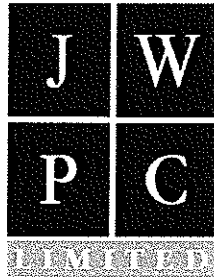


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**ALTERATIONS TO (AND CHANGE OF USE OF) PART OF EXISTING
AGRICULTURAL BUILDING FOR CLASS B1 EMPLOYMENT SCHEME, TO FORM
PHASE 2 OF THE RECENTLY COMPLETED RURAL BUSINESS CENTRE**

Manor Court
Salesbury, near Ribchester

PLANNING SUPPORT STATEMENT

June 2011

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement supports the planning application submitted by Mr & Mrs C. Mustoe for the conversion of part of the largest remaining former agricultural buildings now contained within the broader Manor Court rural business centre. The application responds to the success of the existing scheme, now fully occupied by a variety of businesses, supporting the rural economy whilst at the same time providing rural employment. Additionally, the scheme demonstrates the opportunity presented by redundant agricultural buildings to have a continued role, albeit for a different use.



- 1.2 The present scheme follows considerable investment by the Mustoe family in what is now regarded as a high quality rural employment venture created from the conversion of disused older, more traditional agricultural buildings which once formed part of Salesbury Hall Farm. That original farm, comprised a larger mix of buildings (old and new, large and small) which totalled over 5,000 square metres.

- 1.3 Discussions with Council officers to explore possible alternative uses started in 2003, followed by planning applications for their regeneration. However, objections by Lancashire County Council led to the refusal in April 2007 of Mr & Mrs Musto's planning application to address the whole of the former farm site. The application had involved the refurbishment of the older, more characterful buildings, accompanied by the demolition of the largest of the more modern buildings and replacement by smaller, more traditional offices. At that time the County Council considered that the building replacement element of the scheme breached County Structure Plan policies (although the County Council had no objection to the refurbishment of the existing buildings).
- 1.4 Following that refusal, the scheme was downsized and revised to focus purely upon the refurbishment element, together with the replacement of the original farmhouse, that scheme being approved by application ref: 3/2007/1048P.
- 1.5 Application 3/2007/1048P granted permission for 1300 square metres of lettable office space (contained within a gross floorspace of 1,685 square metres of former agricultural buildings), together with adjacent parking, courtyard and landscaping works and the formation of a new access to the public highway. That scheme is now complete and fully occupied.
- 1.6 At the same time the largest of the former agricultural buildings (i.e. the building which is now the subject of the current application) was partially clad externally to improve its appearance but fundamentally remains as an ancillary storage building to serve the Salesbury Hall estate. The smaller of the two agricultural buildings was retained for family purposes and that remains its intention today.



