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# Planning and Heritage Statement for the conversion of domestic outbuilding to form a holiday let

## Outbuilding at The Old Orchard, Castle Hill Road

November 2020

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| Project | Outbuilding at The Old Orchard, Castle Hill Road, Alton, ST10 4AJ |
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# 1 Introduction

1.1 JMI Planning is a Midlands based town planning consultancy. Its directors are chartered town planners with over 30 years' combined experience in both the public and private sector.

1.2 The author of this statement, Teodora Golemdzhiyska graduated from University of Liverpool with a 1st Class Masters in Town and Regional Planning. She is a Chartered Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and is currently working as a Planner in the private sector.

# 2 Site and Planning History

2.1 The application site comprises of a double garage constructed from stone and tile which sits within the domestic curtilage of The Old Orchard and is used for domestic purposes associated with the dwellinghouse.

2.2 The wider site is located within the settlement of Alton in a predominantly residential context consisting of a mixture of stone and brick and tile dwellings of various ages.

2.3 The subject building forms part of the residential plot's north boundary where it adjoins a dry stone wall which runs partway along the north boundary and continues along the north boundaries of several other plots along Castle Hill Road. The building sits within the driveway of the property and is adjacent to the residential dwelling, thus there is no boundary treatment separating the two.

2.4 The building and the dwelling are both accessed from a gated access that emerges onto Castle Hill Road.

2.5 The application site is located within Alton and Farley Conservation Area. The dwellings (formerly a single cowhouse now 3 dwellings) immediately east of the application site is Grade II listed.

2.6 The site and surroundings are shown on the aerial photograph below.




*Figure 1 – Aerial photograph of site and surroundings.*

# 3 The Proposed Development

3.1 The application building was granted permission to be constructed in 1980 to serve as a double garage for the property. More recently the applicant has been finding that they are using the building for storage purposes rather than garage as they have a relatively large drive which provides sufficient parking for their vehicles.

3.2 The building is a relatively large structure and its use for storage purposes is underutilised the space available and the applicant feels that this space could be put

to better uses.

3.3 The village of Alton is located in close proximity to Alton Towers and the River Churnet and its valley which presents opportunity for walking and hiking and other outdoor attractions.

3.4 It is thought that the building could be better used as a holiday let to provide accommodation to visitors to the area and permission is therefore sought for the conversion and external alterations associated with this.

3.4 The external works proposed consist of the removal of the metal garage doors which are to be partially bricked up and two windows are to be inserted in place. The openings in the north, east and south elevation will remain the same size however they will be replaced with glazed windows. Two rooflights are also proposed within the east and south facing roof slopes.

3.5 The existing internal arrangement will be retained and only a small amount of stud walling is proposed to form the shower room. A second storey and a new staircase is proposed within one of the portions of the building to provide sleeping space within the roof space of the building.

3.6 The existing curtilage layout will be retained which provides sufficient parking space for both the existing dwelling and the proposed holiday let.

# 4 Planning Policy Context

## National Planning Policy Framework

4.1 Paragraph 11 advises that at the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision taking, this means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date Local Plan; and also in circumstances where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.

4.2 Paragraph 80 of the NPPF prescribes significant weight to the need to support economic growth and productivity.

4.3 Paragraph 83 of the NPPF supports the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas through both the conversion of existing buildings and the provision of well-designed new buildings. It specifically supports the development of sustainable rural tourist facilities.

4.4 Chapter 12 of the NPPF houses a number of relevant paragraphs relating to the importance of appropriate design. Paragraph 124 encourages the creation of high-quality buildings which raise the quality of the built environment and create better places in which to live and work. Paragraph 127 advises that decision makers should aim to ensure that developments respond to local character and history, reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, and are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping.

## Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020)

4.5 The site falls within the development boundary for Alton which is identified as one of the villages which falls within the Larger Villages Areas Strategy set out in Policy SS 8 where a variety of development types are acceptable. Principle 4 of Policy SS 8 requires new development to reflect and enhance each village's special character and heritage by:

- *Giving priority to the reuse and regeneration of existing redundant, underused or surplus sites and premises for new development;*
- *Ensuring that development is of a suitable scale in relation to the role and function of the villages as set out in the Spatial strategy*
- *Supporting the use of Neighbourhood Plans and Village Design Statements to guide future development*
- *Protecting and enhancing the setting of individual settlements*
- *Protecting and enhancing the setting and historic character of the village, including heritage assets*

4.6 The site is located within the Churnet Valley and Policy SS 11 which sets out guidance for the development within this area is therefore relevant.

