

Planning and Design & Access Statement

**DEMOLITION OF DWELLING AND OUTBUILDINGS AND NEW
RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF 5NO. DWELLINGS
(RESUBMISSION OF APPLICATION 2022/0886)**

CONISTON FARM, STAINCROSS, BARNSELY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This statement has been prepared to support the submission of an application for full planning permission for the demolition of an existing dwelling and ten substantial outbuildings that have established use for a mix of agricultural and cattery uses. The proposal would significantly improve the appearance of the site, would improve Green Belt openness and would deliver significant biodiversity net gain.

The application is a resubmission of application 2022/0886 which was withdrawn prior to a decision being made. The number and size of the proposed houses has been reduced since the previous application. As is discussed in more detail below, the scheme would now deliver a vast improvement to Green Belt openness and to visual amenity in comparison to the existing situation.

The statement incorporates a Design and Access Statement, provided to satisfy the statutory requirements imposed under Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) (Amendment) Order 2013 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). A Design and Access Statement is required as the size of the application site is over 0.5 hectares, and the proposal therefore constitutes major development.

It is a fundamental principle of the NPPF that all requirements for supporting documentation should be proportionate to the scale and nature of the development proposed. This document sets out the design justification for the proposed development and demonstrates that the scheme is in full compliance with relevant planning policy and guidance.

This statement should be read in conjunction with the supporting plans and technical reports which demonstrate the credentials of the scheme in more detail.

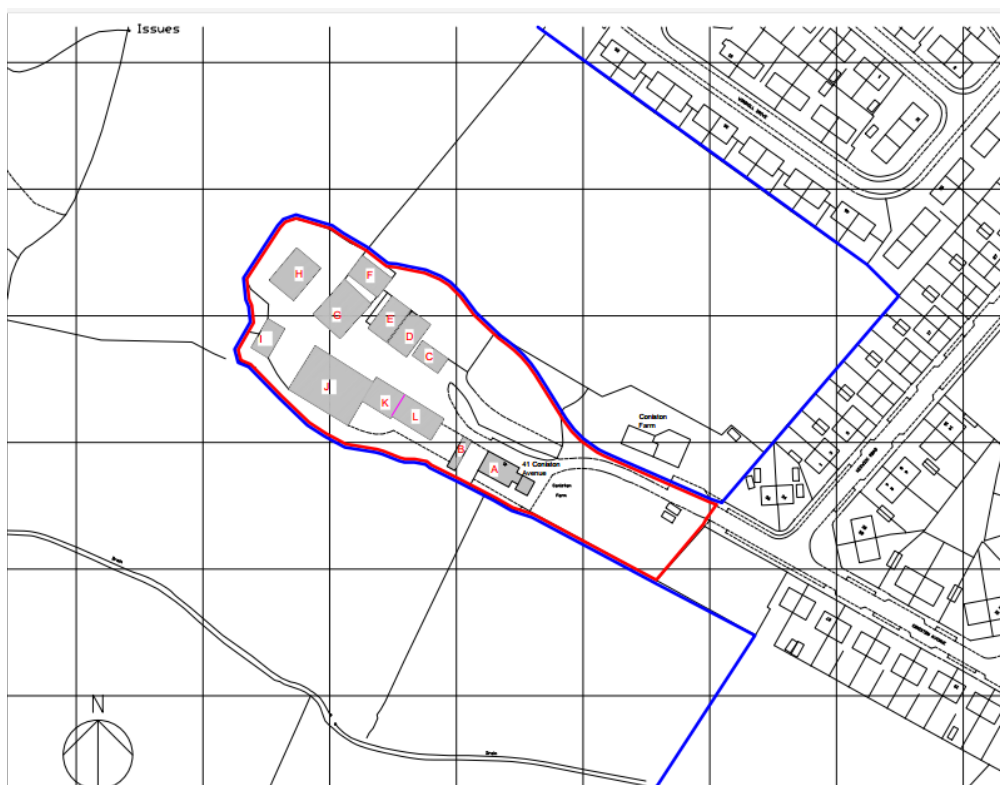
The site is within the Green Belt and the proposal also offers the opportunity to vastly improve openness compared to the existing situation. The scheme delivers an enormous

reduction in the existing amount of built form on site. Although the development does not strictly fall under any of the 'closed list' of development types that are appropriate in the Green Belt, the immense improvement to openness, along with the other planning gains that are discussed below, form clear 'very special circumstances' that justify the development in the Green Belt. This is a rare opportunity to secure these benefits and it is anticipated that the LPA will grasp it.

