



THE OUTBARN, CLOUGH BOTTOM, RABBIT LANE, BASHALL EAVES BB7 3NA

**APPLICATION FOR THE CHANGE OF USE OF
EXISTING PREMISES FROM CLASS D1 TO A MIXED
USE WITHIN CLASS D1 AND D2 TO ALLOW USE AS A
WEDDING VENUE FOR UP TO 40 DAYS PER YEAR**

COVERING STATEMENT

FEBRUARY 2016

- 1 Planning application 3/2012/0490/P sought consent for alterations and extensions to the existing training barn (Out Barn) at Clough Bottom Farm and training centre was approved with conditions on 3 August 2012.
- 2 The Design and Access Statement submitted with that application described the circumstances that gave rise to the application. In doing so the Statement noted that Clough Bottom Farm comprised an extensive group of buildings in a variety of uses including the farmhouse, three holiday cottages for which planning permission had been granted for use as permanent dwellings, and Middle Barn and Out Barn which were used by Focus Experimental Training (FET), a business set up in the late 1980's to provide tailor made training courses for corporate clients. In addition an agricultural enterprise continued to be run from the farm, which had previously diversified into animal feed, and a tree nursery had been established. All the enterprises continued to be under the ownership and control of the applicant.
- 3 The Statement went on to describe the fact that FET had benefitted from its own purpose built facility since 1991 and enjoyed many successful trading years with a peak turnover in the financial year ending March 2008. At that time the business employed five full time and five part time staff with 8 – 10 associated trainers. However in September 2008 the economic downturn and recession hit the nation and the training budgets of corporate clients were among the first to be scaled back or cut completely. As a consequence FET was badly affected and to remedy the situation the staffing levels were quickly reduced to one full time and six part time with five associated trainers. Nevertheless the following two financial years saw a progressive decline in turnover, with a substantial loss in the first and a small profit in the second.
- 4 The Statement then detailed a number of trends to emerge from this restructuring:
 - The training business is now operated mainly by part time staff covering full time hours between them; hot desking increases flexibility in the business but reduces the need for office space
 - The training group size has reduced from an average of 20+ to between 10 and 12, reducing the size of the training room required and the scale of other facilities
 - The frequency with which it is necessary to run two courses in parallel, utilising both Middle Barn and Out Barn has reduced to the point where it no longer occurs
 - FET continues to pay the overheads of two training barns when only one is required
 - FET is contributing to the overheads of a large office and training centre (Middle Barn) which are now too large for its requirements

- 5 It was in the light of these circumstances and the need to ensure that FET remained financially viable that it was proposed that FET would continue to operate in its contracted form from the Out Barn. Nevertheless alterations and an extension were necessary because it was assessed that neither of the two existing facilities would meet the needs of the business going forward, and in due course the planning permission sought was granted by the Borough Council.
- 6 Condition 6 on the planning permission states that the development hereby permitted shall be used for the purposes of a Training Centre and no other purpose (including any other purpose in Class D1 of the Schedule of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, or its successors or amendments). The reason given was to safeguard nearby residential amenity and in the interest of highway safety and to comply with Policy G1 of the Districtwide Local Plan.
- 7 The summary of reasons for approval of the application states that the proposed development, having regard to the economic benefits associated with the scheme, would outweigh any visual detriment to the building and wider landscape arising from the proposal.
- 8 Subsequently the rationalised training facility has shown improved trading but it has never resumed the trading level enjoyed in the mid 1980's. With this in mind the owner, who has demonstrated an ability to recognise and implement farm diversification opportunities in the past, identified the Out Barn as a suitable venue for weddings; corporate training takes place during the working week and weddings more often than not at the weekend.
- 9 Accordingly a planning application seeking consent to vary condition 6 of planning permission 3/2012/0490/P to allow the use of the Out Barn as a wedding venue on up to 40 days per year was submitted under planning reference 3/2015/0302/P. The draft report to Planning and Development Committee identified the main issues relevant to the consideration of the proposal as the level of impact of the proposal on residential amenity and highway safety, which had to be balanced against economic and employment benefits to the rural economy arising from permitting the development. That application was however withdrawn for technical reasons and this application is made in its place.
- 10 With regard to impact on residential amenity the draft report refers to noise issues, stating that this is something that has been identified by many of the objectors, and advises that an acoustic report has been requested. The draft report goes on to state that on the basis of the evidence submitted the Council's Environmental Health Officer is initially satisfied that subject to adequate mitigation measures detailed in the acoustic report being implemented including the use of the outside area being limited, an appropriate decibel level in respect of any music, a controlling mechanism on door and window openings and the hours of use being limited, that the development could be controlled so as not to adversely affect adjacent residential amenity.

- 11 With regard to highway safety the draft report states that Lancashire County Council had concerns with the proposal, particularly regarding the local road network. Rabbit Lane and Cross Lane are identified as having restricted width making it difficult for vehicles to pass and there is limited full visibility in both the horizontal and vertical plane which may reduce vehicle speed and necessitate reversing to find suitable passing places. The draft report states that the application site has a low accessibility score and that guests and staff would need to use a variety of modes of transport. There is also concern that increased vehicular activity may conflict with pedestrian use. All these issues have been addressed in the accompanying Transport Assessment.
- 12 In favour of the proposal the draft report refers to the significant economic benefit not just for the applicant but also to the wider community; the report acknowledges the letters of support from caterers, bed and breakfast, pub/restaurant and hotelier proprietors and other commercial establishments and individuals who recognise the economic benefit of allowing this activity.
- 13 The report concludes that it would not be appropriate to grant an unrestricted consent to vary the condition (not that that is what was proposed), and that it is suitable to grant a temporary consent for a period of 18 months and with the number of events limited to 20 per calendar year. It was considered that this would give reasonable safeguards and allow time to monitor the impact of the proposal on residential amenity and highway safety. Accordingly the report recommended that condition 6 be varied for a temporary period and that within one month of the date of the decision an acoustics management plan should be submitted, agreed and implemented to the satisfaction of the LPA.
- 14 Whilst this positive standpoint from the Planning Officer in the report to Committee was undoubtedly at first sight was seen as being extremely supportive taking a balanced view of all the relevant issues, then unfortunately a temporary consent for a period of 18 months is wholly unsuitable in respect of the provision of a wedding venue as most weddings are planned and bookings made over a far longer timeframe. Indeed, the applicant already has bookings for weddings that would take place more than 18 months in the future. In these circumstances there was no alternative but to withdraw the application.
- 15 As a way forward this revised application proposes the use of the Out Barn as a wedding venue for up to 40 days per year. The Out Barn Management Plan Operating Procedures document again comprises part of the planning submission. This sets out in great detail how all events are to be managed with the intention of demonstrating that neither residential amenity nor highway safety will be compromised.
- 16 The application is also supported by a Noise Impact Assessment undertaken by NOVA Acoustics Ltd and a Transport Statement prepared by DTPC. The Noise Impact Assessment should be read for full details but in summary the recommendations detailed in section 8 ensure that music will not be perceptible at the boundary points. The draft report to Planning and Development

Committee indicated that the Council's Environmental Health Officer was satisfied in this regard should these measures be achievable.

- 17 The Transport Statement should also be read in detail, but in summary it indicates that use of the site as a wedding venue compares favourably with use for training in terms of impact on the highway network. It also describes the use of the Out Barn as a wedding venue as being an existing use with no highway issues arising, and indeed this is a retrospective application and the traffic survey fully supports this viewpoint.
- 18 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) expresses in paragraph 28 strong support for the rural economy, both through the conversion of existing buildings and the provision of new buildings. It requires planning policies to support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development.
- 19 The adopted Core Strategy interprets at a local level the provisions of the NPPF. Key Statement EC1: Business and Employment Development states that developments which contribute to farm diversification and the strengthening of the wider rural and village economies will be supported in principle. Policy DMB2: The Conversion of Barns and Other Rural Buildings for Employment Uses states that planning permission will be granted for employment generating uses in barns and other rural buildings provided that a number of criteria are met. The principle of the Out Barn being in employment use has been established, and it is therefore solely the impact of the proposed additional use on a part time basis that is appropriately assessed at this time. This additional form of diversification will not only ensure the safeguarding of the existing training jobs but will bring other attendant benefits both on site and in the wider local economy.
- 20 For the reasons detailed the Out Barn could be used on up to 40 days per year as a wedding venue without significant harm to residential amenity or highway safety. Moreover a number of other local business including caterers, bed and breakfast establishments and taxi and coach providers profit from this activity and so the benefits are far reaching.