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CHARTERED TOWN PLANNERS

Planning, design and access statement

Conversion of barn to a single dwelling

Austin Grounds Farm, Sibford Ferris

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 This planning, design and access statement has been produced by JPPC to accompany a planning application in respect of proposals to convert the existing barn to a single dwelling at Austin Grounds Farm, Sibford Ferris.

1.2 With reference to the character of the application site and surrounding area, an appraisal of the prevailing planning policies and planning history and an assessment of the planning issues raised by the proposal, this statement sets out why the proposed development is deemed to be acceptable.

1.3 The submission is accompanied by the architectural plans, the Bat Survey Report produced by Cotswold Wildlife Surveys and the Structural Survey produced by Andrew Baxter.

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2.0 Site Description, Planning History and Proposal

2.1 The site is located to the south of Sibford Ferris, to the east of Hook Norton Road, which links Sibford Ferris to The Gate Hangs High crossroads. The site is accessed from a gated driveway and is well-screened from the majority of views by mature vegetation. The site is not within a conservation area and there are no listed buildings in close proximity of the site.

Figure 1 - Map showing site context

2.2 The building is fully enclosed and has a typical appearance for a modern agricultural building, with corrugated metal sheet walls and a corrugated sheet roof.

Planning History

2.3 The conversion of the building subject to this planning application has been approved three times previously by the Council in 2015 (15/00936/Q56), 2017 (17/01087/Q56) and in 2024 (24/01676/Q56).

2.4 A planning application for alterations to and conversion of the barn to form one dwelling was withdrawn in June 2026, after the Council required a legal agreement to be signed to secure that the dwelling would be a self-build for the

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purpose of an exemption to BNG. The Council had indicated that they would approve this application, subject to the legal agreement.

Proposal

2.5 This application seeks planning permission to make alterations to and convert the building to a single dwelling. Following the changes to BNG legislation which were introduced in August 2026, a legal agreement should no longer be required as the site is under 0.2 hectares and does not affect a priority habitat.

2.6 The dwelling would have three bedrooms, with an open plan kitchen and dining area and a separate lounge area. The conversion scheme has sought to use existing window and door openings where possible, with new openings kept to a minimum.

2.7 The dwelling would benefit from a spacious private garden and would have two parking spaces provided at the front of the site and an additional space within the integral garage. The existing access onto the road to the west will be utilised.

2.8 A planning application is submitted because there are some minor alterations that would fall outside the scope of a Class Q application, including a larger curtilage and some small external changes to the building.

3.0 Planning Policy

3.1 Under Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 there is a statutory obligation to determine planning applications and appeals in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include Government Guidance and any other matters relevant to the use and development of land.

National Planning Policy Framework

3.2 The National Planning Policy Framework ("the NPPF") was revised in August 2026. Policy S3 states that decisions on development proposals should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which means in all locations that development proposals that accord with both an up-to-date development

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plan and the decision-making policies in the Framework should be approved without delay.

3.3 Policy DM3 states that local planning authorities should work with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner, where necessary seeking solutions to problems arising from initial proposals, to enable a timely decision.

3.4 Policy DP3 states that development proposals should respond to their context (the history, character and features of their site and its setting), so that they integrate with and enhance their surroundings; such as through the arrangement of development plots and buildings, the use of materials and architectural features, and the restoration, reuse and integration of heritage assets.

3.5 Policy S5 states that outside of settlements the reuse, extension, alteration or replacement of an existing building can be considered acceptable, provided that the existing building is of permanent and substantial construction, is lawful in planning terms, and any extension or alteration will not result in a disproportionate increase in size compared to the existing building. In the case of proposals for a replacement building, it should be for the same use and not disproportionately larger than the one it replaces.

Cherwell Development Plan

Cherwell Local Plan 2015

3.6 In this instance, the Development Plan comprises of the Cherwell Local Plan 2015 together with the saved policies of the 1996 Adopted Local Plan. The following policies are considered relevant to the development proposal:

3.7 Policy ESD13: Opportunities will be sought to secure the enhancement of the character and appearance of the landscape, through the restoration, management or enhancement of existing landscapes and development proposals will be expected to respect and enhance local landscape character. Proposals that cause undue visual intrusion into the open countryside; cause undue harm to important natural landscape features; are inconsistent with local character; harm the setting of settlements; or harm the historic value of the landscape will not be permitted.

