

The Burrows Planning Statement

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The Burrows Design & Access Statement

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1. Summary

Proposed earth sheltered dwelling on land at the rear of The Old Farmhouse, Briery Busk Farm, off Hunshelf Hall Lane, Hunshelf Bank, Barnsley.

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2. Context/Area and Site History

The site lies to the north of the Briery Busk farm complex, which comprises 8 residential units, the old farmhouse, cottages and converted barns. This area lies within Sheffield. It has not been used as a farm since the old farmer died in the late 1960's and the land was sold off separately from the buildings.

The applicant's father purchased the farmhouse and other buildings together with 13 acres of land in 1990. The farmhouse and cottages were renovated and the barn buildings converted by the family with the benefit of planning permission granted by Sheffield City Council.

The applicant, who runs a building business, has lived in part of the old farmhouse for over 20 years. He has a personal interest in low energy living and the environment.

The old farmhouse is Listed and lies at a substantially lower level than the site of application. The site of application itself, (which is in Barnsley), is a narrow, level platform in a steep hillside, below the level of the stone wall to the field beyond the northern boundary, which is the brow of the hill. To the south the land falls away steeply to the old farmhouse complex with extensive views across the valley to Stocksbridge.

An initial assessment of site stability has been carried out and bedrock exists at a shallow depth. Subject to a toe retaining wall to the southern boundary, the applicant is satisfied the dwelling can be constructed without any effect on the stability of the slope below.

The site has been used for the storage of building materials, machinery and vehicles for over 20 years by the applicant's father and then himself.

Aerial photographs evidence this use for this period. A fallback position would be to apply for a lawful use certificate for storing vehicles and building materials on the site.

Additionally, planning permission was granted in 2001 for a field shelter of permanent construction on the site, reference B/01/0392. This building was commenced in 2004 up to ground level, but never finished as the land was still required for storage. Nevertheless, this building could still be completed on the site as the permission was kept alive by commencement. The point being that a building of utilitarian, permanent construction could still be erected on the site.

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2. Context/Area and Site History

The site is in a very untidy condition and the applicant's intention is to clear the land of all materials, waste, machinery and vehicles to an offsite builders yard, abandon the field shelter building proposal and construct an earth dwelling of modest size, (approx.184 sq. m., incorporating one reception room and three bedrooms), to the highest energy saving standards, (Passivhaus), landscape and plant the area above and around it with native species to enhance the biodiversity of the area and to compliment the ecology of the area to the south of the site. As such a despoiled site in this rural setting would be regenerated to enhance the environment of the area.

The western area of Barnsley has seen some interest in developing earth sheltered dwellings since Arthur Quarmby submitted the first in 2005. Since then, to my knowledge, there have been only four applications in seven years for this type of development, three of which were granted planning permission. As far as I am aware only two schemes are under construction, one in a small quarry at Upper Maythorn Lane and one at Racecommon Quarry.

Neither scheme is being built to the Passivhaus standard of energy efficiency proposed in this application, which would be a first for Barnsley and South Yorkshire.

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3. National Planning Policy

The new National Planning Policy Framework, (NPPF), was introduced on the 27th March, 2012 and supercedes all previous national planning policy.

The NPPF at paragraph 14 establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which," should be seen as a golden thread running through decision taking".

This proposal is for a building of the highest sustainable construction credentials to Passivhaus standard for energy efficiency.

At paragraph 55, the Framework states that, " LPA's should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances such as, inter alia:-

The exceptional quality or innovative nature of the design of the dwelling. Such a design should:

Be truly outstanding or innovative, helping to raise the standards of design more generally in rural areas ;

Reflect the highest standards in architecture;

Significantly enhance its immediate setting; and

Be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area".

It is considered the construction of this earth sheltered dwelling to Passivhaus standard in a hillside setting, together with landscape enhancement, meets all these criteria and can, therefore, be considered to be of exceptional quality and of innovative design.

Section 7 relates to "Requiring good design".

Paragraph 56 states," good design is a key aspect of sustainable development,

Paragraph 57 states it is important to plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings.

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3. National Planning Policy

Paragraph 60 states planning policies and decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styles nor particular tastes and they should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles. It is however, proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness”.

It is considered that the proposed earth sheltered dwelling, with it’s southern aspect, stone archways, green roof and high energy efficiency meets these high design standards.

Paragraph 62 states,“ LPA’s should have local design review arrangements in place to provide assessment and support to ensure high standards of design and in assessing applications LPA’s should have regard to the recommendations from the design panel review”.

The initial design was well received by the local design panel, the Barnsley Urban Renaissance Design Advisory Panel, (BURDAP), and it was felt that the aesthetic was very interesting and was almost like a croft in appearance and sat well in the surrounding area. A Panel member thought the aesthetic, “witty and interesting and strong in arguing the case for an exceptional and unrepeatable scheme”.