Phase 1 Scheme completed



2. Application Intentions

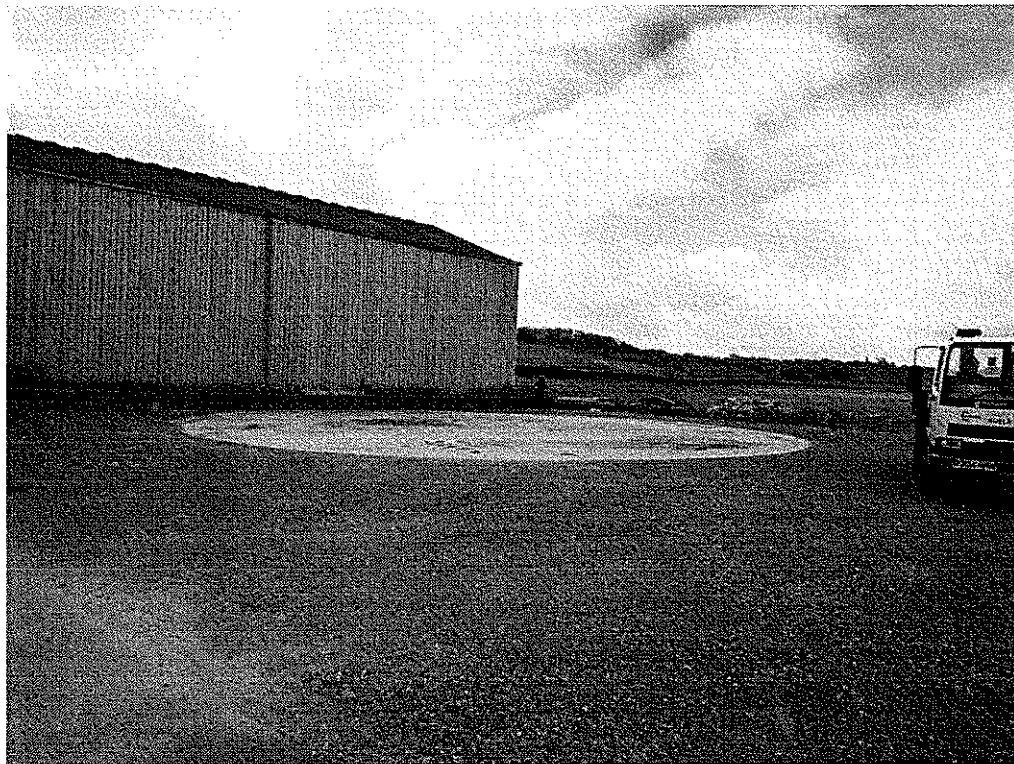
- 2.1 The application proposes to convert the north eastern section of the largest agricultural building into 17 letting office suites through insertion of a mezzanine floor and total refurbishment of this part of the structure. External improvements for this section of the building would also be undertaken, replacing the current simple part timber-boarded exterior, part shuttered mass concrete wall. This will be done in a way which will blend with the completed part of the Phase 1 scheme, respecting the traditional architecture and character of the rural surroundings.



Former agricultural building to be partly converted to B1 use

- 2.2 The remainder of the agricultural building will be retained in estate use in an open plan interior form.

- 2.3 Externally, 36 car parking spaces will be added to the 49 spaces which serve the Phase 1 development, plus cycle and motor cycle parking. Experience to date shows that the 49 spaces are quite sufficient to serve existing occupiers of the completed business units, even though several of the spaces have been taken up by contractors' vehicles in recent months. Once the development scheme is complete (and the contractors vacate the site) the applicants are certain that the scheme will have adequate off-street parking to serve the entire development.



Large slurry tank now removed to allow extra car parking to be created on already surfaced yard

- 2.4 The application is accompanied by a Traffic Supporting Statement, in the knowledge that traffic issues were properly assessed as part of the first phase application. The present survey re-affirms the view that the scheme will not impact adversely upon traffic safety or traffic flows on the adjacent highway, utilising the single improved access point at the northern end of the site.

- 2.5 The application is also accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment (confirming that there are no concerns regarding flooding or impact upon drainage. This was also the conclusion of the Flood Risk Assessment which accompanied the previous planning application.



Recently improved access to serve both phase 1 & 2

- 2.6 The application is also accompanied by a Design & Access Statement, as well as a Bat Risk Assessment.

3. Planning Policy

Government Guidance

- 3.1 It is relevant to comment briefly upon the changes which have taken place to the planning regime, since early 2003 (when the very initial site appraisal was prepared for the redundant farm buildings). These reflect increasing Government pressure to maximise the use of existing developed sites (through improvement or regeneration) and also to ensure that all developments respect the code of sustainability.
- 3.2 With this in mind, the Government published (in August 2004) updated policy guidance for rural development – PPS7 “Sustainable Development in Rural Areas”, since supplemented by the guidance contained within PPS4 – “Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth”.
- 3.3 The new guidance is consistent with prevailing planning policy guidance elsewhere e.g. PPS1, PPG3/PPS3, and PPG12 by directing ‘most new development’ to existing towns, villages and other settlements. In particular planning should promote facilities which are located close together in ‘service centres’. These may be country towns, a large single village or as group of villages.
- 3.4 However PPS7 & PPS4 acknowledge that limited forms of more isolated development will still be required to meet the continuing needs of rural areas and established rural communities, especially having regard to the important initial aim set out in PPS7 to adapt or replace buildings “of permanent design and construction” for economic development purposes, especially where this would bring about environmental improvements in terms of impact on surroundings and landscape.
- 3.5 Where a new development is undertaken away from established settlements, business, community or educational uses are supported, with a clearly expressed

preference for the re-use of existing developed sites. However, the conversion to a new residential use is normally only accepted in cases where it is related to farming or agriculture, supports a specific local need, is in an identified area of housing need in 'less remote locations that offer good accessibility, or forms part of the live-work complex'.

