

24/00708/LBC – Appendix 1

Pirton Parish Council Comments

Thank you for consulting the Pirton Parish Council on these two planning applications.

The Pirton Parish Council objects to the grant of planning permission under both applications.

We take as our starting point the reasons for refusal of the Herts County Council Appeal (HCC) to the Planning Inspectorate (APP/X1925/W/21/3274765) which we support i.e. the effect on the setting and character and appearance of the Pirton Conservation Area: the harmful effect on the designated heritage asset that is the Listed Barn; and adverse impact on the openness of the site to the surrounding countryside (harm to the rural setting). We do not think that the current proposals overcome these objections.

The site is now within Pirton's Conservation Area. The majority of the site is outside the Pirton Development Boundary. No good argument has been made by the Applicant as to why development here should be permitted outside of the Development Boundary, particularly as the proposals do not meet any of the exemptions to the Local Development Plan policy against development in rural areas outside of the Green Belt.

Highways

There are significant Highways issues, raised by HCC Highways which objects to the grant of planning permission. We support the objections of HCC Highways.

Biodiversity and Ecology

The proposals for the improvement to the biodiversity and ecology of the development site, and, indeed, the whole of the Wright's Farm site, are to be welcomed. However, much of Wrights Farm is not included in this planning application. It is not at all clear to us how the proposals by HCC affecting areas outside of the planning application(s) can be enforced, (should HCC sell the land, or indeed retain it without carrying out these improvements). During discussions with HCC in December 2023, it was suggested by HCC that the proposals for areas outside of the area included in the planning application might be secured under a Sec 106 agreement, or by planning condition. In the event that the whole of Wrights Farm being sold, again a suggestion by HCC is that the buyer would be vetted and would need to agree to act in accordance with HCC's proposals. We feel very strongly about this issue, as the "greening" of the land not subject to the application is, nonetheless, an important feature of the application. We have experienced too often how proposals change after the grant of planning permission, particularly where the land is sold on and a fresh application is made by new owners; see Cotman End, Walnut Tree Road, Pirton.

Additionally, the Ecology report of 2023 does not deal with the issue of how the Washbrook chalk stream will be affected, if at all, by these proposals. In spite of meetings between residents and HCC, and the Parish Council and HCC, absolutely no notice has been taken of the potential chalk stream – The Washbrook – that runs through the site. The historic record shows that this is a stream which rises from a spring located on the Pirton/Shillington boundary, one

arm flows east to feed the moats around Rectory Manor, then towards Wrights Farm, and is replenished by another spring on the north west corner of the site. Before the use of field drains throughout the site, and the extraction of water from the aquifers, this was a very wet area of Pirton, the original medieval farmhouse being moated (amongst other moated houses in the area). The stream was so full flowing that it turned a small water mill by the Listed Barn. It is only in very modern times that the flow has decreased for the above reasons. There is every reason to designate this as a chalk stream and to revitalise it as such.

We raise here our concern that the proposals for the use of septic tanks for the disposal of sewage may have an adverse impact on the chalk stream in the event of overflow /leak of untreated sewage from the tank. Any septic tank needs to be placed a considerable distance from the chalk stream; the current proposals place them very close to the stream.

Archaeology

There are no fresh proposals regarding Archaeology. The last report of a preapplication evaluation is now 6 years old, and does not cover much of the area proposed for construction, particularly regarding the Listed Barn and historic water mill. Both the interior of the Listed Barn and land external to the Listed Barn should be fully excavated by hand to recover the full history of its use and age. The floor of the barn in any event will need to be dug up for the installation of utilities, and so any excavation should be done archaeologically to retrieve the maximum information. There will be no second chances. Likewise, the historic map evidence for the Water Mill is clear. The area of the water mill should be carefully excavated by hand for the same reason. The usual conditions for a Written Scheme of Investigation and subsequent work should be imposed.

The Existing Farmhouse Site.

There are no objections in principle to the development of this part of the overall site, as it is within the Pirton Development Boundary, provided it meets also PNP2 regarding design, materials, respect for the local character etc. The number of dwellings proposed for the site has been reduced from three to two, presumably to address the objections from the Planning Inspector. They will be of three bedrooms, which meets PNP 2 of the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan. However, there is no clear information about the proposed heights of these properties, which is crucial in making a considered judgement on the impact of these dwellings on the openness of the countryside/rural setting, bearing in mind that it is a transition area from village to countryside. We remain surprised that HCC has never heeded the observations of Simon Ellis, former head of Development and Conservation, when giving pre-application advice as long ago as January 2019 which was for HCC to consider modest bungalows for this site.