In conclusion, the Panel welcomed the design aesthetic, especially the key principles of sustainable construction, blending into the hillside and using the aspect and views. They considered that the very high quality standards evident in the design of the dwelling should be extended to include the private space around the dwelling and this has now been incorporated in the formal application by landscaping, ecology enhancement and design in private areas, including a specific area for domestic paraphernalia.

Paragraph 63 states,“ that in determining planning applications great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs, which help raise the standard of design more generally in the area”.

The dwelling is designed to blend into the hillside and to be constructed to the Passivhaus standard of energy efficiency, believed to be the first in South Yorkshire and is, therefore, of outstanding and innovative design and will help to raise awareness of energy efficiency and carbon reduction.

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3. National Planning Policy

Paragraph 66 states that,“ applicants will be expected to work closely with those directly affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Proposals that can demonstrate this in developing the design of the new development should be looked on more favourably”.

The draft design has been the subject of pre-application consultation with Barnsley and Sheffield Councils, the site being on the boundary between the two Authorities. The proposal has also been presented to the BURDAP and the local Hunshelf Parish Council, who have had the opportunity to discuss and comment of the draft design prior to submission. In addition, the applicant has discussed his proposal with the nearest residents to the site, the occupiers of the dwellings at the Briery Busk Farm complex, (within the Sheffield boundary), at their monthly management meeting.

No adverse comments have been received, only interest and excitement in the project.

The applicant has agreed to amendments to the proposal to reflect the comments of the BURDAP on the original design, including slightly reducing the width of the arches, using weathered, reclaimed stone, enhancing external areas and including an area for domestic paraphernalia, which is sensitively sited.

Section 9 relates to Protecting Green Belt land.

Paragraph 80 states that,“ Green Belt serves five purposes:

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas;

To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;

To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;

To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and

To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

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3. National Planning Policy

Paragraph 87 states as with previous Green Belt Policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Paragraph 88 states when considering any planning application, LPA's should ensure substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Paragraph 89 states that a LPA should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt and lists exceptions".

It is not considered that the proposal conflicts with any of the purposes of including land in the Green Belt and can be seen as a special one off case in this isolated location, justified by the very special circumstances of clearing a derelict hillside site, which has been used for over twenty years for the storage of building materials and vehicles, constructing an earth sheltered dwelling to blend in with the landscape to the highest sustainable standards and to enhance the biodiversity of the surrounding area by native species planting and implementing the ecology measures set out in that report.

It is also not considered that the proposal would harm nor prejudice the openness of the Green Belt because of the sensitive design. Keeping the height of the dwelling to the height of the stone wall to the ridge of the hill to the north will result in only a minor part of the green roof being visible from the adjacent field to the Barnsley side, but because of the slope of the field away from the site, the roof will not be visible at all from the public highway. In addition blending the dwelling into the hillside, using overhang and the green roof will result in minimal impact on the Green Belt to the southern, Sheffield side as, due to the steeply sloping hillside, it will not be visible from short range public vantage points, such as local public footpaths, the nearest of which runs to the south, well below the level of the site, immediately at the rear of the old farmhouse.

The site cannot be seen from the old farmhouse itself due to the extreme change in levels and is sufficiently distanced to have no effect on the setting of the listed building.

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3. National Planning Policy

It will, therefore, only be visible from long distance views across the valley from Stocksbridge and then only with difficulty.

In summary, the development will not prejudice the role of the Green Belt to perform its functions in this area. The proposal will result in the sensitive development of a small area of despoiled Green Belt land without causing harm to the visual amenity of the Green Belt and at the same time enhancing the visual appearance of the site.

As such, any harm by reason of inappropriateness in the Green Belt is considered to be outweighed by the very special circumstances put forward in this case.

Section 10 Meeting the challenge of climate change.

Paragraph 96 states that,“ in determining planning applications, LPA’s should expect new development to comply with local plan policies on decentralised energy supply and take account of landform, layout building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption”.

The proposal, designed to the Passivhaus standard of energy efficiency, will use only 10% of the energy normally used in a typical dwelling and takes full advantage of the landform and southern aspect in it’s design by using passive solar gain, super insulation, advanced window technology and heat from internal sources, including white goods and even body heat. A typical Passivhaus can reduce CO2 emissions by 80% compared with a typical UK house.

The dwelling would have low energy appliances for lighting and cooking as well as incorporating a clean air environment and rain water will feed a new pond to be constructed on the site. Passivhaus is a design process that is integrated with architectural design. The building would incorporate super insulation to significantly reduce the heat transfer through walls roof and floor. The building would be very airtight, using advanced window technology. Passivhaus is arguably the best low energy, low carbon design standard.

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Section 11 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

Paragraph 109 states that," the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, inter alia;

Minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible.

Remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate".