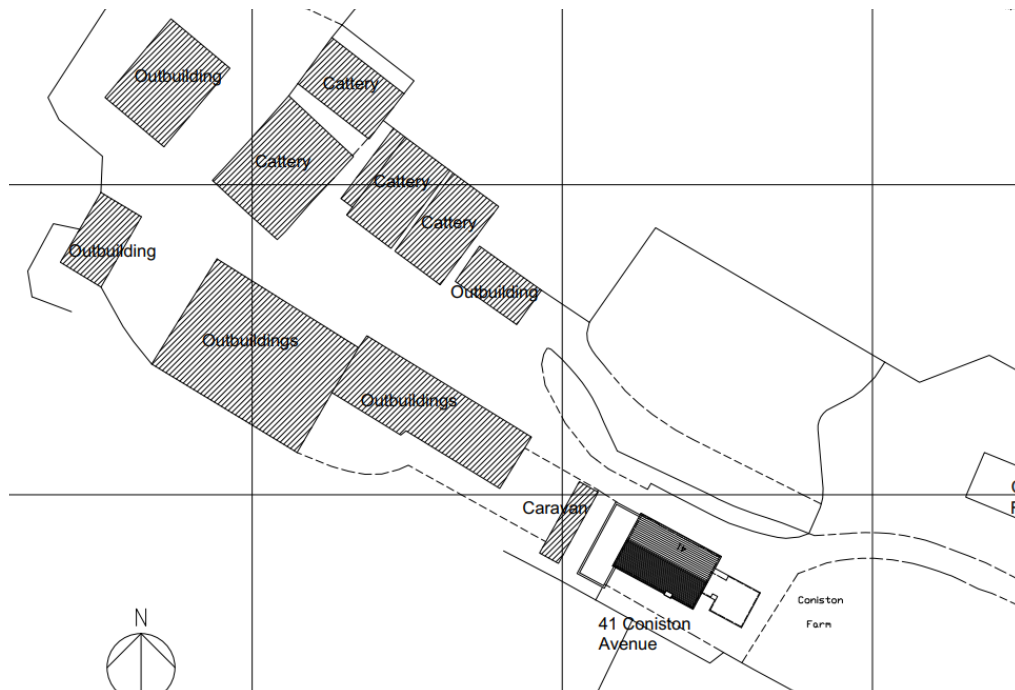
This statement now proceeds to give details of the site. The details of the proposal are then set out. The planning merits of the scheme are then discussed in relation to relevant planning policies contained in the statutory development plan, together with Government guidance principally set out in the NPPF. It will be demonstrated that the proposal would improve openness. The development would also secure biodiversity net-gain and would give rise to no adverse impacts in respect of amenity or highways considerations.

2.0 THE SITE

The application site is Coniston Farm, which lies at the northwestern end of Coniston Avenue in Staincross village:



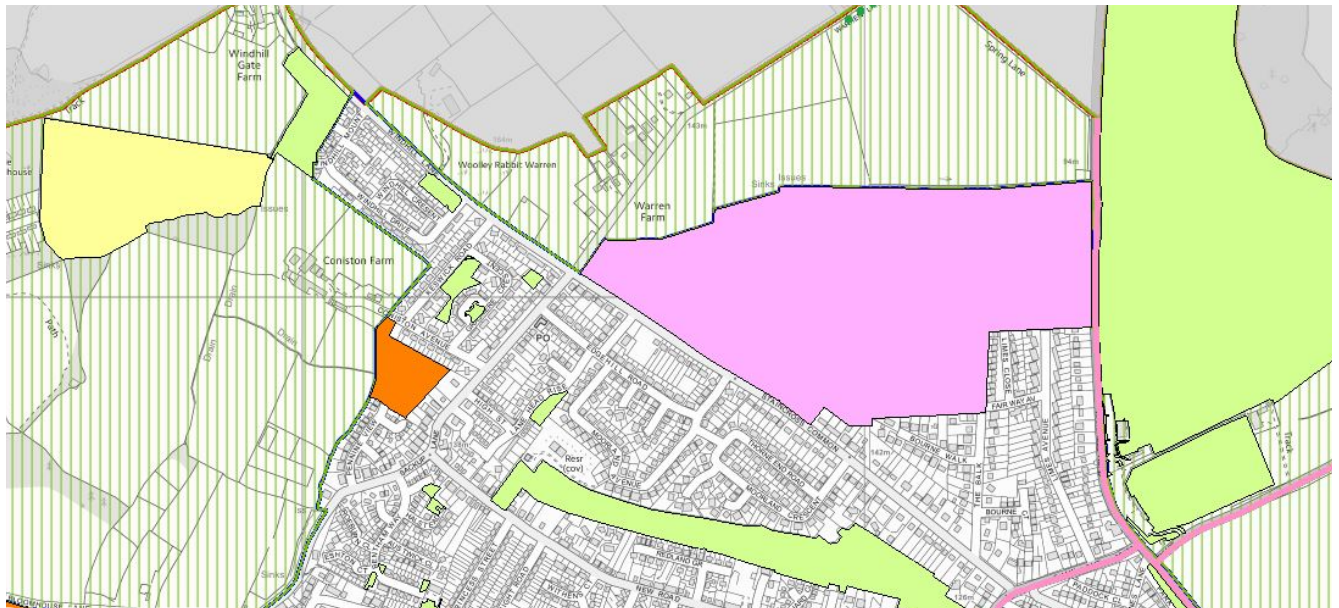
The site contains a vacant bungalow that is in a poor state of repair, a series of substantial outbuildings that have established use for agricultural activity and a cattery business, and associated outdoor areas. The plan below annotates the established uses of each building:



The site is no longer a working farm as a result of a decision made by the owner. However, all the infrastructure required for a farm business remains and agricultural use could resume. The agricultural buildings are permanent and substantial structures, but are not currently in use. The decision has also been made to cease the cattery business. Again, the cattery buildings are substantial and permanent structures, but will lack a beneficial use going forward.