Barn/Stables Site

The proposal here is for two modest semi-detached bungalows, using materials that will make them look like timber barns. Apart from this constituting residential development outside of the development boundary, (see above), it will simply not be possible to disguise the actual use of the buildings, not least because they will be surrounded by, as the Planning Inspector put it, all the paraphernalia of domestic dwellings e.g. car parking, shed, waste bins, and so forth.

Listed Barn

Something needs to be done to ensure the long-term future of the Listed Barn. This is not it. The result of the proposals will be of extensions dominating the listed barn. The scale of development proposed is not at all in keeping with the modest size of the listed barn. The proposed extensions are clearly of greater square meterage than the original Barn, and in places being of two storeys, completely dominate the original barn. The design proposal does not meet the criteria usually applied to barn conversions.

Surface Water Drainage

The proposals in the Drainage Report are to channel surface water into what the writers call a watercourse, which they have identified from plans and aerial photographs. This “watercourse” is the Washbrook as it runs through the site, and in our opinion, a chalk stream (see above). Contaminated water from runoff should not be diverted into the chalk stream. There is no indication that the Local Land Flood Authority will agree to this in any event, so that the application should fail on this point also.

In conclusion, there are still too many unanswered issues that prevent, in our view, this application from being granted.

Conservation Officer Comments

1.0 Recommendation

- 1.1 In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness (para 203). Furthermore, great weight should be given to the conservation of Designated Heritage Assets (para 205, NPPF) and any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset from development within its setting requires clear and convincing justification (para 206).
- 1.2 The two-storey overtly domestic appearance of the barn addition including 3no. dormer windows and chimney stack together with introducing 10no. new windows openings and 4no. roof lights to the grade II listed barn, will erode this building’s significance as a late C18 timber-framed barn of vernacular construction.
- 1.3 I do not take the view that this is a high quality and responsive scheme, and that harm would be occasioned to the listed barn and to the character and appearance of the PCA. On this basis, I raise an **OBJECTION** as the scheme fails to satisfy Sections 16(2) and 72(1) of the Planning (LB & CA) Act 1990, the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031. The public benefit would be to find an optimum viable use for the barn but I conclude that this on its own is insufficient to outweigh the great weight to be given to the less than substantial harm I have identified.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 The barn at Wrights Farm is grade II listed (added to the Statutory List on 29.01.2020 – see Appendix A). The barn was previously located outside the PCA but is now included and at page 20 of the Pirton Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan (March 2023) (“PCACAMP”) prepared by Place Services, the following is noted (my highlights in bold):

*The Wright's Farm Barn [Figure 16] was designated as a Grade II listed building in 2020. Dating from the late eighteenth century, the barn is an important surviving example of regional vernacular architecture. As part of this appraisal, the Conservation Area boundary has been amended to include this barn and the other remaining buildings at Wrights Farm, including associated fields, within the Conservation Area. This means that the boundary now extends across the far northern edge of the village, whereby the Wrights Farm complex was previously excluded. This section of the village is known as Burge End, with the fields surrounding Wrights Farm having historical links to the agricultural heritage of the village. Within this complex of buildings, the listed barn is surrounded by buildings of a low architectural and historic value. **Sensitive redevelopment of the site would be beneficial to the setting of the listed barn.***

- 2.2 Furthermore, at page 65 of the PCACAMP under the subheading 'Opportunity Sites' it says:

There are some opportunity sites across the Conservation Area which, if sensitively redeveloped, may enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Sites which may provide opportunity for enhancement include those where premises or buildings are empty, back land areas or corner plots.

Wright's Farm, in the northern section of the Conservation Area, would benefit from some form of sensitive redevelopment which allows for the reuse of the listed barn. A masterplan for the site would be highly beneficial, which should be informed by a heritage statement which considers the significance of the barn, remaining structures and their setting.

- 2.3 The area and the building are designated heritage assets for the purpose of applying the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF.
- 2.4 Below is the scheme considered under ref: 19/01275/OP indicating four dwellings to the south of the barn. The listed barn sits to the north and beyond the application site and the Inspector describes the barn as a "little-altered and substantially intact example of the region's vernacular building traditions and the only remaining building from an earlier significantly more extensive parallel range of buildings with the farmstead". The Inspector continues by stating that "As far as it is relevant to the appeal before me, I find the significance of the listed building to be found in its architectural and historic interest, as a 17th Century timber-framed barn of vernacular construction".



3.0 The Local Plan and NPPF

3.1 I have been consulted on the heritage merits of this case, and I leave other policy matters to the case officer. It is important, however, to evaluate the significance of this building and that the proposals are considered in the context of Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031 and government policy guidance including the following paragraphs of the NPPF (Dec 2023 version):

- **200** (local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting)
- **203** (a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation; b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness),
- **205** (great weight should be given to the asset's conservation),
- **206** (clear and convincing justification), and
- **208** (harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use).