It is considered that the proposal to clear a despoiled site and redevelop the site with a sensitively designed earth sheltered dwelling, together with local species planting on and around the building, will meet the requirements of this policy.

Paragraph 118 states that," when determining planning applications, LPA's should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by applying the following principles, inter alia:

Development proposals where the primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be permitted;

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Opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around developments should be encouraged".
Biodiversity enhancement measures in the proposal include:-

Approximately half the site of application to be left "wild";

Log and rubble piles to be created in the field to the west to encourage reptiles;

Clearance of bulrush from the existing dew pond;

Construction of a new pond, approx. 5m x 10m on land to the west;

Construction of a green roof, incorporating heather;

Erection of 5 bird boxes in the vicinity;

Gaps left in the stonework on the inward face of the parapet walls of the dwelling;
It is, therefore, considered that the proposal also meets this policy for the reasons stated immediately above.

The Framework at paragraph 186 states that," LPA's should approach decision taking in a positive way to foster the delivery of sustainable development and at 187 that LPA's should look for solutions rather than problems and decision takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible".

The Framework at paragraphs 188 and 189 also encourages pre- application discussion with the LPA and local community and this has been carried out.

It is, therefore, considered that the proposal complies with the above national planning policy for the reasons stated, with the exception of, by definition, Green Belt policy. However, it is considered that very special circumstances have been demonstrated in this case, which outweigh any harm by reason of inappropriateness to the Green Belt to justify the granting of planning permission.

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4. Local Planning Policy

Local Planning Policy is contained in the Barnsley Local Development Framework, Core Strategy. Relevant Core Strategy policies include:-

CSP1 Climate change – the proposal will increase the efficient use of resources through sustainable construction techniques.

CSP2 Sustainable construction – the policy emphasises sustainable construction requirements by expecting all new development in the Borough to demonstrate how it minimises resource and energy consumption. The development demonstrates how it would minimise resource and energy consumption to the highest, Passivhaus, standards. In addition, Barnsley College TLC, (Think Low Carbon), Centre have been approached and I am sure will be very interested in the project should planning permission be granted. The applicant has indicated that he is willing to allow controlled student access during and post construction.

CSP29 Design – the design is high quality, which takes advantage of it's setting in a steeply sloping hillside and incorporates key views across the valley to the south and west. This is endorsed by the Barnsley Urban Renaissance Design Advisory Panel. The proposal would transform a site that has been used for storage and has become despoiled and lacking any distinctiveness.

CSP34 Green Belt – this reaffirms the site will be retained as Green Belt and accordingly the national planning policy on Green Belt will apply as outlined above.

CSP 36 Biodiversity and Geodiversity - the development will conserve and enhance the biodiversity of the area by clearing materials from the site, and protecting and improving habitats and species through native planting and other measures as set out in the Ecology report.

CSP37 Landscape character – the proposed development will retain and enhance the character and distinctiveness of the landscape character of the area by blending the dwelling into the hillside and planting around and over the building with local species. The design now includes an area for hanging out washing and for other domestic paraphernalia in the area adjacent to the garage to minimise visual impact and also incorporates arches and overhangs to prevent solar reflection, thus helping to reduce visual impact.

It is, therefore, considered that the proposal complies with all these local planning policies.

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5. Community Consultation

Following pre-application discussions with Barnsley and Sheffield Councils and the BURDAP, details of the proposed earth sheltered dwelling were sent to Hunshelf Parish Council and subsequently formally presented to them at their meeting on 10th May, 2012, followed by a question and answer session. Written comments on the design were invited for consideration.

The applicant presented the proposal to the Briery Busk Farm residents monthly meeting on 15th May, 2012. The project was received with enthusiasm and excitement. These residents reside within Sheffield. There are no residents near to the site in Barnsley, the nearest dwelling being over the brow of the hill on Hunshelf Hall Lane, over 400 metres away.

The applicant has met the farmer, who owns the field immediately to the north of the site, and whose stone boundary wall is immediately adjacent to the site. He has no objections to excavation within 0.3m of the wall, which, he confirms, is built on solid rock.

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6. Conclusion

The proposal will enable the clearance and landscape/ecological enhancement of a despoiled site in the Green Belt and the abandonment of an extant planning permission for a field shelter building of utilitarian, permanent construction on the site.

The dwelling is of special design, to the highest energy saving standards, Passivhaus, and will provide a leading and outstanding example of low carbon building in Barnsley and South Yorkshire.

It is considered that the design of the dwelling is truly outstanding and innovative and that it's location in the hillside is unique and that accordingly, the proposal meets the NPPF policy on isolated homes in the countryside. This, in my opinion, together with the regeneration of a despoiled site, enhancement of local biodiversity with local species planting and the creation of new habitats, combine to provide very special circumstances to outweigh any harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and justifies the granting of planning permission in this case.