All of the buildings within the site, including the bungalow, are of functional design and appearance and lack any particular architectural or historic merit. None of the buildings are listed and none could be considered to be non-designated heritage assets.

As shown on the map extract below, the site lies within the Green Belt:



However, the site is very closely related to the built-up area of Staincross village. It lies at the end of Coniston Avenue, a residential street with post-war housing on either side. Staincross, along with the adjoining villages of Mapplewell and Darton, form the north western corner of the defined Urban Barnsley settlement area. The three villages are quite densely developed, primary for residential uses. They also provide a very good range of local services facilities, and benefit from good public transport links. Staincross lies about 4km to the north of Barnsley Town centre, which is very easily accessible via the A61.

The site is not within a Conservation Area and there are no listed buildings in close proximity, the nearest being Windhill Gate Farmhouse which is over 400m from the application site.

The site is within Flood Zone 1 (lowest risk of flooding) according to the Environment Agency's flood risk maps.

The site is within a Coal Authority Development High Risk Area.

3.0 THE PROPOSAL – INCLUDING DESIGN AND ACCESS CONSIDERATIONS

Full planning permission is sought for the demolition of all the existing buildings within the site and the construction of 5 new dwellings (a net increase of 4 dwellings).

More information about the proposal can be found in the accompanying plans and supporting technical documents. The key elements of the proposal are as follows:

- The existing agricultural and cattery buildings, as well as the existing bungalow, are to be completely removed from the site.
- Unlike the current situation whereby buildings are spread across the whole site, the new dwellings are to be consolidated on the eastern side of the site and on the footprint of the existing bungalow.
- This would allow a significant proportion of the site, which is entirely developed at the moment, to be given over to a meadow. This would be significantly beneficial to both openness and to the biodiversity value of the site
- The scheme would also achieve a huge reduction in the amount of built form at the site, again being very beneficial to Green Belt openness.
- The new houses would provide very high-quality family accommodation. They have been carefully and sensitively designed to produce new homes that would reflect the transition between the urban setting to the east and the rural setting to the west. The development would significantly enhance the visual appearance of the site and the contribution that it makes to the character of the locality.
- Since the previous application, the number of additional dwellings has been reduced from 5 to 4. This results in a very low density development with very generous plot spaces and good gaps in between the new buildings. Furthermore, the size of the new dwellings has also been reduced, resulting in an even lower ratio of built form to open space within the site,

USE

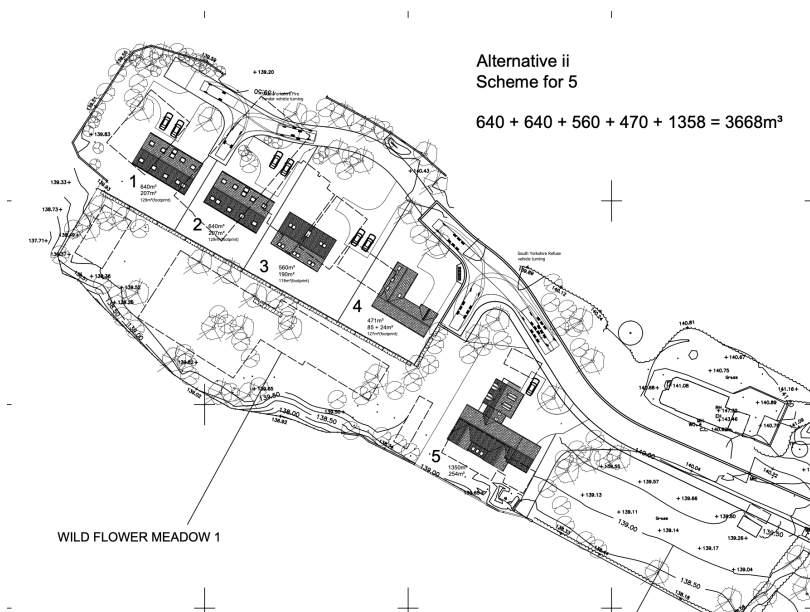
The site has established use as an agricultural farm with a cattery business. The proposed use is 5 residential dwellings. As discussed in more detail further below, the principle of 5 new dwellings on the edge of Urban Barnsley is entirely acceptable.

AMOUNT

The scheme of 5 detached dwellings has been carefully conceived in order to achieve a redevelopment of the site that achieves a significant improvement to openness, enhances the appearance of the site, significantly enhances the biodiversity value of site, is of an appropriate density for this transitional site and that is also financially viable in order to ensure the scheme goes ahead so that these very clear planning gains can be realised.

LAYOUT

The layout of the redevelopment is shown below:



The linear formation of plots 1-4 allows the majority of the new development to be consolidated on one section of the site. This is a significant benefit compared with the existing arrangement whereby buildings are scattered across the site and the only gaps are covered with hard surfacing. The proposed arrangement will greatly improve openness and allows a significant amount of the site to be given over to the creation of a meadow. As well as enhancing openness this will also vastly improve the biodiversity value of the site. The linear formation also reflects the existing pattern and grain of development along Conistone Avenue, ensuring the new development is appropriate for the transitional status of the site in between rural and urban environments. Plot 5 broadly sits on the footprint of the existing bungalow, and is a logical place for a new dwelling to be sited.

Overall, the layout would greatly enhance openness and the appearance of the site, as well as biodiversity value.

