



# PLANNING STATEMENT

WITCHER WELL

MR J IBISON

 Rural Solutions

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## PLANNING STATEMENT

### LOCATION

WITCHER WELL FISHERY, DUNSOP BRIDGE

### PROPOSAL

CONVERSION AND CHANGE OF USE OF FORMER FISH  
HATCHERY BUILDING TO 3 HOLIDAY LET UNITS

### APPLICANT

MR J IBISON

### ISSUE DATE

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The proposed development seeks the change of use and conversion of the former fish hatchery building to 3.No holiday let units at Witcher Well Fish Hatchery.



### POLICY

Proposals which contribute to and strengthen the visitor economy of the Ribble Valley will be encouraged (Key Statement EC2).

Planning policy should support sustainable development, supporting sustainable development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay (paragraph 11 of the NPPF).

Decisions should enable sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside (paragraph 83(c) and support the diversification of agricultural and land-based rural businesses (paragraph 83(b)).



### MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The development provides a sustainable tourism use within the countryside and will support the rural economy of Ribble Valley in accordance with Development Plan policy.

Both local and national planning policy seek to support a strong rural economy.

The development will help fund wider environmental improvements and stewardship across the landholding, in consultation with the AONB.

There are no adverse impacts arising from the proposed development in terms of landscape, highways or environmental impacts which would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.



## BENEFITS

- Direct and indirect job creation including on-site employment and jobs created during construction
- The site will utilise local companies for goods and services
- Guests will contribute expenditure to local businesses and services
- Enhancements to the site's appearance through rationalisation of redundant buildings and continued maintenance of site
- An area from which guests can enjoy the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Landscaping and ecological enhancement and management, delivering net biodiversity gain



## PLANNING BALANCE

The proposals are overall in line with the development plan. There are no adverse impacts with significantly outweigh the clear benefits of the proposed development, as such in line with paragraph 11 of the Framework the development should be approved without delay.

## I. INTRODUCTION AND APPROACH

- I.1: This planning statement has been produced to support a planning application for a tourism-based diversification initiative at the Witcher Well Fish Hatchery site north of Dunsop Bridge.
- I.2: The proposal seeks the change of use and conversion of the main hatchery building to 3.No Holiday Let units.
- I.3: The application follows withdrawal of a previous application in 2019, which alternatively proposed the siting of 4 new glamping huts, following planning officer and stakeholder feedback on concerns regarding the scheme. This is discussed in more detail in section 2 of this planning statement under 'planning history'.

### DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

- I.4: The description of development is set out below:

“Change of use and conversion of fish hatchery building including small extension, replacement of septic tank and creation of parking area for 6 cars”

### CONTEXT

- I.5: This planning statement:

- Describes the site and the surrounding area, including planning history on the site (Section 2);
- Describes the proposed development (Section 3);
- Provides an analysis of the proposed development against relevant development plan policy (Section 4);
- Provides a summary of relevant national planning policy and guidance (Section 5);
- Discussed other material considerations (Section 6);
- Outlines key benefits of the proposed development (Section 7) and
- Provides conclusions (Section 8).

- I.6: It should be read in conjunction with the following technical reports:

- Plans Package (Mason Gillibrand)
- Summary Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Rural Solutions)
- Preliminary Ecological Assessment (Naturally Wild)



## 2. THE SITE AND IT'S SURROUNDINGS

2.1: This section of the planning statement sets out details of the site location and its wider context, in addition to discussion of its history and events leading to the submission of this planning application.

### LOCATION

2.2: The site is a former Fish Hatchery located north of the village of Dunsop Bridge. Mr Ibson acquired the site 3 to 4 years ago following disposal by the Environment Agency.

2.3: The site is around 4.3 km (2.7 miles) north of the centre of Dunsop Bridge, and is located adjacent the River Dunsop, as identified in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Witcher Well Hatchery Site location circled in red (Source: Bing Maps)

## CONTEXT

- 2.4: The landholding in total comprises approximately 3.5 hectares and comprises a series of buildings previously connected with the Environment Agency use of the site as a Fish Hatchery and its curtilage, in addition to adjacent grazing land.
- 2.5: The development site is identified on the aerial photo at Figure 2.



Figure 2: Aerial photo with site location circled in red (Source: Bing Maps)

- 2.6: The site benefits from access to utilities (electricity, water).
- 2.7: The site is located within The Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the site is located within close proximity to the River Dunsop (to the east of the site), though the site itself is on land that is classified as a low flood risk area (Flood Zone 1).
- 2.8: The land also falls within the 'Valley of the River Dunsop' Biological Heritage Site.