4.0 Two storey extension and internal and external alterations to existing agricultural barn to facilitate conversion into one 4-bed dwelling.

4.1 Whilst there are occasions in the district where a barn is attached or linked to a house i.e., at Thistley Farm, Gosmore and Lower Green Farm, Ickleford, this is not the norm. Generally, agrarian buildings are either purposefully built i.e., Model Farm layout or are clustered together through time and use. The current site is neither of these. Considering the Inspector's remarks in respect of a smaller building to the south which would respect the barn's significance on the site, it would not seem right to entertain a two-storey overtly domestic building appearing alongside the barn as indicated below. In my opinion, this approach is fundamentally flawed.



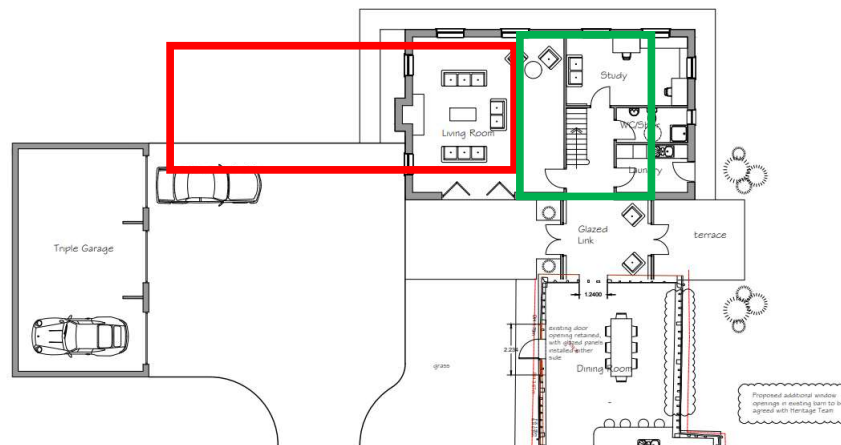
4.2 I turn again to the Inspector's decision and the following:

.... addressing the potential impacts of decline associated with the absence of a current use of the site, should not be at all costs, as this should come in the form of a development that is of high quality and responsive to its context. (Para 28)

The retention of the listed barn is undoubtedly a key consideration, but the appeal scheme does not directly relate to it.... there is no indication that the proposal would be enabling development in connection with works to the listed building. The fact that the appeal site and

the listed barn are within the same ownership also does not provide any certainty that the barn would be safeguarded from harm associated with the proposal. (Para 29)

- 4.3 I have looked carefully at the proposed development here and where 4 bedrooms are proposed at first floor with living room / study / WC & shower / Laundry on the ground floor. The barn is shown with a ground floor providing a large dining space, kitchen, and family room. In my opinion, a **high quality and responsive scheme** attached to the main barn that would also maintain a greater sense of openness would need to potentially come in the form of a single-storey, subservient range. Therefore, whilst I am happy to consider a glazed link, I am not prepared to support the two-storey build.
- 4.4 In my opinion, a 1½ storey new build where the study / WC / laundry is with perhaps a staircase serving a Master Bedroom over but with a reduce headroom (green outlined section below) may work but then I would be seeking a step down to a narrower single-storey section to provide further bedroom / bathroom accommodation (red outline). This arrangement would clearly require the triple garage to be repositioned. This suggested single-storey section would complement the height and form of the said garage.



- 4.5 With respect to the main barn I note the following at 6.14 of the submitted Planning, Design and Access Statement
- The proposed dwelling which is intended to ensure a viable future for the listed barn is again constructed of brick and tile. It is envisaged that the brick choice will match the other buildings, but a discussion is invited on this point. The connection to the barn has been minimised so as to protect the barn structure as much as possible. A single storey glazed link in oak framing is proposed to transition between the new and the old buildings. **Other intrusions into the barn have been kept to a minimum to provide adequate daylight.** The interior space will be preserved as a single clear span so that sight of the barn framing is preserved.*
- 4.6 The idea of maintaining the barn's interior space is commendable, however, should the suggestion of reducing the height of the adjacent new build be problematic I am prepared to consider (if it works internally) a mezzanine over the family room.
- 4.7 It is unclear from the submission as to what effect the 10no. new glazed openings in the walls would have on the existing frame. For instance, to the two smaller windows on the front elevation would appear to interfere with the either studwork, diagonal

braces or the larger horizontal sections of framing in the image below (photo 15 of the Structural Condition Report). This should be established before proceeding further and the following is noted at 4.2.6 of the aforementioned report:

Where additional openings are proposed, either to the gable or within the wall structure, further strengthening would likely be required to the timber frame by doubling up of studs and rafters, for example. Sufficiently sized headers should be provided, supported off these doubled up members to provide a lintel detail. This detail would need to be confirmed by Structural Engineer's calculations. Any large openings will require checking to ascertain the panel is still sufficient to prevent racking.



