



Blue Bell Farm, Higher Road, Longridge, Preston, PR3 2YX

Change of Use from Class B1(a) and Class B1(b), and use of building for storage of private cars and workshop, to Class E

PLANNING STATEMENT

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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION
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2	SITE DESCRIPTION
---	------------------

3	SITE HISTORY
---	--------------

4	PROPOSAL
---	----------

5	PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT
---	-------------------------

6	PLANNING POLICY ASSESSMENT
---	----------------------------

7	CONCLUSION
---	------------

/1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. PWA Planning is retained by Alchemie Technology ('the applicant') to progress a change of use application to allow for Class E usage at Blue Bell Farm, Higher Road, Longridge, Preston, PR3 2YX.
- 1.2. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This Planning Statement will demonstrate that the proposals accord with the provisions of the relevant policies of the Development Plan, and moreover that there are other significant material considerations which indicate that planning permission ought to be granted. In addition, the statement will seek to demonstrate that there are no technical reasons which could hinder the grant of planning permission.
- 1.3. This Planning Statement, alongside a review of the site history and relevant policies, provides a description of the proposed development together with an appraisal of the planning merits of the scheme as a whole. The statement should be read in conjunction with the submitted application package, which includes the following documents:
 - Application Form
 - Planning Drawings:
 - 3336_001 Plans as Existing
 - 3336_002 Elevations as Existing
 - 3336_003 Location Plan
 - 3336_004 Plans as Proposed
 - 3336_005 Elevations as Proposed
- 1.4. The submitted documents are sufficient for the validation of the application. However, should the Local Planning Authority require any further information, it is requested that the agent is contacted.

/2 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1. The site is located on land off Higher Road at Blue Bell Farm, to the northeast of Longridge within the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It comprises of a former agricultural building which has been converted for use as a laboratory and office (Planning Application Ref. 03/2015/0918). The building also incorporates a car storage garage with associated workshop. It has a stone construction with a roof made from corrugated sheets and is positioned to the west of the site. The site in its wider setting is shown in the aerial image in Figure 1 below.

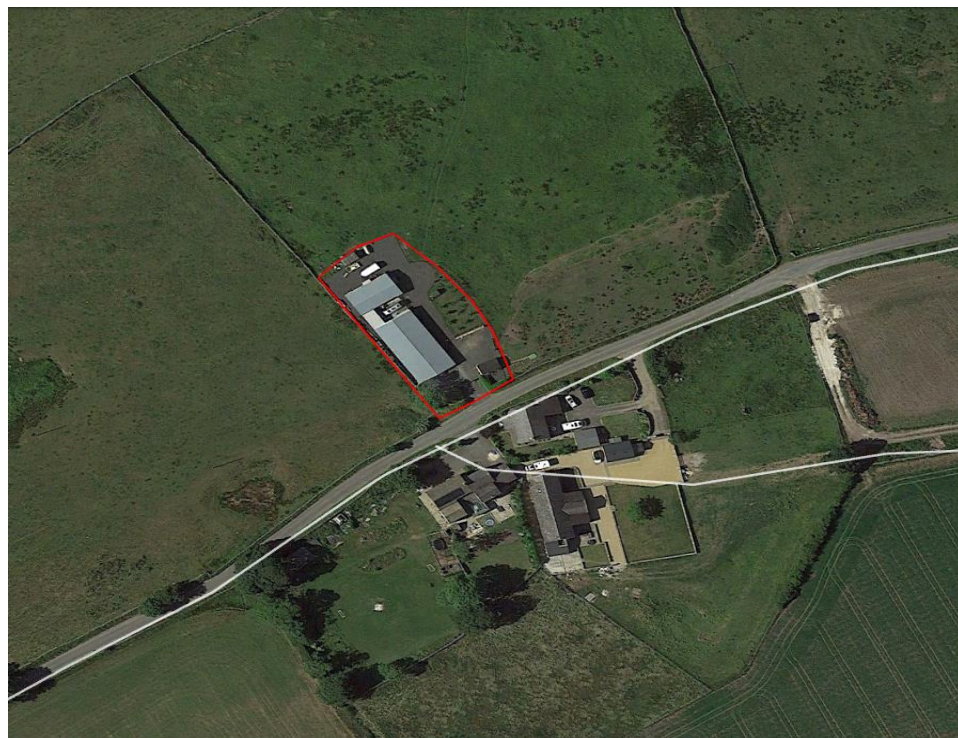


Figure 1: Aerial image of the site (Google Maps)

- 2.2. The land surrounding the building is hardstanding, which includes a parking area. There are some planted trees in a fenced off section to the east of the building. Higher Road is directly to the south, which runs southwest to east. Access to the site is from Higher Road and there are two points of field access from the perimeter fence in the east.