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3.8 Policy ESD15: The Character of the Built and Historic Environment requires development proposals to complement and enhance the character of its context through sensitive siting, layout and high quality design and all new development is required to meet high design standards.

3.9 Supporting text to policy ESD15 advises that the Council will protect the historic environment since it is a major contributor to the local distinctiveness of the District. The text continues on this theme and advises that designated (and non-designated) heritage assets form part of the historic fabric of the District and contribute to the character of the area and will be maintained.

Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996

3.10 Saved Policy H19 considers proposals for the conversion of a rural building, whose form, bulk and general design is in keeping with its surroundings to a dwelling in a location beyond the built-up limits of a settlement. The policy provides as follows:

(I) The building can be converted without major rebuilding or extension and without inappropriate alteration to its form and character;
(II) The proposal would not cause significant harm to the character of the countryside or the immediate setting of the building;
(III) The proposal would not harm the special character and interest of a building of architectural or historic significance;
(IV) The proposal meets the requirements of the other policies in the plan.

3.11 Saved Policy C28 states as follows:

Control will be exercised over all new development, including conversions and extensions, to ensure that the standards of layout, design and external appearance including the choice of external-finish materials, are sympathetic to the character of the urban or rural content of that development. In sensitive areas such as conservation areas, the area of outstanding natural beauty and areas of high landscape value, development will be required to be of a high standard and the use of traditional local building materials will normally be required.

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4.0 Discussion

Principle of the Development

4.1 Saved policy H19 of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 allows for the conversion of buildings in the countryside to dwellings, subject to four criteria. These criteria are as follows:

The building can be converted without major rebuilding or extension and without inappropriate alteration to its form and character – The external building materials for the roof and walls of the building would be retained in their entirety, with insulation added as part of the proposals. There would be no alteration to the form and character of the building. A Structural Survey Report has been submitted which has been produced by Andrew Baxter which demonstrates that the building can be converted and that the building is in good condition without significant defects.

Furthermore, the building has previously been considered to be capable of conversion under the Class Q application. An excerpt of the delegated report from this application has been copied below

> 8.10. A structural survey has been submitted with the application that confirms that the barn is structurally sound. The extent of alterations proposed are the same as those subject of the last application (17/01087/Q56), which was determined positively. It is noted that the intention is to place no additional structural load on the structural frame of the existing barn.
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> 8.11. It is therefore considered that this building is capable of being converted.

The floor plan and elevation drawings that have been submitted with this application – alongside the structural report – demonstrates that the building will be converted without major rebuilding or extension.

The proposal would not cause significant harm to the character of the countryside or the immediate setting of the building – the existing building is typical of a rural building which can be found throughout Cherwell district, with corrugated sheet walls and roofing. The building is of a modest scale and is not clearly visible from any public views.

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The design of the building is functional and such buildings are commonly seen throughout the countryside. There are no clear public viewpoints of the building, given the mature vegetation between the site and the public highway. There would be no spill of residential use into the countryside, with a small garden area proposed around the building, which would be well contained and not clearly visible from public viewpoints.

The proposal would not harm the special character and interest of a building of architectural or historic significance – The proposals would not harm the character of the building. The form of the building would be retained and its agricultural appearance would still be able to be read, with existing openings infilled and new openings kept to a minimum.

The proposal meets the requirements of the other policies in the plan – this is discussed further below.

4.2 The supporting text of saved policy H19 states that *'it is intended that this policy should encourage the conversion not of buildings of modern construction but of traditional farm buildings whether or not they are listed as being of architectural or historic interest whose usefulness has been displaced by modern farming method'.* This policy is 30 years old and is not entirely compliant with Policy S5 of the NPPF, which only requires for buildings to be converted to be of permanent and substantial construction and to be lawful in planning terms.

4.3 This is consistent with the view taken by the Council on 24/00314/F, which involved the conversion of an equestrian building to residential use at The Old Grange Barn, Swalcliffe. The Council's report for this application concluded the following:

Officers consider the existing stable building to be generally in keeping with its surroundings and that it can be converted without the need for major rebuilding. Provided that the building is converted as proposed then it finds support from saved Policy H19 and is acceptable in principle. There is a small degree of harm to the simple functional character of the building; however, the design changes propose a nod to its existing use that is reflective of the rural character of the overall site and neighbouring countryside uses.