LANDSCAPING

As noted above, a key aspect of the redevelopment scheme is the ability to create meadow areas. Plots 1 – 4 would have clearly defined curtilages. The land to the south west of the garden areas would then be given over to wildflower meadow. A second wildflower meadow is to be created to the eastern side of plot 5.

As is discussed in more detail further below, the creation of the meadow areas would significantly increase the biodiversity value of the site. Furthermore, the provision of a meadow on an area of the site that is currently covered by substantial agricultural buildings would significantly improve the visual appearance of the site.

The landscaping would also provide good sized private garden areas and appropriate access and parking spaces. As such, as well as improving the appearance of the site, the landscaping scheme would deliver a development that provides a very high standard of amenity for future occupiers.

APPEARANCE

The existing bungalow is in a poor state of repair and is of no architectural merit. The existing agricultural buildings are large and cumbersome and are of functional utilitarian appearance. As is typical of modern agricultural buildings, their appearance reflects their use, and they are of no merit at all:



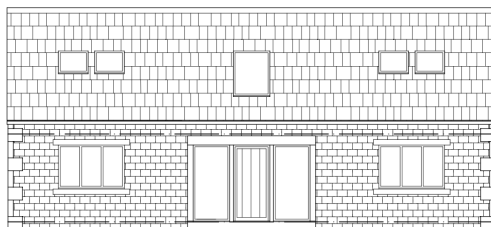
The redevelopment of the site therefore offers an opportunity to greatly enhance the appearance of the site.

The merits of the layout of the new scheme have been set out further above. The design of each new dwelling has also been carefully arrived at in order to create dwellings that are of suitable appearance for this site and this location.

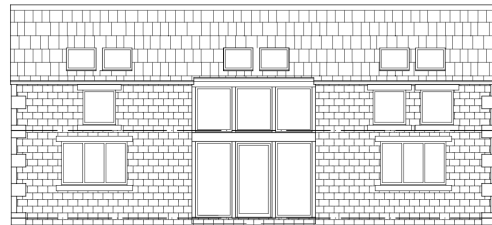
The design has been heavily influenced by the transitional status of the site with Urban Barnsley to the east and rural open land to the west. Because of this, it would not be desirable to simply copy the typically-suburban pattern of development to the east, with

blocks of predominantly semi-detached houses of regular form and appearance. Doing so would only serve to extend the urban area into the more rural space. Instead, the development has been designed to reference and respect the urban development to the west through the use of a linear form, but the development has a lower density to reflect the rural transition.

The individual dwelling designs then also reflect the more rural character, with the use of materials, forms and detailing that references buildings of a more rural nature:



FRONT ELEVATION



REAR ELEVATION

The new houses are each of a bespoke individual design, but with a commonality in the design ethos that links them all together. The houses are a mix of one, one and a half and two storey heights, to reflect the different sizes of buildings typically found within a farmyard setting whilst also maximising the improvements to openness.

Overall, the redevelopment offers a very welcome opportunity to significantly improve the visual appearance of the site.

ACCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Although the site is just outside of the defined settlement boundary for Urban Barnsley, it is still in a highly sustainable location. The site forms an extension to Coniston Avenue; a densely developed residential area within Staincross village.

All of the facilities and services within Staincross and the neighbouring villages would be just as accessible to future residents of the new houses as they are already to residents of

Coniston Avenue and other nearby streets. Staincross has good public transport links, including to Barnsley town centre which is very easily accessible.

As such, although the site is within the Green Belt, it remains a very sustainable location and the new development would form a very comfortable extension to the existing urban area. The site is in no way isolated.

As is the case for the existing farm, the development would be accessed directly from Coniston Avenue. An access road is to be provided that runs parallel with the north-eastern site boundary, providing access to each of the new houses. All the houses would have sufficient off-street parking and appropriate turning space.

The proposed development will fully comply with all DDA access requirements as set out in current building regulations.

4.0 PLANNING HISTORY AND PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS

The most relevant planning history for the site is application 2022/0886 for demolition of existing buildings and construction of 6no. dwellings. This application was validated on 26 August 2022 and then withdrawn prior to a decision being made.

During the course of the application, the case officer raised concerns that the proposal comprises an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt and that sufficient very special circumstances had not been demonstrated.

The new application proposes a significant reduction in new built form compared to the previous submission. As is set out in more detail further below, it is now very clear that very special circumstances in favour of approval exist.

A search of the Council's online records also shows the following previous applications:

- B/95/0331/DT - Erection of two single-storey side extensions to dwelling
- B/99/0606/DT - Change of use of agricultural buildings for use as cattery.
- 2009/1386 - Raising height of and extending existing roof and erection of a single storey rear extension to dwelling.

5.0 ALLOCATION AND POLICIES

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance the Development Plan consists of the Barnsley Local Plan which was adopted in January 2019 and the Joint Waste Plan.

Material considerations exist in the form of national policy and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as updated in July 2021 and the suite of documents comprising National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). The Council's SPDs are also considered of relevance.

The site is within the Green Belt as identified under the local plan.