## ACCESSIBILITY

- 2.9: The site is approximately 3.2km (2 miles) north of the village of Dunsop Bridge.

- 2.10: The site is accessed from Whitendale Road, a private road off the main road through Dunsop Bridge. We understand Mr Ibison has full vehicular access rights over the private road. The road is also a public bridleway (No.8).
- 2.11: Dunsop Bridge is located within the Ribble Valley, approximately 14km (9 miles) north west of Clitheroe and 24 km (15 miles) south-east of Lancaster. The village is at the confluence of the River Dunsop and the River Hodder.
- 2.12: Dunsop Bridge is located within the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The village is the starting part for many walkers, with a myriad of public footpaths crossing the area and leading up into the nearby fells. The village contains a popular café, Puddleducks Café, a popular stop off for walkers and visitors to the village, in addition to a public car park and wc facilities.

### USE

- 2.13: It is understood that the 'Witcher Well' from which the site takes its name originally served to provide the water supply to the village of Dunsop Bridge.
- 2.14: Once no longer required to serve the village the presence of the spring water supply led to the subsequent creation of the fish hatchery site by the Environment Agency. It was used for the breeding of Salmon and Sea Trout to provide for restocking of local rivers including the adjacent River Dunsop. The site is believed to have been in operation from the 1920s/30s.
- 2.15: The site was closed by the Environment Agency in the late 1990s as practices changed and there was no longer a need for the facility; and the site was subsequently identified for disposal by Defra.
- 2.16: The site was marketed for sale in 2016 including the hatchery building, still fully equipped, a number of outbuildings including covered water tanks, plus a small adjacent land holding of circa 3.5 hectares.
- 2.17: The buildings are not insubstantial and give the site a previously developed almost industrial character due to their appearance and materials.
- 2.18: A letter at Appendix A contains confirmation from a Fisheries Management Consultant that the lawful fisheries use of the building no longer presents a viable use for the site.

### PLANNING HISTORY

- 2.19: A search of the Councils online planning application records shows a planning application made by the National Rivers Authority in 1990 for the extension of the Hatchery building. This was granted permission in August 1990. There are no further planning application records found on the online search relating to the site until the applicant's recent activity in 2019 which is described below.
- 2.20: Following acquisition of the site the applicant approached Rural Solutions to explore advancing proposals for a diversification use on the site.
- 2.21: The applicant's objective was to create a public use of the site from where the local wildlife and landscape character could be appreciated.

- 2.22: A pre-application enquiry was subsequently prepared and submitted to Ribble Valley Borough Council in 2018. The enquiry sought feedback on the principle of the proposal to erect a small number of camping pods on the site and to redevelop the smaller group of outbuildings to provide some managers accommodation including reception / office space for the glamping business.
- 2.23: Whilst the pre-application feedback was positive about the principle of development, on receipt of the application and assessment by a different planning officer, concerns were raised regarding the landscape and visual impact of the introduction of new structures (camping pods) onto the site. The application was therefore withdrawn to allow the applicant and project team to consider the objections and potential amendments to the scheme,
- 2.24: Feedback was however also given which encouraged an application to alternatively look at reuse of the existing buildings on site as visitor accommodation, rather than introduce new structures onto the site.
- 2.25: The scheme which forms this application was developed following this feedback and now focusses on reuse of the main fish hatchery building to holiday let accommodation, plus a series of measures to provide enhancement to the site including the removal of redundant structures and equipment, and a scheme of sensitive landscaping to accompany the development, and provide both landscape and biodiversity enhancement.
- 2.26: Engagement was also undertaken with the AONB Officer to seek their views on an alternative scheme.
- 2.27: During an onsite meeting, AONB Officers verbally expressed no objection in principle to the revised scheme for reuse of the buildings.
- 2.28: Positive engagement is also underway with the AONB Team in respect of the applicant's aspirations for management of the wider landholding. An agreement has been reached to undertake further engagement and provide advice regarding habitat management principles for the site in order to enhance and protect the ecological and biodiversity value of the site. Bringing the buildings back into an economically viable use will help provide funds for this wider environmental management.