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4.4 This is also consistent with the view taken by the Council on 23/01865/F, which involved the conversion of a modern agricultural building to residential use at Sydenham Farm, Adderbury. There are a number of similarities between the barn subject to this application at the building at Sydenham Farm. The Council's report for this application concluded the following:

In this instance, it is considered that the proposal comprises a conversion of the existing agricultural building and so is generally supported by policy.

4.5 There is significant Government support for the conversion of redundant rural buildings to dwellings. This is evident from Policies S5 and HO11 of the NPPF which supports developments where they would convert buildings in the countryside. Further to this, there are also Class Q permitted development rights which allow for the conversion of agricultural buildings to dwellings. These rights have recently been expanded to allow for more rural buildings to be converted, with the Government press release of 23 May 2024 stating that

'the Government is extending these rights to give farmers greater freedoms to diversify and convert agricultural buildings to commercial uses, as well as up to 10 homes, without needing to submit a planning application. These rules are subject to space and natural light conditions, to ensure homes are suitable. This will help turbocharge rural housing development, with just 5,000 homes delivered on farming land since April 2014'.

4.6 The building is a longstanding feature of the site, having been constructed over forty years ago and due to a change in circumstances for the applicants, the building is no longer required for its original purpose. The conversion of the barn would constitute an efficient use of land and the reuse of a now redundant building, which is strongly encouraged by national planning policy. The previous planning application was being supported by the planning officer and was only withdrawn as the applicant wished to avoid a legal agreement as part of the BNG process. This application has been submitted following the changes to the BNG legislation introduced in August 2026 and falls under the new 0.2ha exemption.

4.7 The conversion of the building would comply with the provisions of both saved policy H19 and Policy S5 of the NPPF. The building is suitable for conversion and the fact that it is a more modern building is not relevant, given the wording

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of the NPPF. The building also benefits from an extant Class Q permission, which is an important fallback position.

Design and Layout

4.8 Policy ESD13 and ESD15 of the CLP 2031 are the principal policies that the development would be considered against, which relate to landscape impact and general design principles.

4.9 The building is not clearly visible from the public domain. The building would retain its current appearance and would still be read as a rural building. The corrugated sheet walls and roof are materials that are found on other barn conversions in the district and can have an attractive, contemporary appearance. The Council have previously accepted this in the three permitted Class Q applications.

4.10 This would be the case in the current proposal, with the doors and windows to be introduced to be of a high quality which will result in an improvement in the appearance of the building. The doors and windows have been limited to the minimum required for the building to function as a dwelling and comply with Building Regulations, so that the existing fabric of the building is kept wherever possible.

4.11 There would be no spread of residential use, as only a small garden surrounding the building is proposed and the Council can secure further details of this as part of a landscaping scheme.

4.12 The proposed development would comply with Policies ESD13 and ESD15 of the CLP 2031 and Government guidance contained within the NPPF.

Other matters

4.13 A preliminary ecological appraisal has been undertaken by Cotswold Wildlife Surveys. The report for this survey found that there was no evidence of bats and the barns had negligible bat roosting potential. It is recommended that no further survey work is undertaken and therefore the development would not cause harm to protected species.

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4.14 As mentioned previously in this statement, following the August 2026 changes to the BNG legislation, the development would now be exempt as the site is under 0.2ha and no priority habitat is affected as part of the development.

4.15 The site benefits from an existing access onto the road to the west and this would remain unaltered in the proposed development. This access has served the site for over 40 years and benefits from sufficient visibility in both directions.

4.16 The closest dwelling to the proposed barn conversion is Shortland Park Stud, which is located over 80m away from the building subject to this application. This is significantly in excess of the separation distances set out within the Cherwell Design Guide. The dwelling would benefit from a generously sized garden and as a result future occupiers would have a high standard of amenity.

5.0 Conclusions

5.1 This statement has examined the planning background of the site, the context of the site and the surrounding area and the relevant national and local planning policy framework in respect of the proposed development at the barn south of Austin Grounds Farm, Hook Norton.

5.2 The proposal would result in the conversion of the barn to form a single dwelling. This planning statement demonstrates that the principle of development is acceptable and that the development would have a positive impact on the character and appearance of the area.

5.3 The proposals are considered to be a sustainable form of development in accordance with both the NPPF and the Cherwell Local Plan 2031.

5.4 In light of the above, we respectfully request on behalf of our client that the Council approves the proposal.

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