**Policy SS 11 Churnet Valley Strategy**

*The Churnet Valley is identified as an area for sustainable tourism and rural regeneration. The Churnet Valley Masterplan provides a comprehensive framework for development in the Churnet Valley and development should be in accordance with the Masterplan. Within this area particular support will be given to the following forms of development and measures:*

- *Short stay and long stay visitor accommodation;*
- *The expansion of existing tourist attractions and facilities and the provision of compatible new tourist attractions and facilities;*

- *Measures to enhance, protect and interpret the landscape character and heritage assets of the Churnet Valley;*
- *Measures to remediate and restore derelict land, buildings and features including the appropriate redevelopment of sites;*
- *Actions to protect and enhance the biodiversity of the valley, including the maintenance, buffering and connection of designated sites and actions to mitigate climate change.*
- measures that support and integrate the heritage transport infrastructure of the valley, sympathetically with enhancing and developing links to strategic footpaths, cycle and horse riding routes.
- measures to improve connectivity and accessibility to and within the Churnet Valley by sustainable transport means having regard to the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

*Any development should be of a scale and nature and of a high standard of design which conserves and enhances the heritage, landscape and biodiversity of the area. Strong sustainable development and environmental management principles should also be demonstrated. The consideration of landscape character will be paramount in all development proposals in order to protect and conserve locally distinctive qualities and sense of place and to maximise opportunities for restoring, strengthening and enhancing distinctive landscape features.*

*Complementary and sensitive highway improvements to access routes and/or measures to support other alternative means of access will be required to serve any developments which generate significant additional demand for travel.*

4.7 **Policy E4 – Tourism and Cultural Development**

*New tourism and cultural development which complements the distinctive character and quality of the District will be supported having regard to the Area Strategies in Policies SS 5 to SS 10 and and Churnet Valley Strategy Policy SS 11.*

*1. New tourist, visitor and cultural accommodation, attractions and facilities should be developed in locations that offer, or are capable of offering either:*

- *a) good connectivity with other tourist destinations and amenities, particularly by public transport, walking and cycling; or*
- *b) in locations in or close to settlements where local services, facilities and public transport are available; or*
- *c) in areas specifically identified for tourism development in the Churnet Valley Masterplan or other relevant documents.*

*2. Developments in other locations may be supported where a rural location can be justified. New accommodation, attractions and facilities should:*

- *A. support the provision and expansion of tourist, visitor and cultural facilities in the rural areas where needs are not met by existing facilities; and*
- *B. all development shall be of an appropriate quality, scale and character compatible with the local area, protect the residential amenity of the area, enhance the heritage, landscape and biodiversity of the area and shall not harm interests of acknowledged importance.*

# 5 Planning Considerations

## Principle of Development

5.1 The application site lies in Alton which is one of the larger villages with a good amount of services and facilities and is considered a suitable place for new development, providing it does not detract from the character of the settlement.

5.2 Policy SS 8 sets out the principles for new development in larger villages and encourages, amongst other things, the reuse and regeneration of existing redundant, underused or surplus sites for new development.

5.3 The building was erected as a double garage some 40 years ago and has a relatively large footprint. Also, the building has a height relative to that of a one and half storey dwelling with a pitched roof which is above average for a domestic building. The use of a building of this size which is a solid and well-preserved structure for storage purposes does not represent the most suitable use for the building.

5.4 The proposed two bedroom holiday let is thought to be a more suitable and viable use for the building in this sought after rural location popular for rural holidays. The proposed use and size of the holiday let is suitable in relation to the role and function of the village as a service village where there are sufficient facilities.

5.5 In accordance with Paragraph 83 of the NPPF the proposal would contribute towards supporting a prosperous rural economy by allowing the growth of business in a rural area through the conversion of an existing building whilst providing sustainable rural tourism development which respects the character of the countryside.

5.6 The principle of development is also accepted by Policy E 4 which relates to tourism and cultural development and allows for new tourism development which complements the distinctive character and quality of the District, benefits from good connectivity with other tourist destinations and complies with the Churnet Valley Masterplan.

5.7 The proposed conversion makes use of an existing building which has been present within the townscape for a significant period of time and therefore contributes to the character of the settlement. The subject building makes a positive contribution through its traditional form and well preserved nature and in particularly through the use of light colour stone which matches that of the wall which is a dominant feature along Castle Hill Road and is distinct to the District.