- 2.3. The main settlement of Longridge is situated approximately 2.7km to the southwest of the site. The closest residential dwellings are three properties located to the south beyond Higher Road. These are part of a farm complex that includes High House Farm, High House and Moss Hall. Longridge Golf Course is approximately 430m to the north east and Forty Acre Farm is approximately 490m to the north.
- 2.4. There are no ecological or cultural heritage constraints associated with the site. There are no listed buildings associated with the site. The closest listed building is located 760m to the southwest, the grade II listed Hills Farmhouse. The development will not affect this building or its setting. With regards to flood risk, the site is within Flood Zone 1 where the risk of flooding is low.

/3 SITE HISTORY

- 3.1. A search of Ribble Valley Borough Council's planning register has been carried out in order to understand the site's planning history. The relevant applications are discussed in turn below.
- 3.2. The following planning applications were identified on site:
- **LPA Ref. 3/2019/047.** *Proposed single storey extension and conversion of laboratory and office to a live work unit.* Approved 20.05.19.
 - **LPA Ref. 3/2018/0330.** *Proposed Erection of 1no. Occupancy Restricted Dwelling in Association with Alchemie Technology and Extension to Existing Laboratory and Office (Use Class B1a and B1b).* Withdrawn 26.06.18.
 - **LPA Ref. 3/2015/0918.** *Retention of unauthorised change of use from Agricultural to B1(a) and B1(b) (office and laboratory) in addition to car storage and private workshop (sui generis).* Approved 11.11.15.
 - **LPA Ref. 3/2007/0629.** *Retrospective application for the demolition of existing buildings and erection of two new buildings for the breeding/rearing of pigs and production/packaging of sausages.* Withdrawn 25.01.08.
- 3.3. Although other applications exist locally, there are no other applications evident from the planning register which are deemed relevant to the current proposal.

/4 PROPOSAL

- 4.1. The proposal seeks the change of use of an existing unit at Blue Bell Farm, Higher Road (Class B1(a) and Class B1(b), and use of building for storage of private cars and workshop) to allow for a wider range of prospective uses (Class E). The permission will allow for the unit to be used by a wider range of occupiers in place of the current usage which only allows for use by Alchemie Technology.
- 4.2. The proposal does not look to make any changes to the structure or external design of the unit, and it does not look to increase its size. The site's access will remain off Higher Road and will be unaffected as part of the development proposals.
- 4.3. The change of use would not result in any significant impact upon the operation of the neighbouring properties.

/5 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 5.1. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, including any other supplementary / supporting planning documents and government guidance as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021).
- 5.2. The Development Plan for the site comprises of the Ribble Valley Borough Council Core Strategy 2008 – 2028 (2014) the Ribble Valley Housing and Economic Development-Development Plan Document. Additionally, key policy documents that comprise 'material considerations' include the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 5.3. The Ribble Valley Borough Council Core Strategy was adopted in December 2015. It sets out a vision for the borough in accordance with the principles set out in the NPPF and allocates land for different uses, such as housing, employment and leisure. The Core Strategy, which is to be read in conjunction with the proposals map includes a range of development management policies which guide the Council in their decision making.
- 5.4. As can be seen in the extract of the Ribble Valley Borough Council Core Strategy shown below in Figure 2, the site is allocated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (Replaced by Policies EN2 and DME2) and Land outside main settlement / village boundaries (Replaced by Policies DS1 and DMG2).