National

The NPPF is reflective of the guidance contained within the NPPG. The following sections of the revised NPPF are considered of direct relevance to the current proposal:

- Section 2 - Achieving sustainable development
- Section 4 - Decision-making
- Section 5 – Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
- Section 12 – Achieving well-designed places
- Section 13 – Protecting Green Belt Land
- Section 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

The overarching message of the NPPF is that LPAs should adopt a positive and pro-active approach to planning proposals, particularly those that result in sustainable development. LPAs should not place unnecessary burdens on developers and should look to support appropriate schemes such as this.

Barnsley Local Plan

- SD1 Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development
- GD1 General Development
- LG2 The Location of Growth
- H1 The Number of New Homes to be Built
- H2 The Distribution of New Homes
- H5 Residential Development on Large Non-allocated Sites
- H6 Housing Mix and Efficient Use of Land
- T3 New Development and Sustainable Travel
- T4 New development and Transport Safety
- D1 High Quality Design and Place Making
- LC1 Landscape Character
- BIO1 Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- GB1 Protection of Green Belt
- GB2 Replacement, extension and alteration of existing buildings in the Green Belt
- CC1 Climate Change
- CC2 Sustainable Design and Construction
- CC3 Flood Risk

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Regard has been had to the LPA's Design of Housing Development and Biodiversity and Geodiversity SPDs.

6.0 ASSESSMENT

Principle of Development

Sustainability

As will be discussed in more depth below, whilst the development proposal as a whole does not completely fit within the 'closed list' of development types that are appropriate within the Green Belt, there are clear and convincing very special circumstances that justify the proposal. The development therefore accords with local and national Green Belt policy.

Notwithstanding the need to comply with Green Belt policy, the main emphasis of current national planning policy is to ensure proposals are compliant with the definition of sustainable development set out within the NPPF. Sustainability is multifaceted. The Government's view of what sustainable development means in practice is to be found throughout the Framework, taken as a whole. To achieve sustainable development, the Framework states that economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system.

The proposal would be wholly sustainable using the definition set out in the NPPF for the following reasons:

- **Social:** The proposed development would result in the net gain of four additional dwellings (one is a replacement dwelling). All five dwellings at the site would provide very high-quality family housing for future occupiers in a sustainable location in Staincross village. The proposal would not result in any adverse social impacts.
- **Economic:** The site is no longer part of a working farm, and the cattery business is to cease. The proposal would see the currently disused existing buildings replaced and would secure a long-term beneficial use for the site. The development would provide growth and investment in the locality. Additional economic activity would be created during the construction phase. The new dwellings would be likely to provide additional custom at existing local services in the locality.

• **Environmental:** The three key planning benefits of the scheme are that it would deliver visual enhancement, would improve the openness of the Green Belt and would deliver biodiversity net benefits. In doing so, the proposal would enhance the landscape character of the wider area. The scheme delivers very clear environmental benefits that will not be released if the proposal does not go ahead.

In terms of the location of the site for residential development, although the site is within the Green Belt it is still in a sustainable location. The site is very clearly an extension to the main built-up area of Staincross, which itself forms part of Urban Barnsley. The site is accessed directly from Coniston Avenue and is only a short distance from the existing dwellings on Coniston Avenue. The application site boundary touches the defined settlement boundary for Urban Barnsley. As such, the development is immediately next to the defined settlement.

The adopted housing policies set out that the majority of new housing will be delivered in Urban Barnsley. Given that the site immediately adjoins the settlement boundary, and that housing on the western side of the boundary line would be just as sustainable as the existing housing (or any new housing) on the eastern side of the boundary line, the principle of development here should be viewed favourably.

In terms of local facilities and services, Staincross and the adjoining villages of Mapplewell and Darton provide a very good range. These include schools, post offices, a wide variety of shops, places of worship, food and drink outlets and leisure venues. The services and facilities would be easily accessible to future residents of the new houses on foot or bicycle. Staincross also have very good road and public transport links, with Barnsley town centre being only 4km away and very easily accessible.

The accompanying Highways Statement by Paragon Highways sets out the sustainable credentials of the site and sets out the very wide range of services and facilities that would be easily accessible for future residents without reliance on a private motor vehicle, as well as the good bus and train services.

The redevelopment of the site to provide new homes would represent a sustainable use of the land resource in an appropriate and sustainable location for housing growth of this scale. Although the site is just outside of the defined boundary for Urban Barnsley, it would form a very clear and comfortable extension to the urban area and would result in no conflict at all with the strategic aims of adopted housing policy.

The proposal would not result in any material harm and the presumption in favour of sustainable development must be applied. The broad principle of development must therefore be considered acceptable.

Green Belt

The NPPF states that new development is inappropriate within the Green Belt, with defined exceptions provided in the 'closed list' of development types set out in paragraphs 149 and 150.

The proposal comprises the replacement of one existing dwelling and the cattery and agricultural buildings with five new dwellings. Paragraph 149 confirms that the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), is an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt provided that it would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development.

The NPPF also confirms that agricultural buildings should be excluded from the definition of previously developed land.

The site as existing, therefore, comprises a mix of previously developed land and non-previously developed land. This results in a situation whereby redevelopment of some areas of the site would constitute appropriate development in the Green Belt by definition, but the same type of development on other areas of the site would not.

This anomaly of the strict application of the NPPF prevents the proper planning of redevelopment of the site. Clearly, it would make no sense (and would significantly reduce

the planning gains the scheme delivers) to redevelop the areas of the site that contain the existing bungalow and cattery buildings and leave the agricultural buildings in place, even though that approach would achieve a development that falls within the scope of paragraph 149. It is therefore acknowledged that, taken as a whole, the proposal includes some development that falls outside of the closed list of development types set out in paragraphs 149 and 150.