- 3.6 In appropriate instances, replacement buildings 'for business purposes' may be acceptable subject to normal development control criteria, and especially where they bring about environmental improvement in terms of the impact upon surrounding and the landscape and where they would not harm conservation aims (Policy EC12 – PPS4).
- 3.7 In general, PPS4 & PPS7 offer greater encouragement to farm diversification and the diversification of the wider rural economy into other rural-based businesses. They place a duty on rural planning authorities to look carefully at local housing needs in towns and villages and encourages development around 'service centres'. Encouragement is also given to tourism developments where they respect their local and wider environments.

Local Plan Policies (as saved)

- 3.8 The Ribble Valley Local Plan, although soon to be replaced by the Local Development Framework and its associated Documents, contains a range of policies which have a bearing upon rural development prospects. These remain as the relevant planning policy and are summarized below.
- 3.9 **Policy G1** explains that all development proposals will be expected to provide a high standard of building design and landscape quality. The policy sets out a series of detailed criteria against which all applications will be tested.

3.10 **Policy G5** confirms that outside the main settlement boundaries and the village boundaries, Planning Consent will only be granted for small scale developments which are:-

- essential to the local economy or the social well being of the area or
- needed for the purposes of agriculture or forestry or
- sites developed for local needs housing or
- small scale tourism developments and small scale recreational developments appropriate to a rural area
- other small scale uses appropriate to a rural area which conform to the policies of this plan

3.11 **Policy ENV3** requires that in the open countryside development will be required to be in keeping with the character of the landscaped area and should reflect local vernacular scale, style, features and building materials. Proposals to conserve, renew and enhance landscape features will be permitted, providing regard has been given for the characteristic landscape features of the area.

3.12 **Policy ENV6** confirms that the Borough Council will safeguard the best and most versatile agricultural land unless it can be shown that the need for development overrides agricultural consideration.

3.13 **Policies ENV9, ENV10, ENV12 and ENV13** confirms that the Council will oppose development which adversely affects the local ecology or which harms important landscape features.

3.14 **Policy ENV14** confirms the Council's intention to safeguard the Borough's archaeological and historic heritage.

- 3.15 **Policy H2** deals with dwellings in the open countryside and confirms that outside the settlement boundaries, residential development will be severely limited. Only development which is essential for the purposes of agriculture or forestry, development especially intended to meet a proven local need or through conversions of existing agricultural buildings to dwellings will be allowed.
- 3.16 **Policy H14** confirms that the rebuilding or replacement of dwellings will be permitted in the open countryside, providing the residential use of these has not already been abandoned.
- 3.17 **Policies H15 and H16** confirms that existing rural buildings can be converted to dwellings in certain situations, providing the buildings in question are structurally sound and capable of conversion without the need for extensive rebuilding or major alterations. This Policy has recently been supplemented by the Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- 3.18 **Policy EMP9** has been partly superseded by Supplementary Planning Guidance (strengthening the search for an employment reuse as opposed to residential) and confirms that Planning Permission will be granted for employment generating uses in barns and other rural buildings, providing all other following criteria are met:-
- the proposed use will not cause unacceptable disturbance to neighbours in any way
 - the building has a genuine history of use for agriculture or other rural enterprise
 - the building is structurally sound and capable of conversion for the proposed use without the need for major alterations which would adversely affect the character of the building

- the impact of the proposal or addition of elements likely to be required for the proper operation of the building will not harm the appearance or function of the area in which it is situated
 - the access to the site is of a safe standard or is capable of being improved to a safe standard without harming the appearance of the area
 - the design of the conversion should be of a high standard and be in keeping with local tradition, particularly in terms of material, geometric form and windows and door openings
- 3.19 **Policy EMP12** confirms that proposals for agricultural diversification will be approved, subject to other policies within the Local Plan.
- 3.20 **Policy T1** sets out the highways and transport criteria against which all new development will be assessed. Emphasis is placed upon sustainable development and upon ensuring that proposals which involve major traffic generators should be accessible by means other than by private car.
- 3.21 **Policy T7** confirms that all development proposals will be required to provide adequate car parking and servicing space.