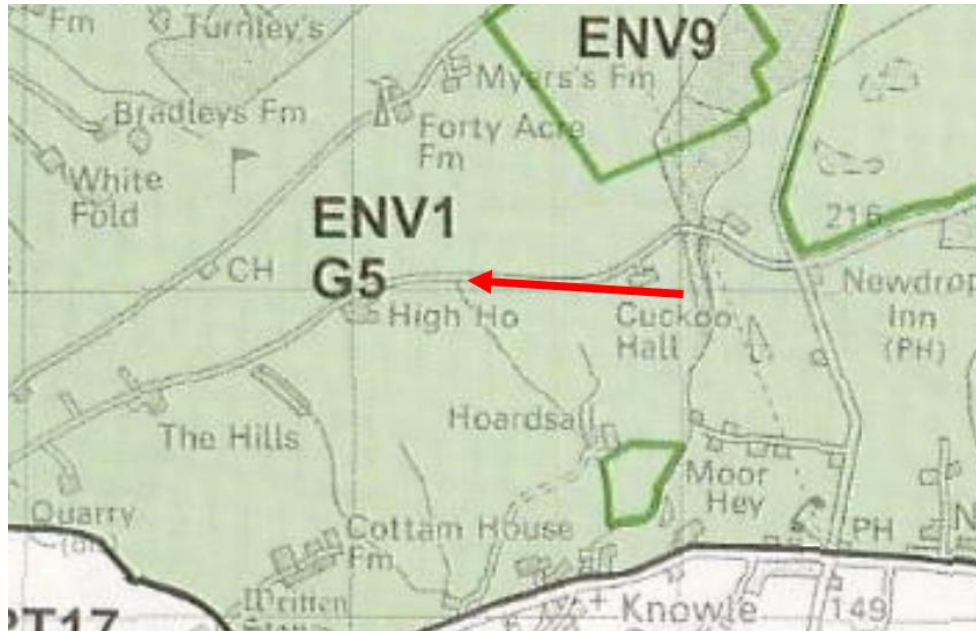


Figure 2: Extract of the Core Strategy Proposals Map South (2014)

Ribble Valley Borough Council Core Strategy (2012-2028)

- 5.5. The following policies are considered to be relevant to the determination of the application:
- 5.6. **Key Statement DS1:** Development Strategy outlines the importance of development in allowing the Borough to achieve its long term economic, social and environmental goals. It also details areas in which specific types of development will be targeted.
- 5.7. **Key Statement DS2:** Sustainable Development looks to mirror Paragraph 11 of the NPPF which details the sustainable development principle that seeks to guide both authorities and developers. Further to that it places emphasis on the Council to develop proactive relationships with applicants to ensure that where possible applications are approved unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.8. **Key Statement EN2:** Landscape mainly focuses on protection of the Forest of Bowland AONB through ensuring development contributes to the conservation of the

area by enhancing and protecting the landscape and character. In the Council's justification for the policy they state that:

"The Council considers that it is important to ensure development proposals do not serve to undermine the inherent quality of the landscape. Particular regard, consistent with the designation as AONB, will be given to matters of design and impact with an expectation that the highest standards of design will be required. The Council will also seek to ensure that the open countryside is protected from inappropriate development. Developers should adopt a non-standardised approach to design which recognises and enhances local distinctiveness, landscape character, the quality of the built fabric, historic patterns and landscape tranquility."

5.9. **Policy DMG1:** General Considerations assists in ensuring that development proposals are in line with numerous broad considerations by providing a series of overarching considerations regarding the quality of developments. The policy categorises the criteria under 6 headings which are as follows:

- Design;
- Access;
- Amenity;
- Environment;
- Infrastructure;
- Other.

5.10. **Policy DMG2:** Strategic Considerations states that development should be in accordance with the Core Strategy Development Strategy and should support the spatial vision. It also give specific guidance on developments outside settlement boundaries, which the development site is allocated as. It states that development outside settlement boundaries should meet one of the following criteria:

- The development should be essential to the local economy or social well being of the area;
- The development is needed for the purposes of forestry or agriculture;
- The development is for local needs housing which meets an identified need;
- The development is for small scale tourism or recreational developments appropriate to a rural area;
- The development is for small-scale uses appropriate to a rural area where a local need or benefit can be demonstrated;
- The development is compatible with the enterprise zone designation.

5.11. This policy also provides guidance on developments within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty:

"In protecting the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty the Council will have regard to the economic and social well being of the area. However the most important consideration in the assessment of any development proposals will be the protection, conservation and enhancement of the landscape and character of the area avoiding where possible habitat fragmentation. Where possible new development should be accommodated through the re-use of existing buildings, which in most cases is more appropriate than new build. 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. The AONB Management Plan should be considered and will be used by the Council in determining planning applications".

5.12. **Policy DMB1:** Supporting Business Growth and the Local Economy states that proposals intended to support business growth and the local economy will be supported in principle. It states that the expansion of established firms on land outside settlements will be allowed provided it is essential to maintain the existing source of employment and can be assimilated within the local landscape.