It is therefore acknowledged that the development proposal as a whole is technically a form of development that is inappropriate development within the Green Belt.

Paragraph 147 of the NPPF states that *“Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.”*.

Paragraph 148 goes on to clarify that *“Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.”*.

In this instance, there are truly clear and convincing very special circumstances that overwhelmingly outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness.

There are three very special circumstances that are of particular importance and must be given very significant weight in the planning balance:

1. Improvement of Green Belt openness.
2. Visual enhancement.
3. Biodiversity and ecology enhancement.

There are further planning gains that also amount to very special circumstances and carry moderate weight in favour in the planning balance:

4. There is a fall-back position that would not deliver the planning benefits.
5. Environmental improvements through cessation of agricultural use.
6. Delivery of sustainable high-quality housing.

These planning benefits amount to very special circumstances are discussed in the following sections of this statement. The conclusion will be reached that the benefits of the development far outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness.

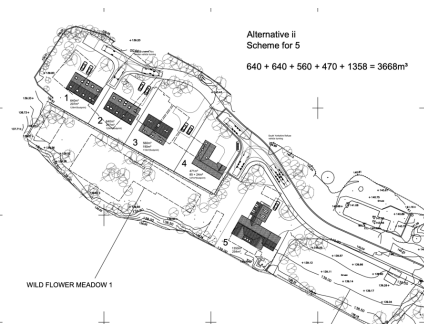
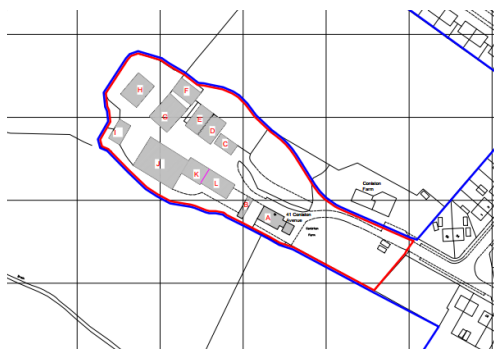
It is acknowledged that the LPA was not convinced by the very special circumstances during the consideration of application 2022/0886. However, since that time the scheme has been significantly amended by omitting one of the proposed houses altogether and reducing the scale of others. As is discussed below, this has greatly emphasised the planning gains of the scheme and it is now very clear that the very special circumstances outweigh the harm by way of technical inappropriateness.

Very Special Circumstances

1. Benefits to Green Belt Openness

Openness has a spatial and visual aspect. The proposed development would both consolidate the developed areas of the site and would result in a huge reduction in built form at the site compared with the existing situation. This would be greatly beneficial to both visual and spatial openness.

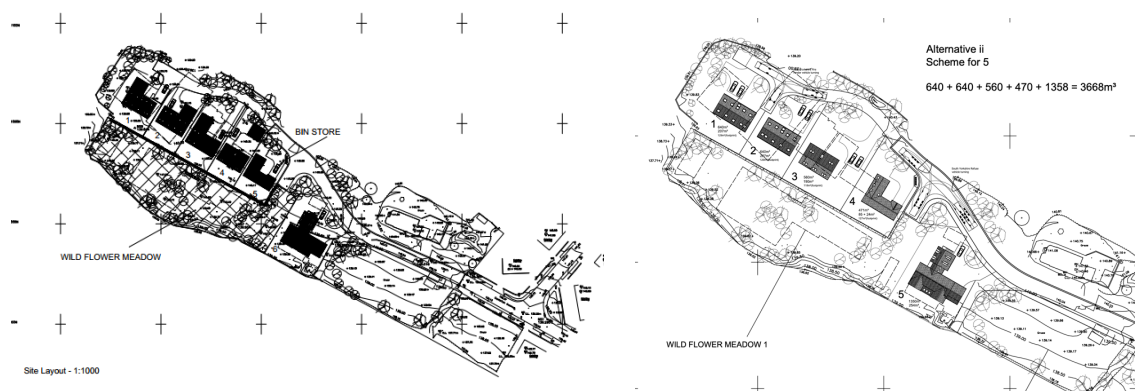
A comparison of the existing and proposed site plans begins to demonstrate this:



Whereas the current situation involves buildings being scattered over all of the site, with the intervening gaps generally covered in hard standing, the redevelopment is based on a clean and simple linear arrangement with plots 1-4 consolidated to the north eastern side of the site. Plot 5 occupies the footprint of the existing bungalow.

This consolidation of development predominantly into one area of the site allows the rest of the site, which currently houses very large agricultural buildings, to be given over to a wildflower meadow.

The improvement to openness of the current scheme in comparison to withdrawn application 2022/0886 should also be noted at this point. The comparative plans are shown below:



It can clearly be seen that the omission of one dwelling and the reduction in size of the others has a significant beneficial impact in terms of lowering the density of the new development and significantly opening up spaces between the new buildings. Whereas the previous scheme could have resulted in almost a single linear building mass, the new layout still proposes an appropriate linear arrangement but with the benefit of significant gapping between the buildings. This will greatly increase the sense of openness.

