



Our ref: PIH/AG/15020

Your ref:

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Dear Aida

**RE: OBSOLETE STONE BARN
TOWNHEAD FARM FOXT STAFFORDSHIRE ST10 2HW**

Thank you for your instructions for us to inspect the barn at the above premises and provide an opinion as to alternative uses that can be considered for this site. We have initially looked at the existing use and considered general alternative uses that might be attracted to this type of location.

As you know, Rushton Hickman Limited is an active commercial property consultancy based in Burton upon Trent, concentrating on the purchase, sale, letting, valuation and development of land for a wide range of employment purposes and residential uses in East Staffordshire, South Derbyshire and parts of North West Leicestershire.

We have considerable experience in dealing with all forms of developments and re-use of land and buildings and have, for many years, advised a number of rural clients on bringing redundant sites and obsolete buildings into more viable and sustainable uses.

Obsolete Barn Townhead Farm Foxt



We have no information as to when the original farmhouse and barn were constructed but assume this was over 200 years ago.

Today we find a refurbished farmhouse nearest to the highway and a cluster of generally modern single storey farm buildings to the northwest of the farmhouse.

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The subject barn stands out as being the oldest and only two storey farm building in the yard. The more modern barns are used for a mixture of storage and animal husbandry. The subject barn is simply used for rough storage and has in the past been converted to provide two garages, now stores, within part of the ground floor.

The Obsolete Barn

At appendix 2 there is a schedule of photographs of the existing building with external and internal photographs.



This detached barn is planned upon two floors and principally constructed of solid, mainly sandstone, walls under traditional timber framed, pitched roofs with traditional Staffordshire blue clay tiles. Part of the front elevation, which may in the past have been an open fronted hovel, has been modernised with opening timber doors on the ground floor, giving access to storage and

timber cladding and a timber framed band of windows beneath the eaves.

On the western side of the building there are 3 door openings on the ground floor leading into rough storage areas and first floor windows have been boarded, as per the photographs at appendix 2.

To the rear of the building there has been a modern single storey mono-pitched roof extension of cavity brick walls under Staffordshire blue clay tiled roof. The majority of water goods to the building, where they exist, are of modern plastic manufacture.

Internally, there are bare stone walls and concrete floors to the ground floor, and in the western part of the building very uneven, these areas probably historically having been used for stabling or small numbers of beasts.

The only access to the first floor is via an external timber staircase on the north eastern side of the building which leads to the first floor storage areas, which again are of bare stone/brick finish with timber floors. Much of the timber floors are in a poor state with holes where the floor has given way. This area is also put to light storage uses.

In general, the shell of the building appears to be in a good wind and watertight condition but the internal areas within the building are no longer suitable for modern agricultural or storage uses.

The building is connected to mains electricity.

This building forms part of a group of farm buildings and it is the owner's intention to demolish the barn to the northwest side of the subject barn to create additional amenity space for a future re-use of this building.

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This barn is not listed but is patently one of the older built structures within Foxt and substantially displays the character of its original design and purpose. The building is therefore worthy of retention and alternative use as it is now obsolete for its original agricultural use.

This building is very much hidden by the topography of the rising ground to the northeast and by the other agricultural buildings that surround it as can be seen by the plans at appendix 3 and the photographs at appendix 2.

Title

We understand that the premises are held freehold and there are no tenancy or other impediments which would delay a development or re-use of this obsolete barn coming forward.

Modern utility connections are available and a right of way can be provided directly from the adopted highway.

Location

Foxt is a small attractive hamlet, some 4 miles northwest of Cheadle, just to the east of the village of Ipstones. Foxt stands on the hill side over the Churnet Valley with the highway passing through the hamlet from the northeast to the southwest in the direction of Froghall, where it joins with the A52.

This general area is recognised as a historic mining area for ironstone and gritstone, supplementing the general farming activities in the area.

The village today has a church built in the mid 1800's, a village hall, a motor vehicle repair workshop and a public house and restaurant, The Fox and Goose. The hamlet is also on a bus route with a daily bus service into Cheadle. On the leisure front there is a guesthouse at Shawgate Farm and a Caravan Club CL site nearby.

Planning

We are informed that there is a permanent dwelling house upon the site, Townhead Farm, falling under Use Class C3 (Dwellinghouses) and an established use for agriculture and storage covering the range of buildings to the rear of the farmhouse.

Existing Use

The building currently has a limited use for storage on the ground floor with a limited height of approximately 2.33 metres on the ground floor and storage on the first floor accessed only by an external timber staircase with limited load bearing from damaged timber flooring.

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Alternative Uses

Light Industrial and Warehouse Uses

The farmyard lies within a predominantly residential area within a linear settlement established along the highway frontage, forming the hamlet of Foxt.

There already exists within the hamlet a vehicle repair workshop meeting local private and agricultural needs.

It is our belief that it would be extremely difficult to envisage an employment planning consent for this building as it would have an extremely detrimental effect upon the existing dwelling, Townhead Farm, which traffic would have to pass to reach a commercial unit.

Whilst buses and HGV's delivering and collecting from farms use the highway. The access from the highway into the farmyard is limited and again this traffic would cause considerable disruption to the occupiers of the farmhouse.