### 3. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1: The proposal is to convert the formed Fish hatchery building into 3.No holiday let units.
- 3.2: The accompanying Design & Access Statement describes the development and design approach in greater detail. In summary:
- Each unit provides for 2.No bedrooms with associated living spaces and bathrooms. Each unit provides at least one bedroom and bathroom at ground floor to facilitate accessibility.
  - External changes to the existing building are limited to the creation of additional doors, windows and rooflights, which have been minimised to those considered necessary to provide critical light to principle areas; and the addition of small covered porches over the front entrance doorways to provide for storage for bikes, wet coats and boats etc.
  - A small extension is proposed to the western elevation to provide for a landlords/managers store room and plant. The opportunity have been taken to create a small terrace on the roof for the occupiers of unit 3. The extension is part sunken into the ground to limit visual impact.
  - Additions and alterations are proposed in materials to match the existing and/or new natural materials (eg timber, green roofs etc) suitable for the rural location.
- 3.3: To offset the creation of the small extension, a number of disused buildings on site would be removed as part of the scheme.
- 3.4: The proposed sewage package treatment plant will also be sited in place of one of the existing tank buildings, minimising impact on the site.
- 3.5: Overall, the proposed scheme would include a net reduction of built volume on site.
- 3.6: Similarly, improvements will be made through removal of lighting columns and replacement with low wattage lighting to provide safety lighting to accesses and pathways. Lighting will be fitted with motion sensors to limit unnecessary light pollution.

#### ACCESS

- 3.7: A small car parking area would be laid out to the side (north) elevation of the fish hatchery building accessed via the existing site entrance.
- 3.8: To encourage customers to travel by sustainable travel modes, electric car charging points will be available at the site for customers use.

- 3.9: It is envisaged the site will also be attractive to walkers and visitors who may arrive on foot or bike via the public bridleway which leads directly past the site. Cycle storage is provided within the porch shelters for each unit.

## 4. THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- 4.1: Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and paragraph 47 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) explain that the starting point for the determination of planning applications is the development plan and the determination of an application must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.2: The adopted Local Plan in Ribble Valley borough consists of:
- Core Strategy (2014).

### THE ECONOMY

- 4.3: The Strategic Objectives of the Core Strategy include 'co-ordinate, innovate and diversify sustainable tourism, building on our strengths and developing new initiatives' (Paragraph 3.17).
- 4.4: Chapter 7 of the Core Strategy on 'The Economy' states that the strength of the tourism economy in Ribble Valley reflects the attractive countryside, historic towns and villages and a range of visitor attractions including the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. However, it adds that there is a need to encourage new investment within certain areas of the tourism economy including in self-catering accommodation.
- 4.5: This support is articulated in policy 'Key Statement EC3: Visitor Economy' which states that:

Proposals that contribute to and strengthen the visitor economy of Ribble Valley will be encouraged, including the creation of new accommodation and tourism facilities through the conversion of existing buildings or associated with existing attractions.

- 4.6: Development Control Policy DMB3 provides greater detail in relation to the determination of planning applications. It states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that provide for tourism facilities subject to detailed criteria being met, including additional criteria for developments within the AONB. These criteria are considered below in respect of the proposed development:

1. *The proposal must not conflict with other policies of this plan;*

It is considered the proposed development complies with relevant policies of the plan.

2. *The proposal must be physically well related to an existing main settlement or village; Or to an existing group of buildings, except where the proposed facilities are required in conjunction with a particular countryside attraction and there are no suitable existing buildings or developed sites available;*

The proposed building for conversion is sited within an existing cluster of buildings which made up the former Fish Hatchery site.

The site is accessed from Dunsop Bridge, a popular village with visitors to the area. Whilst located some distance from the centre of the village it is within practical walking or cycling distance for people involved in such activities in the area, and on a public right of way/bridleway, providing direct and safe access.

The previously developed nature of the site has led to the proposal to introduce a new use for the site; the scheme will reuse an existing building through a sensitive conversion scheme and enhance the site through removal of other redundant buildings and structures. It is considered the proposals therefore comply with the overarching thrust of this criterion.

- 3. The development should not undermine the character, quality or visual amenities of the plan area by virtue of its scale, siting, materials or design;*

The scheme has been developed to be deliberately low key and sympathetic in design and materials, with alterations to the building kept to a minimum. Careful landscaping of the site will screen the car parking area. Redundant buildings and structures will be removed from the site including the replacement of lighting columns with low level lighting which will reduce any impact on the AONB dark skies. Overall, the proposals will not have a detrimental impact on the character or visual amenity of the area.

- 4. The proposals should be well related to the existing highway network. It should not generate additional traffic movements of a scale and type likely to cause undue problems or disturbance. Where possible the proposals should be well related to the public transport network;*

The site can be accessed via an existing private road and requires no new road infrastructure to access it. The scale of visitors would result in low levels of traffic generation. There are no regular bus routes to the area, but connections are available in nearby larger settlements which could encourage use of public transport for part of the journey. Equally the site can be accessed via foot or cycle for people involved in such activities in the area and on an existing bridleway route.

It is noted that the highways authority raised no objection to the previous scheme due to the low levels of traffic involved; this current application proposes a similar level of development, 3 holiday let units as opposed to 4 camping pods.

