

Land to Rear of Ennerdale Country House Hotel, Cleator – Outline Application for Residential use.

24 October 2019

This document is written in response to the initial site inspection completed by Mr Woodford, Conservation Officer to Copeland Borough Council.

It is acknowledged that the site is not a Listed Building nor lying within the curtilage of the adjacent Grade 2 Listed property formerly known as The Flish. The application site sits in an overall derelict condition with several barns in a poor state of repair. The condition has deteriorated over the past decade with roofs in part now collapsed and in unsafe condition.

To develop the site for any new use, highway access is important and the existing former gated access not appropriate as the width and visibility is insufficient. This would have been appropriate historically when first established with cars being only a recent invention and the main purpose is likely for access to the fields with livestock.

Due to the curvature of the main road, the proposed enlarged access and visibility splay is fixed as shown on the indicative site plan, this relates to speed surveys completed and current speed limit on the road.

With reference to this, existing barns (part collapsed) onto the roadside need to be removed for ANY site development. Demolition of the roadside red brick barns need to be considered essential and consideration of their importance and retention not appropriate if we are to consider the rear barn structures.

The buildings /barns to the rear are in majority collapsed and form the perimeter of the site, associated cast columns etc elude to the previous land use and farmstead development. We acknowledge the work completed on mapping research by the Conservation Officer in this respect, identifying early building plans for this application site.

Whilst re-building could be considered, in truth, circa eighty percent has collapsed, in need of urgent structural attention and as such the historic nature is lost and by re-building from the ground upwards (required for any form a building warranty / mortgage) we are merely producing a replica of the former farmsteading.

Furthermore the size, width and heights of the barns, will restrict the design and may not render them suitable for residential use.

This commentary therefore concentrates on the single large retained barn centrally within the farmstead believed from mapping to be one of two in this orientation. There is no evidence on the ground of the adjacent barn.

The building has limited openings with a principle barn door to the northern gable and smaller door to the South leading through to the former farmyard. To the East and West walls are low level stone arches and evidence of a headwall runs between these. Information from locals advises this is the location of a former water wheel and culvert with approximately 2m of headroom. The culvert remains across the site and the assumed location noted on the indicative site plan.

This lateral drains serves the public highway and consented housing developments to the West of the site and is identified as part of drainage strategy for this site.

The barn generally is in the best condition of all on site with plumb walls to all sides, apertures are limited and with a deep plan, natural light for conversion is limited. Siting central on the site limits other residential opportunities within the site.

Of greatest concern is the location of the culvert, this cannot be retained under / within a new dwelling as access is required by Highways / Lead Flood Authority. This could reasonably be diverted around or away from the barn, but this simply erodes further the historic interest in the barn. Excavation of the culvert and backfilling would be essential and it is unlikely to add any value or desirability to the conversion.

We must consider also the economic costs for the works, it is acknowledged that conversion costs of barns / buildings are more expensive, typically build costs for a new build dwelling are £1000 - £1200 m² with conversions extending to £1500- £1800m². Conversions are also fixed in floor area, less efficient on thermal performance and therefore more expensive to build and live in. The retention of this single barn in the site would significantly reduce any further development around the site perimeter of housing and as such the true cost of retention on land value etc is much higher.

Cleator and the locality of the site is lower than the national average house price and within West Cumbria generally a lower value. As such the residual house price / sale price is a limiting factor. Whilst a profit for a development site would be circa 20% using a viability report this would be based in multiple dwellings and a solo conversion is unlikely to break even. There is limited data on re-sale values for this type of barn conversion locally and it must be noted those within three to four miles siting within the LDNP are not a comparable.

It is acknowledged that that farmstead once played an important role and related to The Flish and farm land surrounding. Many years of abandonment

and lack of investment in the site has now left the buildings beyond economic conversion and this proposal offers a viable re-use of a brownfield site.

We do acknowledge that the setting is important and subject to agreement and support from adjacent land owners we will repair existing perimeter stone walls and re-form the farmstead enclosure.

All stone from the demolition will be retained on site and used to form key details or features and included within a detailed planning consent for reserved matters.

In summary, we accept that farmstead has historical importance, the opportunity for an economic development on this site has past due to the deterioration of the buildings and previous resistance for development by the Local Authority. It is regrettable but no developer will consider this site for retention of barns due to the high costs and low sale values. Whilst there maybe a desire to retain the barns, at best they should be recorded to an agreed Archaeological Level and therefore preserved through drawings and photographs.

We do re-confirm that this is an outline planning application to establish the principle of residential use only.

S Woodall RIBA
Green Swallow North Limited