In terms of the comparative volumes and footprints, the existing buildings have a combined volume of 10776 cubic metres and footprint of 2469 square metres.

The proposed new dwellings have a combined volume of just 3668 cubic metres. This equates to a resultant volume that is only 34% of the existing volume. 66% of the existing level of built volume (equal to 7108 cubic metres) will, therefore, be completely and permanently omitted. This will be hugely beneficial to Green Belt openness in both visual and spatial terms.

It's also noteworthy that the 3668 cubic metres of proposed new volume represents a reduction since the previous application from 5121 cubic metres. The level of proposed new build has, therefore, been reduced by almost 30% since the previous submission.

Aside from the reduction in built form, the form of each individual new dwelling further compounds the benefits to openness. The new dwellings would either be of similar height to or lower than the existing buildings that would be removed, but they would now achieve very noticeable gaps in between each structure. The siting of each dwelling in a sizeable garden provides a very open character to the redevelopment as a whole, significantly in contrast to the densely developed existing situation.

As well as the new buildings having a reduced impact on openness, there would also be a benefit in terms of the comparative use of outdoor spaces. It can be the case that new dwellings in the Green Belt can cause harm to openness by way of the introduction of domestic paraphernalia, parking and garden spaces. However, that would not be the case in this instance. The external spaces around the existing buildings were previously used for everyday functions associated with agricultural use of the working farm. As such, there is no increase in the intensity of the use of the land as a result of all agricultural and cattery use ceasing, the farm and cattery buildings being removed, and four additional dwellings being introduced. This also means that there would be no harm to openness through the introduction of domestic paraphernalia, parking spaces and gardens, since the areas of the site in which these features would be sited were all previously part of the well-used farmyard.

Overall, the development would result in a very significant reduction in built form, would not result in encroachment of built form or associated domestic features into areas that did not

previously contain buildings or form part of the farmyard (indeed it would result in significant consolidation into one part of the site), and represents a scale of development that would not intensify the use of the site in comparison to the established agricultural and cattery use. As such, the development would greatly improve openness compared to the established situation. The development would not conflict with any of the other purposes of the Green Belt. It would be counter-productive to refuse an application for development for reasons of inappropriateness when the development would actually greatly improve openness. This therefore forms the first highly significant very special circumstance.

2. Visual Benefits

As set out further above, all of the existing buildings lack any architectural or historic merit. Furthermore, the external spaces around them are functional (primarily hard surfacing) and make no positive contribution to visual amenity or character.

Conversely, the redevelopment scheme will deliver 5 high quality and attractive buildings that have been designed to be appropriate for the site and setting. The replacement of the functional existing buildings that are of no visual merit with the proposed new dwellings would significantly improve the appearance of the site.

The visual benefit would also be vast in terms of the improvement to the outdoor spaces within the site through the replacement of a farmyard with two wildflower meadows and sensitively landscaped garden areas.

Overall, the development scheme will deliver very significant visual enhancement within the site. The site will go from one that detracts from the character and visual amenity of the locality to one that makes a positive contribution.

This benefit cannot be realised without development that is, by definition, inappropriate within the Green Belt. At best, a mediocre scheme that sees the cattery buildings and existing bungalow replaced and the redundant farm buildings either staying put or converted could happen. This would be fall within the definition of appropriate development but would

deliver none of the enhancements that the current scheme offers. The visual enhancements the scheme would deliver are a highly significant benefit that amounts to a very special circumstance to which a great deal of weight should be given in the planning balance.

3. Biodiversity Enhancement

An Ecological Appraisal has been prepared by Middleton Bell Ecology and is submitted separately. This sets out in detail the biodiversity enhancements that will be achieved as part of the redevelopment scheme. The report quantifies that the development will achieve a 39.60% increase in the ecological value of the site in comparison to the existing situation.

This is a very significant benefit and can only be realised through the removal of the agricultural buildings in order to create the habitat space that the wildflower meadow would deliver. This would not be possible through a scheme involving the retention of the agricultural buildings, even though such a scheme would be an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt.

Allowing additional development that is not strictly appropriate in the Green Belt but that causes no conflict with Green Belt purposes is a sensible approach in this instance in order to deliver the most planning gain. This represents another significant very special circumstance to which considerable weight should be given.

The enhancements to openness, visual amenity and biodiversity are the cornerstones of the case in favour of there being very special circumstances. We believe that these reasons alone should be more than sufficient to outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness. There are, however, other planning factors that also weigh in favour of approval.

4. Fallback position

Class Q of the General Permitted Development Order offers a viable alternative development type that would deliver none of the benefits set out above. The existing modern agricultural buildings are of permanent and substantial construction and could be converted

to residential dwellings within the scope of the works that are allowed under Class Q. This would see the existing modern agricultural buildings, which make no positive contribution and have a greater impact on openness than the proposed scheme, retained in perpetuity as residential dwellings. Other than the delivery of new homes, this would achieve little planning benefit. In comparison with the very significant benefits that the application scheme offers, this would be a particularly poor outcome.

There is also the prospect of other forms of development at the site that would be, by definition, appropriate in the Green Belt but would not deliver any of the planning gains secured by the proposal scheme.

The use of the existing buildings for facilities for outdoor sport and recreation, such as stabling for horses, would be one such use. Similar to a policy compliant housing conversion, this would also see the existing utilitarian buildings retained in perpetuity and would achieve none of the benefits to openness, visual amenity or biodiversity value.