- 5. The site should be large enough to accommodate the necessary car parking, service areas and appropriate landscaped areas;*



Visitor parking would be providing within the site accessed from the existing site access. The parking area will be created adjacent the north elevation of the building, allowing the cars to be hidden from view on approach from the south. Landscaping and planting featuring native species will be created to screen the parking area from views from the north back to the site.

6. *The proposal must take into account any nature conservation impacts using suitable survey information and where possible seek to incorporate any important existing associations within the development. Failing this then adequate mitigation will be sought;*

A preliminary ecological assessment has been carried out and concluded that there is no harm to biodiversity as a result of the proposed development. Taking into account proposed landscape planting, the proposed scheme would result in an overall net increase in biodiversity. This is discussed in more detail within sections 6 and 7 of this statement.

The income derived from bringing the site back into an economically viable use will also allow for wider environmental management across the site, with positive benefits for nature conservation.

7. *The proposal should display a high standard of design appropriate to the area;*

The design approach to the conversion is to respect the existing utilitarian character of the building, with minimal intervention. Openings are limited to those considered necessary and overall fenestration is not overly domestic to maintain the character of the site.

Similarly, landscape intervention has been minimised in order to maintain the natural character of the landscaping in the area, but the proposed planting makes use of native species appropriate to the area. The car park area will be screened by planting bunding created to blend into the currently undulating topography of this part of the site.

8. *The site should not introduce built development into an area largely devoid of structures (other than those directly related to agriculture or forestry uses);*

The proposal utilises an existing building, and with the exception of a small extension and a new small parking area no new development will be created on the site. There will be a net reduction of built form on the site through the removal of other redundant buildings and structures.

- 4.7: Overall, it is considered that the proposed development is consistent with the objectives of policy DMB3. The development would provide a low key tourist and visitor facility within the Forest of Bowland AONB and encourage appropriate visitor interaction with the landscape and wildlife of the AONB in this unique location whilst maintaining the qualities and character which make the area special. The building is unique, and in a location which relates to its

original functional need, and the understanding of its history can be maintained by introducing a new viable use into the building.

### THE AONB

4.8: The Core Strategy recognises that over 75% of the district is designated as AONB (Paragraph 5.3). In order to support tourism in the rural areas, opportunities to provide appropriate tourism accommodation and attractions within the AONB should therefore be encouraged.

4.9: In order to provide the necessary protection within the AONB, policy 'Key Statement EN2: Landscape' sets out controls over development. It states that 'any development will need to contribute to the conservation of the natural beauty of the area' and that

As a principle the council will expect development to be in keeping with the character of the landscape, reflecting local distinctiveness, vernacular style, scale, style, features and building materials.

4.10: Policy DMG2: Strategic Considerations adds further detail in regard to determination of planning applications. It confirms that the most important consideration in the assessment of development proposals in the AONB will be the 'protection, enhancement and character of the area'.

4.11: It states that where possible new development should be accommodated through the reuse of existing buildings, and that more generally development will be required to be in keeping with the character of the landscape and 'acknowledge the special qualities of the AONB by virtue of its size, design, use of material, landscaping and siting.

4.12: In order to inform the scheme a detailed LVIA has been undertaken.

4.13: The LVIA concludes that the proposed development is relatively well screened from views from within the study area due to the existing landform and the presence of large coniferous plantations. It also notes that whilst the site is located within a designated AONB landscape, the site forms an insignificant part of the wider AONB.

4.14: In respect of landscape effects, the proposed development is considered to have a moderate significance of effect at year 1 on the Site, with effects at year 10 and beyond considered slight due to the limited changes.

4.15: In respect of visual effects, these are limited to certain viewpoints, those in closest proximity to the site, as may be expected. Here effects are considered to give rise to moderate levels of significance of effect, with the remaining viewpoints not considered significant.

4.16: The LVIA concludes that overall there are no overriding landscape or visual reasons, to suggest that the proposed development would cause important levels

of harm to either the landscape and visual integrity of the national or local landscape character areas or the area of landscape covered by the AONB, which should result in a refusal during the planning permission process.

4.17: A scheme of mitigation and enhancement measures are recommended and have been adopted as follows:

- Inclusion of well-considered native planting proposals to help reduce the exposure of built form and parked cars to help integrate the development with the surrounding development;
- Planting proposals to be accompanied by a landscape maintenance and management plan (secured by condition);
- Enhance the ecological value of the site by providing a wider variety of habitats that are likely to support a range of wildlife species;
- Promote the restoration of dwarf shrub communities and bog-mosses (Sphagna);
- Maintain upland springs through appropriate management and ensure that they are not affected by new structures;
- The use of gritstone for surfacing;
- Excess spoil from any excavations could be retained on-site and combined with partially buried rubble, obtained from any demolitions works to promote a valuable reptile habitat by way of low mounds contoured into the site also providing additional screening;

4.18: In addition to these measures, as detailed in paragraphs 3.3-3.5 additional buildings and structures will be removed from the site, further reducing visual impacts and enhancing the landscape.