- 4.8 I am also unconvinced that the intrusions are kept to the minimum considering that there would be 6no. new openings in the rear wall and 4no. new openings in the front wall (if counting the glazing either side of the existing personnel door). I am not convinced that the dining room need be served by 6no. openings and for this reason I suggest that glazing could perhaps be inserted where the small door opening is on the front elevation and the door retained in an open position (like a shutter). Similarly retaining larger barn doors in a pinned back 'open' position serving the larger glazed opening would be sympathetic to the barn's agrarian character and would probably require the proposed left-hand smaller window in the front elevation to be omitted.



- 4.9 At 4.2.3 to 4.2.5 of the Structural Condition Report it refers to the measures that may be necessary if the barn is to accommodate a first floor. However, this is not currently the case, so I make no further comment at this stage.

Please note that ref: 23/02838/FP still refers to 'conversion of Listed Barn into 1 x 4-bed dwelling' whereas ref: 24/00708/LBC refers 'Two storey extension and internal and external alterations to existing agricultural barn to facilitate conversion into one 4-bed dwelling'. The FP should include two-storey extension and this would result in a moderate to high degree of harm in heritage terms. The same degree of harm is also attributed to the LBC application.

Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer

Appendix A - list entry

Summary of Building:-

A little-altered small timber-framed barn, thought to date to the late C18, and the sole surviving component of an extensive multi-phase vernacular farmstead in Pirton, Hertfordshire.

Reasons for Designation:-

The late C18 timber-framed Barn at Wright's Farm, Pirton in Hertfordshire, the sole surviving component of an extensive multi-phase vernacular farmstead is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

Architectural interest:

- *as a little-altered and substantially intact example of the region's vernacular building traditions, the detailing of its timber framing is of high quality and clearly visible throughout the interior of the building.*

Historic interest:

- *as the only surviving component of an extensive, multi-phase vernacular farmstead, shown on historic late C19 Ordnance Survey maps to have included a farmhouse, parallel ranges of farm buildings, two of which were located close to large ponds, suggesting that they may have been used for powered produce processing.*

History:-

The barn at Wright's Farm is the surviving element of an extensive evolved farmstead which survived until at least 1924 with two parallel ranges of outbuildings, a farmhouse and two buildings with ponds adjacent to them fed by small watercourses. The farmhouse was located in the south-west corner of the steading, with the two ranges of outbuildings located to the north and north-west. Historic map evidence suggests that the barn being assessed was located in the middle of the north-west range, with other farm buildings attached at either end. By the mid-late C20, the farmstead, identified on C19 maps as Haxham's Farm, had been comprehensively remodelled, with new farm buildings replacing most of the earlier structures, and a new farmhouse built further to the south-east. The farmstead site was later purchased by Hertfordshire County Council, and was unoccupied at the time of inspection (September 2019).

Details:-

A small late C18 timber-framed barn, the surviving component of an extensive evolved farmstead, and formerly part of a range of attached farm buildings forming the northern boundary of the steading.

MATERIALS: timber-framed, the framing set on a low brick plinth, with a weather-board cladding and a plain clay tile roof covering.

PLAN: linear in form, aligned north-west to south-east with a shallow rear offshut to one bay.

EXTERIOR: the barn is weather-boarded externally, with a full-height off-centre double doorway with vertically-boarded doors to the south-west elevation. To the left of this opening is a small single doorway giving access to the end bay of the building. The rear elevation has a small single bay offshut towards the building's south-east end, beneath an extension of the main roof slope. Both gable ends are devoid of openings, the north-west end being largely obscured by an adjacent C20 farm building.

INTERIOR: the barn has a four-bay timber frame forming an undivided single interior space, accessed by means of a the double doorway to the third of the four bays. The bays are defined by substantial posts with jowelled heads which support longitudinal wall plates and transverse tie beams. Straight braces link the posts and tie beams, above which are queen struts and collar beams which clasp shallow single purlins supporting the common rafters. The barn side walls are formed of close-spaced studs, each wall bay with a substantial post to the centre, either side of which are slender down

braces linking staggered mid rails to the jowl posts. The third bay incorporates a shallow open rear offshut with low close-studded walls. The wall plate oversailing the opening is supported by curved braces rising from the flanking jowl posts. The south-east gable is framed in the same fashion as the side walls, but the north-east end is formed of what appears to be the overboarded remnant of an earlier attached framed building, subsequently replaced by the present C20 building on the site.