PLANNING, DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT
TO ACCOMPANY

PLANNING APPLICATION FOR
CAR PARK, TURNING AREA AND ACCESS

AT

ABBEY FARMHOUSE, LEEK
ON BEHALF OF

MR N & MRS H DOCKSEY

Prepared by:

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Chartered Town Planners

1. Introduction

This application is to provide an independent parking area to one of the two dwellings which comprise the former Abbey Farmhouse a Grade II Listed Building.

2. Context (Ref: Location Plan)

Abbey Farm is a working dairy farm accessed by a private drive from Abbey Green Road. In addition to the range of agricultural buildings, the farmstead contains four dwellings. The applicants live in a barn conversion adjacent to the former farmhouse, which was divided into two dwellings following a planning permission granted in the 1970s.

The former farmhouse is orientated north-south, and is sub-divided vertically. The component dwellings share an extensive curtilage comprising gardens and woodland to the west and shared yard and vehicular access to the east.

3. Purpose of The Scheme

The disposition of the dwellings and the shared use of the vehicular access, means that currently, occupants of the northerly dwelling have to drive past the principal windows of the southerly dwelling with consequent noise disturbance and loss of privacy.

The applicants and owners have attempted to sell the two dwellings to secure the future maintenance of the listed buildings by new owners which of course should be considered as a public benefit.

Unfortunately potential purchasers of the dwellings have been deterred by the lack of independent access and parking arrangements and the potential for loss of privacy, noise and conflicting vehicle movements.

4. Design of Scheme

The scheme is designed to separate the access and parking arrangements of the two homes by giving the northern dwelling an independent parking area linked by a pre-existing footpath to the house, thereby removing the privacy and amenity concerns of the second house.

To the west of the garden area of the former farmhouse is an existing field gate and access which exits onto the private drive serving the whole farmstead and giving access to Abbey Green Road. It is proposed to extend the farm track following the garden boundary north, then turning at right angles into an unused and overgrown part of the garden, to create an open parking area. The head of the access track will be configured to also provide a turning area. The field access will be retained. The proposed parking area occupies a former vegetable garden, which has not been used for 20 years+.

It is also surrounded by mature woodland and all of this will be retained.

It is backed by a natural sandstone outcrop and the mounded topography will ensure it does not intrude into the setting of the listed building.

The surface of the access track, car park and turning area will be unbound stone, providing S.U.D.s, and a cattle grid will be provided as appropriate. This will maintain an informal rural character. No fencing is required or proposed.

5. Planning Considerations

Abbey Farmhouse was originally constructed in 1612 and later extensions and remodelling occurred in the later Nineteenth Century (after 1862).

To the east of the farmhouse are a number of early farm buildings constructed around 1820, two of them are now converted to dwellings. These buildings were partially constructed from and ornamented with sculpted stone from the ruin of the Cistercian Dieu-la-Cres Abbey. Further east is the modern dairy farm with its operational yards and stock, fodder and implement stores.

The western elevation of the former farmhouse overlooks a garden area bounded by strap metal estate fencing. The existing field access runs parallel with this fence.

The whole of the farmstead stands at the centre of the farm holding and there are no private neighbouring properties in the vicinity or public vantage points, which give an overview of the farmhouse and the site of the proposed car parking.

Prior to preparation of this application, we undertook a pre-application enquiry which largely based on input from the Conservation Officer provided to the Case Officer, concluded the scheme would be unlikely to receive planning permission because the access track would represent harm to the setting of the Listed Building.

In reaching this conclusion the Conservation Officer has set the policy background, in particular making reference to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. At para 66 the Act places a general duty on L.P.A.s to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of a Listed Building. Case Law related to the impact on the setting of Listed Buildings demonstrates that the strong presumption in favour of preserving listed buildings still applies when the harm is

less than substantial. This is in contrast to the N.P.P.F. which at para 134 states that where a harm is less than substantial that harm must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. Government Planning Practice Guidance, states that benefits do not always have to be visible or accessible to the public in order to be public benefits; for example, aiding the viable use of a heritage asset in support of its long term conservation. P.P.G. states L.P.As are required to make a thorough assessment of the impact on the setting, but must take into account and be proportionate to the significance of the asset and the degree to which changes enhance or detract from that significance and the ability to appreciate it. These are primarily visual considerations of the way views of or from the building are affected.

The N.P.P.F. at para 128 requires applicants to provide a proportionate description of the effect of their proposals on any heritage assets and their settings.

The listed building Abbey Farm containing the two dwellings is viewed very much as a part of the cluster of farm buildings to the east with its westerly setting being a garden with lawns and hedges. To the north is a mature woodland and a sandstone promontory overlooking the farmstead.

The proposed access to the car park and turning area, is an extension to a pre-existing field access, and is forty five metres approximately from the listed building. As no buildings or structures are proposed, we judge they will have no impact on the setting of the listed building and once the loose stone has greened over it will be indistinguishable in the setting of the houses. The turning head and parking bays are similarly inconspicuous and there is no inter-visibility between the parking areas and the dwellings, due to mature plant cover and the topography. Access to the house is by an existing woodland footpath.

We fairly judge the impact of the proposals on the listed building and its setting not to be substantial and not even slight. It will be imperceptible being at no more than ground level. We believe the Conservation Officer's view of the impact is an overstatement and disproportionate.

In contrast it is the applicants' belief that provision of this facility will enhance the attraction of the two properties to potential purchasers and we conclude that the occupation together with the normal maintenance and heating of the properties represents a public benefit.

Considering archaeological interest, no deep excavations are required, only surface dressing and previous cultivation of the land to be used has revealed no archaeology.

The footprint of the Cistercian Abbey and associated buildings lies to the east of the farmstead in the vicinity of the nineteenth century buildings. If any archaeology is discovered, this can be recorded or protected by standard planning conditions.

We conclude that because the proposals do no harm to the setting, and facilitate public benefit, the balancing planning judgement should be in favour of the proposal.

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