4.19: It is also noted that this is not a pristine, undisturbed landscape. This is a developed site with existing buildings, set within a valley which is subject to active forestry works which are changing the landscape on a continual basis. Just as this landscape is evolving to reflect current requirements and objectives, the site is evolving into a new use, following it becoming surplus to operational requirements. With the low impact development now proposed, it is considered the scheme is appropriate for the AONB location.

4.20: The existing buildings, whilst not traditional, are considered in keeping with the character of this valley, which features other structures associated with the water industry infrastructure located in close proximity to rivers.

- 4.21: It is considered that the scheme for their reuse would support the functions of the AONB, encourage visitor interaction in a low key and sustainable way, whilst conserving and enhancing the landscape character of this area of the AONB.
- 4.22: It is thus considered the proposed development would comply with the conditions of Policy DMG2.
- 4.23: Policy DMG2 adds that the AONB Management Plan should be considered and will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. This is discussed in section 6 of this Planning Statement.

### THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

- 4.24: Policy DME3: (Sites and Species Protection and Conservation) seeks to protect designated wildlife areas from adverse impact. The policy also adds that all developers are encouraged to consider incorporating measures to enhance biodiversity where appropriate.
- 4.25: A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been carried for the site.
- 4.26: The appraisal has concluded that the buildings are considered to have either low or negligible bat roost potential, with no bats observed emerging during the activity survey and are therefore considered to be likely absent from the site.
- 4.27: The appraisal also concluded that there is some suitable habitat for reptiles and for common amphibians in their terrestrial phase. As such the report recommends Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) are adopted during any site clearance to minimise any potential impact, and such works timed to be carried out during the winter months when amphibians and reptiles are unlikely to be active above ground.
- 4.28: In addition, the appraisal advises that the semi-improved grassland offers some suitability for ground nesting birds and foraging bats. Again, timings are recommended for any demolition and site clearance works to avoid bird nesting seasons.
- 4.29: In addition to the above mitigation measures, the scheme has also looked to deliver enhancements through tree and shrub planting with native species suited to the upland climate and landscape character.
- 4.30: Further potential enhancement measures have also been identified including opportunities for creating suitable habitats for invertebrate and reptiles as part of the landscaping works, and the installation of bat and bird boxes.
- 4.31: Providing the recommendations of this report are implemented in full, the ecological appraisal concludes that there will not be a significant impact to protected species or habitats as a result of the proposed works.

- 4.32: The proposed development would therefore comply with the provisions of policy DME3.
- 4.33: The applicant is also committed to adopting a management plan for the wider habitats within the overall landholding, to be developed in conjunction with the AONB Team, which could include the following actions:
- The existing areas of semi-improved grassland will be enhanced through sowing with an additional seed mix to improve floral diversity;
  - The dense area of bracken will be cleared and managed to create additional areas of semi-improved grassland and dwarf shrub communities; and
  - Sections of the flush will be managed, through clearance of encroaching terrestrial vegetation, to promote the restoration of bog mosses.
- 4.34: It is proposed that the agreed approach would be detailed within a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan, which could be secured by condition if deemed necessary by the LPA.
- 4.35: Policy DME6: Water Management advises that development will not be permitted where the proposal would be at an unacceptable risk of flooding or would exacerbate flooding elsewhere.
- 4.36: The site lies within flood zone I as denoted by the Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning however there are narrow areas of flood risk to the immediate east associated with the River Dunsop.
- 4.37: The primary flood risk is therefore assessed to come from the surface water flows through the site.
- 4.38: The access road and car parking areas will be covered by gravel/ permeable coverings and will therefore not require any positive drainage infrastructure.
- 4.39: The development is therefore considered to comply with the requirements of Policy DME6.
- 4.40: Due to the lack of available public sewers in the vicinity of the application site, foul flows from the site will be managed by a Sewage Package Treatment Plant, which would be sited in the location of the current existing filter tank south of the main building.

#### GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.41: Policy DMG1: General Considerations sets out a range of general criteria for all developments. These cover matters such as design, access, amenity, environment and infrastructure.