4. Planning Implications

4.1 Supplementary Planning Guidance and Regional Policy emphasise the Government's wish to concentrate new development wherever possible within or adjacent to existing settlements (where they offer the greatest opportunity to minimise the need to travel). Any new development proposal will be tested against this ideal, with preference given to the most sustainable schemes. Nevertheless, the same policies/Guidelines provide support for rural employment and acknowledge the principle of farm diversification by converting the agricultural buildings/site to rural business facilities. Both the current (saved) Local Plan and the emerging Core Strategy support these ideals.

4.2 Attention has already been drawn to the rural location of Manor Court where most journeys would inevitably attract the use of the private car. However, the application supporting documents draw attention to the following relevant considerations.

- i. The site is located some 2 miles from Ribchester, which has seen housing increases in recent years but a decline in job opportunities associated with the relocation of transport and distribution undertakings. Further local employment would support a balanced community within the village.
- ii. In the mid 1990's, the Council published its Development Brief for the regeneration of the former Brockhall Hospital Site, confirming that the primary objective of any regeneration must be to restore employment. New housing was seen as a secondary, balancing consideration with the aim of making the project as sustainable as possible.
- iii. These objectives were subsequently incorporated in the Council's Local Plan where Policy A2 still confirms "employment opportunities must be created to help replace those lost." The initial planning application embodied these aims – proposing as much as 800,000 sq. ft. of new employment space, to serve residents in the surrounding rural area (and villages) as in previous

decades. The brief also proposed approximately 400 dwellings – intended eventually to provide a balanced live/work community on site. However, much of the employment generation has been largely abandoned, to be replaced by an isolated residential community, offering only limited genuine jobs.

- iv. At present, many existing residents at Brockhall Village (a rural settlement in its own right) travel significant distances to nearby towns or even further afield to their main source of employment. An enhanced business development at Manor Court, Salesbury would, however provide a very convenient rural alternative, less than 3 miles (or 5 minutes travel) away – thereby helping to shorten journey to work distances and helping to address the present sustainability imbalance. We believe that this is a relevant planning benefit (and a relevant commercial consideration).
- v. The more recent granting of planning permission for live/work units at Brockhall Village has not materially addressed the prevailing employment imbalance. It simply means that a limited number of additional families will have access to integral built employment space to serve their personal needs as required.
- vi. As part of the previous application, discussions took place with Lancashire County Council to investigate the possibility of extending local bus services to connect with Manor Court. The nearest service (Route 222) connects Blackburn with Brockhall Village and extends as far as Dinckley, approximately one mile to the east of the application site. If this service could have been extended (and possibly linked to Ribchester) it would have provided a convenient means of public transport for local residents to access Manor Court. However LCC concluded that it would not be possible to extend the service (especially for only occasional use), and subsequent experience with the Phase 1 Manor Court scheme has proved that the development attracts only limited numbers of motor cars and does not have an adverse impact upon key sustainability issues. The relatively small

extension now proposed would similarly not justify a radical change in the public transport service.