It is also likely that such a change of use for industrial or warehouse occupation would require substantial alteration to the elevations of the building in the form of wider and higher access doors, additional car parking and turning areas for HGV's, totally changing the character of this old farm building.

Such use would also generate a greater number of traffic movements within the hamlet, which again we assume would be unwelcome.

Finally, it is our experience that commercial users would normally seek to locate closer to the main urban areas of Cheadle or Ashbourne and would also seek more readily to access major A roads and would not find the gradient of the road down into Froghall particularly helpful.

Offices

The general construction and outward appearance of this old barn might lend itself towards office use as an alternative style of occupation.

Office use would require planning consent and the creation of a more formal car parking area, possibly where the existing barn is to be demolished. There would be a need for internal rearrangement and certainly the possibility of the creation of a more open plan office area on the first floor with an internal staircase.

The current broadband to this locality is relatively slow, this will be a substantial obstacle for office occupiers, for whilst a number of companies enjoy a rural location they rely heavily in such circumstances upon a good download speed and fast internet connection, which is not available in Foxt.

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There would also be additional inconvenience for nearby occupiers by the increase in traffic to offices, over and above the existing traffic flows, particularly at peak hours at the start and end of the day with a trickle of additional traffic throughout the day.

The use of these premises as offices is likely to have a detrimental effect upon the amenity of the existing dwelling house Townhead Farm and its occupiers.

For these reasons we feel that offices would not be a good alternative use within this current location.

Tourism

Whilst these buildings undoubtedly have a strong historic agricultural atmosphere to them they would not necessarily lend themselves to any form of tourism attraction. There is no sign of the buildings having been used for a specific workshop operation or craft skill whereby the premises could be refurbished and enhanced as a miner visitor attraction or a spin-off from Froghall Wharf.

There is guesthouse accommodation within the hamlet and within the wider area. However, there is considerable expenditure to be incurred in conversion of old farm buildings for residential use within the guesthouse or bed and breakfast marketplace. This has to be set against the now considerable competition from the 2 hotels and the new lodge development at Alton Towers which are proving extremely popular with visitors and taking business away from the smaller operators. This bespoke accommodation on the Alton Towers site is themed to attract visitors and obviously benefits from early access from the park and currently an offer of a second day's free entrance to the park, which is difficult for private operators to compete with.

We therefore feel that this would not be a viable use at this time.

Day Nursery

We have, on many occasions, successful negotiated lettings and sales of rural properties/barn conversions for children's day care or children's nursery schools.

Children's day care facilities now normally operate from 7.00am in the morning through to 7:30pm in the evening.

Such use would require substantial internal alterations and improvements to the property including the provision of catering kitchens, specialist WC's and a safe, gated, secure external area with video camera surveillance. If a nursery use were to be approved by the planning authority it would generate considerable amounts of traffic during peak periods in the morning, late afternoon and evenings with parents drop off and pick up activity.

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There will also need to be a substantial financial investment in the property to create a nursery operation.

We do not believe there are sufficient numbers of families in the area, or passing through the area, to create a viable business base for such a nursery or nursery school. Nor is there a nearby primary school to which a children's day nursery unit could act as a feeder.

In the main children's day nurseries tend to be either adjacent to major arterial routes, or within employment areas, or on the edge of the larger urban areas, such as Ashbourne and Cheadle.

We feel this location would be unsuitable and unsustainable for day nursery use due to a lack of demand. Such use would also create a substantial detriment to the amenity of the existing residential property Townhead Farm.

Residential Use

Having regard to this location in Foxt, a change of use of this ancient building to a dwelling house, under Use Class C3, would seem to be the most financially attractive option for the existing owners and create an opportunity for the local community.

A study from the National Housing Federation shows there is a sharp rise nationally in pensioners living in rural areas, which will increase substantially by the end of the decade and stop younger generations from getting a toe hole in the areas where they grew up. The report goes on to indicate a list of pensioner pockets where more than 40% of all households will be over 65 by 2021.

This is a clearly identified national problem and in essence every community, it is suggested, needs to have some creation of new properties to bring 'new blood' into the area. The copies of the plans attached to this report as appendix 3, show a possible conversion for a two storey dwelling, comprising on the ground floor entrance hall and cloakroom, sitting room, kitchen with utility off, a dining room and family room with internal and external staircases to the first floor to provide 3 double bedrooms, a single bedroom and 2 separate bathrooms. These plans show how the existing obsolete farm building could be sensibly converted to provide a modern, detached dwelling house with an attractive and unique layout reflecting the original agricultural design of the building retaining internal and external features, together with external amenity space.

This property would gain access and services from the highway, past the existing dwelling but would cause little inconvenience or disruption to that dwelling as it would be occupied by a single family.

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The conversion would require almost no alterations to the external elevations of the building and yet still provide an attractive internal layout.

Most importantly, this property can be economically converted into an attractive residential unit, which we understand from talking to local estate agents would be attractive to the local market.

Conclusion

It is our opinion that a residential use of this obsolete agricultural building would be the most viable use financially and aesthetically by preserving this building and its original character for the future.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to let us know.

Yours sincerely



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Appendices: Appendix 1 – Street Plan
Appendix 2 – Schedule of Photographs
Appendix 3 – Plans