- 4.42: Diversifying activity on this landholding, including reuse of existing redundant buildings and infrastructure, to provide support to the tourist industry in the Forest of Bowland, is in line with the strategic key objectives of the Core Strategy. The proposed level of development has been kept minimal to reduce impact and retain the tranquillity of the site which would attract a particular visitor to stay in this location.
- 4.43: Visitor numbers at any one time will be low, and therefore there will be no detrimental impact in respect of highways or neighbouring amenities (the nearest residential property is approximately 600 metres down the private road).
- 4.44: It is considered that with an appropriate scheme in respect of materials, finishes and landscaping, the principle of the proposed use would be consistent with the requirements of the Core Strategy.

#### LOCAL PLAN SUMMARY

- 4.45: With regards to all of the above, the proposed development is considered to be in line with the policies and objectives of the local plan.

## 5. THE NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK AND PLANNING GUIDANCE

- 5.1: The National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how they are to be applied. The Framework is confirmed as being a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.
- 5.2: The most relevant policies of the NPPF to the determination of this application are outlined below.
- 5.3: At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (Paragraph 10).
- 5.4: Paragraph 8 sets out the government's three overarching objectives through which sustainable development can be achieved. These objectives (economic, social and environmental) are interdependent and must be pursued in mutually supportive ways.
- 5.5: Paragraph 11 of the NPPF sets out that local authorities should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision taking, this means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay.
- 5.6: Section 6 of the Framework states that planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development.
- 5.7: This includes supporting sustainable rural tourism developments that respects the character of the countryside (Paragraph 83).
- 5.8: This approach was previously set out in the government's Rural Productivity Plan (RPP) which was published on 20th August 2015 and corroborated further in the revised NPPF, which makes clear that a prosperous economy should be supported in both rural and urban areas.
- 5.9: The RPP identifies the economic role that rural areas already have and highlights the economic value of enabling existing and new businesses to grow and the economic potential of rural areas. The RPP further recognises and highlights that tourism is an increasingly important component of rural economies.
- 5.10: Paragraph 83(c) of the NPPF specifically provides support for rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside. This is entirely applicable to this application where the scheme will provide tourist accommodation to visitors who want to access and enjoy the local area surrounding the site.

- 5.11: The site is well placed to support and enhance the local visitor economy located within the Forest of Bowland AONB, a popular visitor destination.
- 5.12: The Framework sets out how great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Paragraph 172).
- 5.13: It has however moved away from a wholesale protection of the countryside for its own sake, as promoted through previous national planning policy guidance and statements. The Framework states that the scale and extent of development within these designated areas 'should be limited' (Paragraph 172) but does not say there should be no development at all.
- 5.14: The previously developed nature of the site means it is well placed to deliver a positive impact on the local visitor accommodation offer within this heavily constrained area covered by a national landscape designation, where development on virgin greenfield sites would likely result in unacceptable impacts on those protected landscapes.
- 5.15: Paragraph 117 states that planning should promote an effective use of land while safeguarding the environment. This includes supporting the development of under-utilised land and buildings (117 d) and encouraging multiple benefits from both urban and rural land including through mixed use schemes, and taking opportunities to achieve net environmental gains, such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or improve public access to the countryside (117a). The scheme would deliver a net gain in biodiversity as assessed in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.
- 5.16: It is considered that with a sensitive and appropriate landscaping scheme, the landscape and visual effects of the proposed scheme can be successfully mitigated against. Therefore, the scheme can be brought forward whilst still conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB, thereby complying with Paragraph 172 of the Framework.
- 5.17: Paragraph 11 of the Framework advises that development that accords with an up-to-date Local Plan should be approved unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. Earlier paragraphs of this planning statement clearly demonstrate compliance with the strategic objectives of the adopted development plan.
- 5.18: Whilst the proposed development may result in some localised visual impact and landscape change, subject to suitable landscape mitigation, it is not considered that the scheme would give rise to significant adverse impacts which would outweigh the key benefits as discussed further in this statement.
- 5.19: Paragraph 80 of the Framework is clear that significant weight should be given to supporting economic growth.



5.20: With reference therefore to the overall objectives of the Framework, the proposed scheme should be supported.