5.8 Delivering a tourism use within the building ensures the future use of the building and its retention within the streetscene.

5.9 The proposed external changes serves to improve the quality of the building and renovate a traditional looking building to resemble something akin to a contemporary barn conversion which is a type of development readily seen in this rural context.

5.10 The scheme does not propose any extensions to the building nor does it propose any alterations to the roofscape or to the stone wall which forms the boundary treatment. The idea is to achieve a quaint holiday let suitable for visitors looking for accommodation with a rural charm and to achieve this the scheme has retained the elements which contribute to the character of the village.

5.11 The Heritage Statement section of this statement covers the matters relating to design and impacts on heritage in greater detail.

5.12 The proposal contributes to the growth of rural economy and tourism development by providing a holiday let in an area that is suitably located to local attractions such as Alton Towers Resort and local landscapes including Dimmingsdale Valley & Furnace Forest Walks and the Churnet Valley.

5.13 The National Planning Police framework makes it clear that sustainability also encompasses economic and social considerations. The proposed holiday let would meet an identified shortfall in tourist accommodation in the district and would attract visitors to the area who would spend money at local attractions and in local pubs and restaurants.

5.14 In light of the current Covid 19 pandemic, there is likely to be increased demand in the short to medium term for domestic holidays. Consumers have been put off flying and there is uncertainty as to the longer-term sustainability or airlines and travel companies. The proposal would deliver a social benefit in providing a quite holiday location for walkers and outdoor activities, as promoted by the Churnet Valley Masterplan.

5.15 The proposal would also contribute to the vitality of the village and the retention of local facilities. Alton also has a number of facilities and services including two convenience stores, a village hall, several pubs and two churches. Alton is also within 5km of the larger settlement of Cheadle.

5.16 Whilst there is no bus service within the village there are a large number of public footpaths which connect the village to nearby local attractions. The extent of the local network is shown in Figure 2 below.

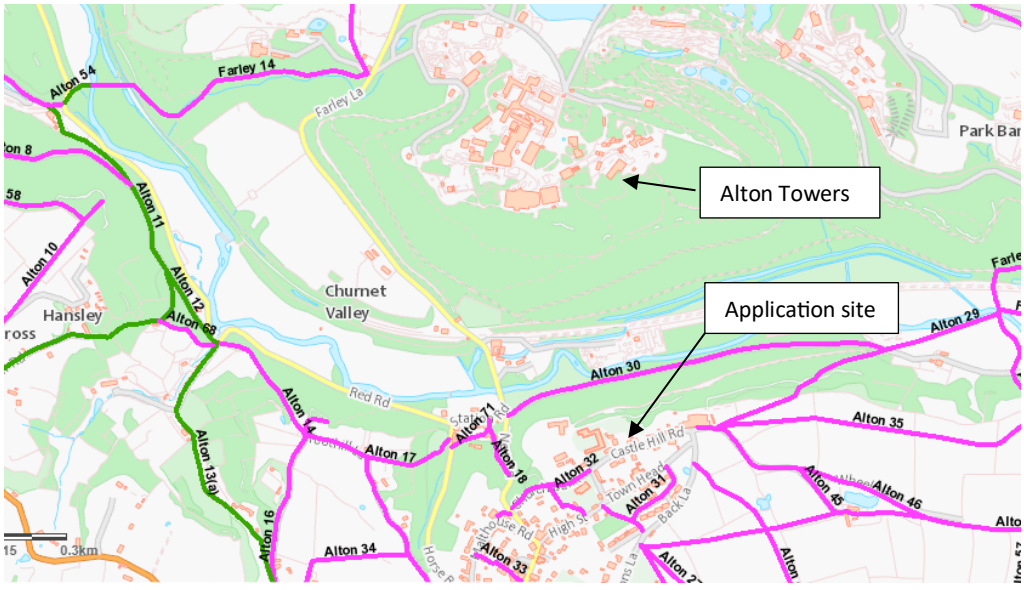



*Figure 2 – Footpath network around Alton*

5.17 Another stipulation of Policy E 4 and Policy SS 8 is that development shall be of an appropriate quality and character compatible with the local area and shall not impact on the residential amenity of the area.