5. Benefits of Cessation of Agricultural Use

The site is no longer a working farm. However, it is quite feasible that the site could return to a working farm in the future if the site cannot be repurposed. This would essentially mean the status quo continues with large modern buildings that are harmful to openness and make no positive contribution to character and visual amenity.

Furthermore, the site is somewhat unusual for a working farm in that it sits at the head of a residential street. This means all agricultural activity within the site takes place in close proximity to the neighbouring dwellings. The site being accessed from Coniston Avenue means all agricultural traffic associated with the site must pass the nearby houses. Whilst this is a well-established situation, there is still an environmental benefit to removing the noise, smell and disturbance associated with a working farm. Residential use of the site is more compatible with neighbouring uses. This is a further planning benefit that adds additional weight in favour.

6. Delivery of Sustainable Family Housing

Policy H9 recognises the problem of a lack of larger dwellings in the borough. The scheme would deliver 5 high quality homes that would be suitable for family occupation. There is a good mix of house types within the scheme, but all provide good-sized accommodation. Furthermore, the construction of new dwellings with the latest building techniques and technologies, as opposed to just converting the existing buildings within their shells, allows a much greater level of sustainability and energy efficiency to be achieved than would otherwise be the case.

Summary in respect of Very Special Circumstances

Whilst the development when taken as a whole represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the scheme would deliver significant planning gains and benefits that amount to clear and convincing very special circumstances. The threshold for very special circumstances set out in paragraph 148 of the NPPF is met and the proposal should therefore be supported.

Having demonstrated that very special circumstances clearly exist, it shall now be demonstrated that there are no other technical planning considerations that would prevent planning permission from being granted.

Design

As set out further above, the redevelopment scheme has been sensitively designed to have no adverse impact on the host building, it follows that there would be no harm to the character and visual amenity of the locality. The development fully accords with adopted policy in this respect.

Amenity

The layout of the scheme and the design of the new houses would ensure a very high standard of housing amenity for future occupiers. The houses would all benefit from

appropriate separation distances, well-proportioned rooms and excellent levels of natural light and outlook. Furthermore, the position of the new dwellings would comfortably exceed minimum recommended separation distances in respect of the relationship with existing dwellings in the locality. As such, there would be no negative impact at all on the amenity of occupiers of any existing dwellings. Indeed, the replacement of the agricultural and cattery uses with a small residential development would have a positive impact on amenity levels.

Highways

The development will be accessed via Coniston Avenue. Enhancements are planned for the western section of the roadway. Adequate off-street parking will be provided according to the recommended standards by the Local Planning Authority (LPA), with special attention given to the inclusion of electric car charging facilities.

A comprehensive Highway Statement, prepared by Paragon Highways, has been submitted as a separate document. This statement outlines how the traffic generated by the housing scheme can smoothly integrate with the existing local highway network. Moreover, it's worth noting that the redevelopment plan is anticipated to result in fewer traffic movements compared to the previous uses involving agriculture and a cattery.

This proposal doesn't raise any concerns related to highway safety and efficiency. It is in full alignment with both local and national policies concerning the impact of highways.

Ecology

As well as setting out the biodiversity enhancement measures that are set out above, the accompanying Ecological Appraisal also sets out the impacts that the removal of the existing buildings would have on ecology interests. It confirms that no evidence has been found of roosting bats in the existing buildings and that the site provides suboptimal foraging opportunities. The appeal of the site to nesting and feeding birds will increase as a result of the development.

Overall, the redevelopment scheme will cause no harm to protected species and will significantly enhance the biodiversity value of the site.

The development proposal fully accords with local and national policy in this respect.

Flood Risk

The application site is within flood zone 1 as identified by the Environment Agency so is not at undue risk of flooding. The whole site area is above the 1 ha threshold at which a flood risk assessment would be required for development not in zone 2 or 3. However a very large part of the whole site area would not be subject to any new development. The new houses are all contained within an area of roughly 0.5ha, so the actually developed area is well below the threshold at which an FRA is required.

Land Stability and Contamination

The site is within a Coal Authority Development High Risk Area. A Coal Mining Risk Assessment (CMRA) and Phase One desk report have been prepared by RGS and are submitted separately.

The CMRA recommends that further investigative works should be completed prior to development going ahead. This can be made a condition of planning approval. The report is sufficient to allow understanding of the potential risks and the next steps that will be required to inform any required mitigation measures.

The Phase One report sets out potential sources of contamination and the nature of further investigations that should be completed prior to development in order to establish if any remediation measures are needed. Again, this can be secured by condition and poses no barrier to the grant of planning permission.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The proposed development, taken as a whole is by definition, inappropriate development within the Green Belt. However, it has been demonstrated above that there are very clear and convincing benefits arising from the development that would overwhelmingly outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness. As such, very special circumstances exist which justify the development.

The benefits in respect of openness, visual enhancement and biodiversity net-gain are compelling and must be afforded significant weight. Issues relating to the fallback position, environmental benefits and the provision of new housing add even more weight in favour.

The proposal represents a rare opportunity to deliver significant planning gain and it is anticipated that the LPA will help this opportunity to be realised.

The Applicant is willing to discuss any issues that may arise during the consideration of the proposal with the LPA.