## 6. OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

### THE FOREST OF BOWLAND AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN

- 6.1: The site lies within the Forest of Bowland AONB. The primary purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
- 6.2: As confirmed in the previous section of this report, the LVIA concludes that the proposed development would not result in any important levels of harm to the AONB. The scheme is therefore consistent with the purposes of the AONB.
- 6.3: The Forest of Bowland AONB website goes on to describe how:
- In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.
- 6.4: Promoting public enjoyment of the AONB has been a key objective of the board. In 2005 and 2010 the AONB was awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.
- 6.5: The 2014 to 2019 Management Plan 'vision' identifies an issue for the AONB as 'Increasing competition with other countryside destinations and need to retain high percentage of tourism market share' (page 46).
- 6.6: Over recent times, the AONB has promoted the concept of 'sustainable tourism' i.e. 'tourism that is dependent upon the area's environment, and which seeks to conserve and enhance that environment, not detract from it'.
- 6.7: The proposals would deliver a product to serve this market and help deliver against the strategic objectives of the management body.
- 6.8: During an onsite meeting, AONB Officers verbally expressed no objection in principle to the revised scheme for reuse of the buildings.
- 6.9: Positive engagement is also underway with the AONB Team in respect of the applicant's aspirations for management of the wider landholding. An agreement has been reached to undertake further engagement and provide advice regarding habitat management principles for the site in order to enhance and protect the ecological and biodiversity value of the site. Bringing the buildings back into an economically viable use will help provide funds for this wider environmental management, and contributing to the primary aims of the AONB to conserve and enhance the landscape.

### ECONOMIC BENEFITS

- 6.10: The Framework is clear that the planning system should give 'significant weight' to supporting economic growth.

- 6.11: English tourism contributes £73bn to the UK economy per annum, and over 80% of domestic English tourism happens in our rural places<sup>1</sup>. Responsible for 2.6m jobs, the tourism sector paved the way for a third of all new jobs created as we emerged from the last recession and although these are troubling times for many, English tourism is resilient, and rural tourism in particular has the potential to be a cornerstone in the post Covid-19 economic recovery.
- 6.12: On July 14th, Rt Hon. Robert Jenrick, the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government issued a Written Ministerial Statement regarding measures to help aid the sector's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 6.13: This statement recognised how the nation's cultural and tourism industries are vitally important to the economy, providing employment and supporting local services and businesses.

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<sup>1</sup> Visit England

## 7. BENEFITS

7.1: As discussed throughout the earlier sections of this statement, there are clear and measurable benefits of the proposed development. These are summarised below.

### ENVIRONMENTAL

7.2: There are numerous environmental benefits associated with the proposed development including the reuse of buildings on the site and the overall management of the site in conjunction with the development:

- Reuse and investment into a collection of existing buildings;
- Use of sustainable construction and energy measures in accommodation;
- Provision of electric car charging points for guests to encourage the use of sustainable transport modes;
- Reuse of a partially developed site minimising demand for the development of virgin green field sites elsewhere in the AONB;
- Investment in landscape and ecological management on the application site and wider landholding; a management plan will be developed in conjunction with AONB team, and is likely to include measures such as:
  - Tree and shrub planting with native species suited to the upland climate and landscape character;
  - Creation of a wider variety of habitats that are likely to support a range of wildlife species;
  - Creation of valuable reptile habitat through reuse of spoil and rubble to create low mounds contoured into the site.
  - The existing areas of semi-improved grassland will be enhanced through sowing with an additional seed mix to improve floral diversity;
  - Promote the restoration of dwarf shrub communities and bog-mosses (Sphagna);
  - The dense area of bracken will be cleared and managed to create additional areas of semi-improved grassland and dwarf shrub communities;
  - Sections of the flush will be managed, through clearance of encroaching terrestrial vegetation, to promote the restoration of bog mosses;
  - Maintain upland springs through appropriate management.

## SOCIAL

7.3: The proposed development of tourist accommodation on the site would lead to clear social benefits:

- Increased opportunity for visitor enjoyment of high-quality landscapes;
- Increase appreciation of biodiversity and habitat through opportunities arising from managed access to adjacent landholding;
- Increase diversity of accommodation offer within AONB;
- Encourage access to informal recreation activities including public rights of way and bridleways;
- Job creation.

## ECONOMIC

7.4: The scheme would also give rise to a range of direct and indirect economic benefits by way of:

- Potential for increase visitors' numbers to support local businesses, including retail and hospitality businesses in the nearby villages of Dunsop Bridge, Whitewell and Slaidburn;
- Visitors and their parties who stay in rented or touring accommodation spend, on average, £557 per visit (£101 per day)<sup>2</sup>;
- Estimated £312,000 construction spend; and
- Business rates payable to Ribble Valley Borough Council.

7.5: It is clear from the economic, social and environmental benefits that the planning balance tilts in favour of the development.