5.18 No alterations are proposed to the layout of the space around the building and the dwellinghouse. There is sufficient separation distance between the building and the dwellinghouse, and to other neighbouring properties to ensure there will be no impacts on the amenity of the residents.

5.19 The holiday let use is not considered an intrinsically noisy use or one which would result in disturbance to neighbours. The holiday let will be advertised to couples and small families who are likely visiting Alton Towers Resort, or to walkers who want to explore the local walking and hiking routes and the natural beauty of the area.

5.20 Given the relatively small size of the accommodation there is only likely to be one additional vehicle associated with the proposal. There is sufficient room on the existing drive, which can hold 4 vehicles, for this vehicle as well as for the vehicles associated with the residential dwelling in line with the Council's parking standards.

5.21 The existing access is wide and afforded with good visibility in both directions along Castle Hill Road. The additional vehicle movements will not therefore detrimentally impact the local highway network.

5.22 It can be concluded that the proposed use will therefore be appropriate in this residential context.

5.23 In accordance with Policies SS 8, SS11 and E 4 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan and Paragraph 83 of the National Planning Policy Framework, the broad principle of the proposed development is therefore acceptable.

## Other Matters

5.24 The Environment Agency shows the site lying entirely within Flood Zone 1, where the annual probability of flooding from rivers or the sea is less than 1 in 1000. The proposed development would not therefore be at unacceptable risk from flooding and neither would they exacerbate flood risk elsewhere.

5.25 The proposal does not propose any alterations to the existing roof structure which is insulated and in good condition. The building is not thought to present suitable habitat for protected species given that the building is relatively new in terms of age and is in regular use. Should I add anymore?

# 6 Heritage Statement

6.1 A search on the Local HER records show the site neighbours the Grade II listed former cowhouse, which is now two residential dwellings. The listing description for the asset is as follows:

- *ALTON C.P. TOWN HEAD (North-west side) SK 0624-0724 13/62 Cowhouse approximately 25 yards west of Town Head Farm- 3.1.67 house (Formerly listed as "Barn at Townsend Farm") GV II*

*Cowhouse. C17 with later addition. Ashlar with herringbone tooling; plain tile roof. 5-bay range aligned east-west with a single bay extension to the west. North side: one storey and attic, main range to left, extension to the right. Main range: buttresses at the bay divisions, door to right of centre; casement to left of centre, square window opening to left with boarded door, square loft openings to left and right. Extension: chamfered eaves band and coped verges. Left hand gable: central loft door with pigeon holes over. Right hand gable: 2 ground floor doors and central loft door. South side: main range to right, extension to left. Main range: buttresses at the bay divisions, doors to right, left and centre; 3 windows, one to the left of each door,*

*square loft opening to the right. Extension: large inserted cart entrance to the right, rectangular loft opening to the left.*

6.2 The site also sits within Alton and Farley Conservation Area.

6.3 The local HER does not identify any other heritage assets or sites of archaeological significance within the immediate surroundings which could be impacted by the proposal.

## Statement of Significance

6.4 To assess the significance and the potential impacts of the development on the identified heritage assets consideration has been given to Historic England guidance and good practise documents.

**Contribution made by the application site to the character of Alton and Farley Conservation Area**

6.5 The Alton and Farley Conservation Area Appraisal identifies the features of townscape and landscape importance and serves as a basis for future policies of preservation and enhancement. The appraisal states that the conservation area was designated in 1971 for the purposes of preserving the townscape of the villages both of which date back to medieval times and contain surviving built form dating back to this period.

6.6 The most notable structure related to the early development of Alton is the castle built for Bertram de Verdun, whilst the 800 acre deer park that also formed part of the family's expanse of land ownership was mainly in Farley. Critical to Alton's later character post 1500 were the interests of John Talbot who instructed the

redevelopment of the castle site and the creation of Alton Towers in the former deer-park.

6.7 Alton village is considered to be a planned settlement with a densely built up core consisting of tight streets and wider roads which lead out to former arable land on the edges of the village. There are three distinct elements: an irregular phase relating to early pastoral farming, the site of the past and present castles, and a planned extension to the village

6.8 Buildings in Alton village are diverse in character, date and spacing. This reflects the historic development of the settlement, topography and piecemeal construction by numerous owners. Narrow burgage plots are centred within the core of the village whilst the edges of the village has a more irregular scatter of building lying up slope which are late in date.