- vii. The present position is that the Estate originally contained almost 5400 sq m of mostly redundant agricultural and gravel extraction buildings. The older, more characterful buildings (amounting to 1685 sq m) have already been successfully refurbished for high quality business use, with some of the other buildings being retained for estate use. However this still leaves the largest (and visually most obtrusive) agricultural building (with a footprint of some 2000 sq m) as largely vacant and requiring a more worthwhile use.
- viii. Undoubtedly, without significant new investment (underwritten by commercial viability) these buildings could deteriorate, thereby impacting upon the quality of Manor Court and the appearance of the open countryside, together with the sensitive setting of the new Hall. Rural policies at all levels support farm diversification and the re-use of agricultural buildings for more appropriate uses. Employment or live/work would be the most appropriate re-use for this largely discontinued site.
- ix. Since acquiring the Salesbury Hall Estate, the applicants have liaised closely with the Environment Section of Lancashire County Council and have undertaken significant landscape improvements by restoring formal woodlands, clearing inappropriate plantation woodland and through the planting of new belts of deciduous trees. The ancillary purpose was to assist local wildlife and ecology (again as agreed with Lancashire County Council). Further tree and hedge planting accompanies the current proposal.
- x. The applicants have also liaised in recent years with the Environment Agency in order to investigate and undertake improvements intended to stabilise erosion to the banking of the River Ribble. Although there has historically been regular erosion of the river bank, together with raised

water levels along the river edge the Flood Risk assessment confirms (as it did for the previous Phase 1 scheme) that there is no risk to occupants of the new units.

- xi. Finally, it is relevant that the applicant family has already successfully created several hundred jobs within North East Lancashire at their employment base within Hyndburn, together with approximately. The expanded scheme at Salesbury Hall/Manor Court involves a different scale of venture but nevertheless would benefit from the family's experience and commitment to supporting employment and regeneration within the sub region. Moreover, the family has a clear incentive in making this project an outstanding success bearing in mind their investment in the rebuilding of the Hall, and the fact that they will be living within a stone's throw of the new business park itself.

4.3 The scheme itself is modelled on other successful rural ventures such as at Broughton Hall near Skipton and Hackthorpe Grange near Penrith with the clear intention of fulfilling a worthwhile need for quality floorspace and quality employment within the Borough.

4.4 As part of the previous (Phase 1) application (and at the request of the planning authorities), the applicants reviewed the position regarding the (suspended) gravel extraction permission, adjacent to the River Ribble. At that time the gravel use was capable of resumption, subject to the agreement of updated operating conditions. At one time the business involved the extraction of some 400 tons of gravel per day from the river, together with extensive storage, processing and operational structures (and also significant generated traffic). As part of planning application 3/2007/1048P, Mr and Mrs Mustoe agreed to surrender the gravel permission, with consequent permanent environmental and traffic benefits. Such benefits should be balanced against any perceived intensification of activities at Manor Court.

- 4.5 When tested against adopted planning policies the scheme scores well through its support for policies ENV3, ENV22, EMP9 and EMP12. Moreover there is no material conflict with Policies G1, G5, ENV6, ENV9, ENV10, ENV12, ENV13, H14, RT18, RT19 and T7.
- 4.6 Whilst the sites' detachment from the main settlements is recognised, this is not an uncommon situation in relation to rural employment opportunities and to the re-use of former agricultural buildings. In supporting these aims, pps4 & PPS7 acknowledge that a balance has to be struck in providing for the needs of an often dispersed rural community. The application is respectful of achieving this balance and equally respects the Council's transport and sustainability policies.
- 4.7 Similar attention to detail is intended for the current application which is intended to blend seamlessly with the already completed scheme. Sharing the facilities, including access and car parking, is a logical approach and the scheme will further benefit from the introduction of a energy-efficient heating system which will serve the entire development. The scheme incorporates a biomass boiler (utilising readily available woodland timber from the estate) which will greatly improve energy-efficiency, not only for the Phase 2 scheme but also for the Phase1 development.
- 4.8 Experience with the Phase 1 scheme demonstrates a strong desire for small companies to establish or relocate within a high quality rural setting, taking advantage of the high specification offered by Manor Court. However, business feedback and additional research has confirmed a continuing demand for small business starter units, similar to the highly successful but over subscribed business incubation units to be found at Myrescough College.
- 4.9 The current proposal is intended to satisfy a proven local need for such units, helping existing and new rural businesses as well as providing employment opportunities for the surrounding area.

- 4.10 Initial discussions/site meeting with the planning department have confirmed no objection in principle to the extended facilities, subject to the submission of a formal application (which this Statement now accompanies).