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<sup>2</sup> 2019 Economic Benefits Report: Holiday Parks and Campsites UK

## 8. CONCLUSIONS AND PLANNING BALANCE

- 8.1: The contribution to the local tourist accommodation offer provided by the proposed scheme would benefit the local economy by increasing the attraction and range of the accommodation offer in the local area, thereby increasing opportunities for visitors and increasing spend in local businesses and tourist economy. There is a risk to the tourist economy of the AONB if accommodation demands cannot be met that the destination loses visitors to other areas, a threat identified by the AONB Management Plan.
- 8.2: The site is a developed site with redundant buildings. The scheme presents an opportunity to bring the site into a new use which would support the local tourism economy in a low impact way.
- 8.3: This application has demonstrated that the scheme is capable of being delivered with no levels of significant harm to the AONB landscape.
- 8.4: There is significant potential for ecological and biodiversity enhancement associated with the scheme through a holistic management plan for the site, and wider landholding which would be enabled by this development.
- 8.5: The scheme has the opportunity to deliver a low key and environmentally sensitive development which delivers clear economic, environmental and social benefits to the area.
- 8.6: There are no other material considerations or disbenefits to local amenities that would suggest planning permission should be withheld.

## PLANNING BALANCE

-	+
POINTS AGAINST	POINTS FOR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Some limited visual effects due to change in the nature of the view by introduction of potentially a higher number of vehicles onto the site.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Direct and indirect job creation including on-site employment and jobs created during construction</li><li>• The site will utilise local companies for goods and services</li><li>• Guests will contribute expenditure to local businesses and services</li><li>• Enhancements to the site's appearance through rationalisation of redundant buildings and continued maintenance of site.</li><li>• Significant landscaping and ecological enhancement and management scheme, including net biodiversity gain.</li><li>• An area from which guests can enjoy the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty</li></ul>

With reference to planning policy and other material considerations, there are no significant and demonstrable adverse impacts that would arise from the proposed development. The 'planning balance' is therefore weighed positively in weight of the proposal with reference to the benefits summarised above and set out within this statement, and planning permission should therefore be granted.

## APPENDIX A



# Dr Bruno Broughton

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To: John Ibison

Email: [john161500@gmail.com](mailto:john161500@gmail.com)

Date: 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020

Dear John,

**Re: Witcher Well Fish Hatchery, near Clitheroe, Lancs.**

I refer to our 'phone conversation last week regarding your exploration of the possibilities for the development of Witcher Well Fish Hatchery.

You will recall that when I accompanied you on a site visit there almost three years ago, we examined the hatchery and its equipment, the various outbuildings and the land that forms part of the property. At your request, I then prepared a written appraisal of the site and the opportunities for its development (document dated 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2017, a copy of which is attached).

Although the hatchery had been abandoned by the previous owners, the fish-rearing facilities appeared to be in good working order and in a condition that would enable the rearing of young, salmonid fish to re-commence. I expressed my belief that although it could be used for its original purpose - to rear juvenile Atlantic salmon and sea trout for release into local rivers to augment stocks - the increased importance placed by the Environment Agency on the genetic provenance of the stock would, at best, restrict the release of hatchery-reared fish into these waters and may very well rule out such action. These considerations also now apply to brown trout.

In the intervening three years, this genetic integrity of native salmonids has been given even more prominence by the Environment Agency, and it is very unlikely that there would be any real prospect of surmounting this impediment. I therefore consider it to be a non-starter.

The site could operate to produce juvenile, non-native rainbow trout, for live release into fishable bodies of still water or for sale to rearing farms where the fish could be raised to stockable sizes. However, there is restricted space for more fish tanks in the hatchery, and the profit margins on tank-reared juvenile trout are so small that such an operation would be viable only on a large scale. I do not believe that it would be possible to generate operational profit at Witcher Well, especially because of the need for daily manpower to operate the facility and the proximity of a large, commercially-run trout farm (Dunsop Bridge Trout Farm).

In my appraisal document I commented on the possibilities the site offered for development of some form of holiday accommodation, either through the installation of some form of 'glamps' on the adjoining land or through the conversion of the existing building to provide holiday 'lets'. This latter option would be visually unobtrusive as no new buildings would be required; their use would merely change.

In my appraisal report I noted several potential obstacles to this form of development, including:-

- The requirement for planning consent;
- The AONB status of the site and possible objections based on landscape quality;
- The consent required to facilitate vehicular access;
- Security – the glamps and their contents would be vulnerable to theft & vandalism;
- Sanitary arrangements for wastes.

Notwithstanding these matters, I believe that an initiative of this type represents the only real, commercially-viable option for the development of the Witcher Well Fish Hatchery site.

Clearly, I am not qualified to provide specifications for the modifications that would be required to bring the buildings to a standard appropriate for holiday use. Nevertheless, I strongly endorse your intention to research this type of development, and I am happy to support you in this regard in any way I can.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bruno Broughton', written in a cursive style.

**Dr Bruno Broughton**

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