6.9 The application building is a relatively new building permission for which was granted in 1980. It is thought that the current garage was an extension to a barn which occupied the site prior to the construction of the dwelling when the site was just orchard and which appears on map extracts from 1890. This is evidenced through the T-shape of the building and through the presence of two different size stone with the older part of the building being constructed from ashlar and the newer east-west facing portion having a smoother stone finish.

6.10 Both the garage, in its current domestic form, and the dwelling are examples of some of the more modern residential development present in the village and whilst not unattractive their contribution to the character of the conservation area is less significant than the more historic townscape located along High Street, Town Head and the southern part of Castle Hill Road.

6.11 The dry stone wall which forms part of the north boundary of the site and which attaches to the garage is the dominant boundary treatment seen throughout the conservation area with properties set behind stone walls of various heights. This feature therefore makes a positive contribution and is of importance to the character.

6.12 The north elevation of the garage building where it meets the stone wall and where it fronts Castle Hill Road is therefore the most sensitive of the four elevations as it is experienced alongside the historic townscape along the north side of the highway and the adjacent Grade II listed building.

**Significance of the Grade II listed Cowhouse**

6.13 The former cowhouse which has since been divided to two properties known as The Coach House and Heaths Barn is thought to date back to 17th century and is linear shaped barn constructed from ashlar with a plain tile roof. The building would have formed part of original curtilage of Town Head Farm and the two appear together on map extracts from 1890 which is a fine example of an 18th century remodelling of a 17th century house.

6.14 The significance of the asset therefore derives from the aesthetic interest of the cowhouse and its links to Town Head Farm both of which are good examples of early built form of the settlement relating to early pastoral farming which is thought to be one of the phases of the villages growth. Also, both the cowhouse and Town Head Farm are made from ashlar and plain tile which are vernacular materials distinctive to the settlement and the local area.

6.15 The application building's north elevation which is part of the original barn which would have occupied the orchard follows the building line established by the barns

and the listed cowhouse which once formed part of Town Head Farm and whilst not part of the complex the design and form of this part of the garage reads as part of the historic built form and makes a positive contribution to the setting of the listed building.

## Assessment of Impact

6.16 The proposed alterations to convert the garage to a holiday let will mainly comprise of the reuse of existing openings and internal alterations required to make a successful conversion. All works will be confined to the envelope of the building with the view of retaining its character.

6.17 There are no changes proposed to the existing boundary treatment or curtilage arrangement.

6.18 The proposal will retain the dry stone wall which makes a positive contribution to the character of conservation area.

6.19 The north and east elevation of the garage are the most sensitive out of the four elevations owing to their earlier date of construction and position parallel with the building line established by the agricultural buildings at Town Head Farm.

6.20 The proposal will not alter the solid to void ratio of the garage ensuring the stone fabric, in particular the original fabric which matches that of the cowhouse and which is a positive feature within the setting of the cowhouse, remains intact.

6.21 The replacement of the timber boarded door on the north elevation with full-height glazing is not believed to result in harm to the setting of the listed building given that the listed building is also in residential use and its openings have too been domesticated as a result of this.

6.21 The proposed works, in particular the replacement of the metal garage doors with windows, are thought to be more visually appropriate to the character of the conservation area and more akin to the appearance of the listed building.

6.22 The cumulative impact of the proposed alterations is not therefore of a nature capable of resulting in harm to the significance of the listed building or its setting. It is therefore concluded that in accordance with Paragraph 196 of the NPPF the proposal will not result in harm to the identified heritage assets.

# 7 Conclusions

7.1 The proposed change of use of the underutilised garage to a holiday let is a more viable use within this sought-after location close to local tourist attractions.

7.2 The proposal would bring forward economic benefits related to visitors of the holiday let visiting local attractions and helping to support the facilities within the village all of which are supported by Paragraph 83 of the NPPF and Policy SS8 and SS 11 of the Local Plan.

7.3 The proposal is compatible with the size and role of the village and to the residential character of this portion of the village. In accordance with Policy E4 the proposal is unlikely to result in disturbances relating to noise or traffic which could be out of character with the context

7.4 The proposals would not harm ecology and biodiversity or the safe or efficient use of the highway network.

7.5 The Heritage Statement finds that the proposal will preserve the features which contribute to the character of the Alton and Farley Conservation Area and will not harm the significance of the Grade II listed building.

7.6 The proposal therefore constitutes sustainable development which accords with Policies E 4, SS 8 and SS 11 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework.