposed employees. It is certainly the case that the current number of people employed at Pitchkettle Farm and Woodside Farm is less than the number that were once employed over Woodside Farm as a whole, and it is likely that the current number of employees across the two sites is a similar number to the number when the Certificate of Lawfulness was made. This is therefore the number referred to within the planning application form.
- 6.12 In summary with regard to Policy CS8, the development has not resulted in any additional employees compared to the most recent operation of Woodside Farm, and has likely resulted in a reduction in comparison to historic operations at the site. Given the size of the site and its lawful use, it is not considered that the introduction of other small scale businesses at the site on a short term basis would result in an increase in employees in comparison to the number that could be employed under its lawful use. As such, it is not considered that there is any conflict with Policy CS8.
- 6.13 In conclusion, it is considered that the redevelopment of an existing business use in a rural area is supported by the relevant policies of the Core Strategy and is in accordance with Paragraphs 84 and 85 of the NPPF. The development has resulted in job opportunities remaining at the site and may also present further opportunities in the future, but without an increase that could create conflict with Policy CS8. As such, the proposed development is acceptable in principle. This is subject to other material planning considerations, which are assessed below.

Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area

6.14 In general terms, it is considered that the change of use and occupation of the site by AICS has improved the visual impact of the site and the visual amenities of the wider area. As is evident from the below Google Maps images which date from before AICS took occupation, the site was previously far more cluttered especially as a result of the mix of old buildings located between the barn and the highway.



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- 6.15 All the buildings that are visible on the above photos between the main barn and the highway have been removed, and replaced with the two buildings shown on the plans. The remainder of this area is laid as hardstanding and used mainly for parking for employees of AICS, with a small amount of outdoor storage.
- 6.16 It is therefore considered that the development has resulted in a less intense and cluttered use that has improved the impact of the site on the visual amenities of the area. In addition, it is not considered that a flexible commercial use over other parts of the site would result in any additional impact; as is evident from the aerial photos, the lawful use also resulted in these areas being cluttered, and a flexible business use would not result in any additional impact in these areas.
- 6.17 It is further considered that the principles of Policy C7 of the Housing Site Allocations DPD can be followed when assessing the impact of small commercial buildings. In respect of this assessment, the overall size and scale of the buildings are smaller than those replaced (taken as a whole) and the materials used are appropriate for the commercial nature of the site. The more modern buildings are an improvement over the previous outdated and dilapidated buildings both in terms of design and sustainability, and are similar in terms of their scale, massing and height. They are located in the same location on the site as previous buildings and are therefore appropriate in terms of their layout.
- 6.18 It is therefore considered that the development proposals have resulted in improvements to the site in respect of its impact on character and visual amenity, both from within the site and to the wider countryside. Firstly, the new buildings have a more modern and attractive appearance than the previous buildings which were outdated and has become an eyesore. In addition, the modern buildings are more sustainable and will have resulted in energy efficiency improvements in comparison.
- 6.19 The proposed use is also in keeping with the character of the site, given the

lawful use, and has resulted in environmental improvements by reducing clutter. It is therefore considered that the development has resulted in a positive impact to the character and appearance of the site and the wider area, and is therefore in accordance with relevant local and national policies.

Residential Amenity

- 6.20 The site is not conspicuous from any residential properties aside from the mobile home that was the subject of application **20/01304/CERTE**. This is visible on the above aerial photos, and it is considered that the removal of the existing buildings on the site and their replacement, plus an overall reduction in buildings and storage in the area between the main barn and the road, has resulted in improvement to the living conditions of the occupant of the mobile home.
- 6.21 In any event, the buildings are single storey with a height of 3.9m and at the closest point are a minimum of 15m from the mobile home. As such, there would not result in an unacceptable loss of light. In addition, there has been a reduction in activity at the site due to the different nature of the businesses, and there is less potential for disturbance to the property as a result. This would still be the case if parts of the site were leased to other businesses within the use classes proposed.
- 6.22 As such, the proposals have resulted in an acceptable impact on residential amenity.

Transport

- 6.23 The site benefits from two access points which have not been altered. Given the lawful position of the whole site operating under Sui Generis use as a waste paper recycling business, it is not considered that the use of the site by AICS, nor the introduction of other businesses under a flexible use, would result in a material increase in traffic in comparison.

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- 6.24 In terms of parking, this is available on the cleared hardstanding between the new buildings and the barn. The cumulative floorspace of the new buildings is 249.25m² which would have a parking requirement of 10 spaces as per the Local Plan parking standards. Also not formalised, there is space for well in excess of this level of parking forward of the new buildings.
- 6.25 If other businesses were introduced in other parts of the site as part of a flexible use, then these would have their own parking requirement, however given the significant space available it is considered that the parking requirements of such businesses could easily be accommodated within the site.
- 6.26 It is therefore not considered that there are any highway safety impacts resulting from the proposals.

7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1 Given the extant use of the site, the development is acceptable in respect of its location, both regard to it being in the countryside and its proximity to Burghfield AWE. It is considered that the development has result in improvements to its impact on visual amenity both within the site and from the wider countryside that have benefits to the character and appearance of the area.

7.2 In addition, there are no unacceptable impacts on residential amenity or highway safety as a result of the development. It is therefore considered that the proposals are in accordance with local and national planning policy. As such West Berkshire Council, as the Local Planning Authority, are respectfully requested to **approve** the application, thereby granting planning permission for the proposed development.

APPENDIX 1: PHOTOGRAPHS OF PREVIOUS BUILDINGS







APPENDIX 2: PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW BUILDINGS