- 5.13. **Policy DMB2:** The Conversion of Barns and Other Rural Buildings for Employment Uses sets out the principles for the conversion of barns and rural buildings. It states that the AONB management plan should be considered and will be used by the Council in determining planning applications and outlines a criteria in ensuring that the proposed use will not cause unacceptable disturbance to neighbours, has a genuine history of agriculture, is structurally sound and capable of conversion, any additional elements must not harm the appearance or function of the area, the access to the site must be safe, the design must be to a high standard and existing nature conservation aspects of the property should be preserved.
- 5.14. **Policy DME2:** Landscape and Townscape Protection states that proposals which induce significant harm to important landscape or landscape features will not be supported. Such features are outlined as including:
1. Traditional Stone Walls.
 2. Ponds.
 3. Characteristic Herb Rich Meadows and Pastures.
 4. Woodlands.
 5. Copses.
 6. Hedgerows and Individual Trees
 7. Townscape Elements such as the Scale, Form, and Materials that Contribute to the Characteristic Townscapes of the Area.
 8. Upland Landscapes and Associated Habitats Such as Blanket Bog.
 9. Botanically Rich Roadside Verges (That are Worthy of Protection).
- 5.15. **Policy DME3:** Site and Species Protection and Conservation looks to provide protection for, amongst other things, features of ecological importance. The policy is in place mainly to add further protection to designated sites of environmental and ecological importance, of which the site is not. However, the overriding theme is that development should be able to mitigate any perceived negative impacts.

Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

- 5.16. The NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions as per Paragraph 2 of the Framework and Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 5.17. The NPPF sets out Government planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The golden thread running throughout the NPPF is the Government's presumption in favour of sustainable development (Paragraph 11) whereby developments which correctly balance the requirements of economic, social and environmental issues should be granted planning permission unless there are strong reasons that permission should not be granted. The NPPF also strongly supports economic and housing development.
- 5.18. Sustainable development is broadly defined in Paragraph 8 of the Framework as having three overarching objectives; namely economic, social and environmental.
- *a) an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;*
 - *b) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and*
 - *c) an environmental objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land,*

helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

- 5.19. Paragraph 83 regarding 'Supporting a prosperous rural economy' outlines that planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas. It outlines that this can be done through the approval of well-designed new buildings. This proposal will help support the rural economy by assisting in the growth and development of an existing enterprise located in a rural location.
- 5.20. Chapter 9 of the Framework, Promoting Sustainable Transport, at Paragraph 109 states that development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe. It is clear that this is not the case with the proposal now before the council.
- 5.21. Paragraph 124, in relation to design, states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development. This considers the design principles in detail, ensuring that the proposed development is compliant with the requirements of the Framework in contributing positively to making places and landscape better for people.

/6 PLANNING POLICY ASSESSMENT

6.1. As already outlined in this Planning Statement, the development site is allocated as land outside of settlement boundaries as well as being within an AONB. As such, the proposal will be judged against the relevant policy in establishing principle of development. However, the pertinent policy in this instance is Policy DMB2, which allows for the conversion of rural buildings to employment uses. Specifically, the policy states:

6.2. *'PLANNING PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED FOR EMPLOYMENT GENERATING USES IN BARNS AND OTHER RURAL BUILDINGS, PROVIDED ALL OF THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA ARE MET:*

1. THE PROPOSED USE WILL NOT CAUSE UNACCEPTABLE DISTURBANCE TO NEIGHBOURS IN ANY WAY.

2. THE BUILDING HAS A GENUINE HISTORY OF USE FOR AGRICULTURE OR OTHER RURAL ENTERPRISE.

3. 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.

4. THE IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL OR ADDITIONAL 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.

5. 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.

6. THE DESIGN OF THE CONVERSION SHOULD BE OF A HIGH STANDARD AND BE IN KEEPING WITH LOCAL TRADITION, PARTICULARLY IN TERMS OF MATERIALS, GEOMETRIC FORM AND WINDOW AND DOOR OPENINGS.

7. THAT ANY EXISTING NATURE CONSERVATION ASPECTS OF THE EXISTING STRUCTURE ARE PROPERLY SURVEYED AND WHERE JUDGED TO BE SIGNIFICANT

PRESERVED OR, IF THIS IS NOT POSSIBLE, THEN ANY LOSS ADEQUATELY MITIGATED.

THE CONVERSION OF BUILDINGS SHOULD BE OF A HIGH STANDARD AND IN KEEPING WITH LOCAL TRADITION. THE IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING THE CREATION OF SERVICING, STORAGE AREAS AND CAR PARKING FACILITIES (OR OTHER ADDITIONS) SHOULD NOT HARM THE APPEARANCE OR FUNCTION OF THE AREA IN WHICH IT IS SITUATED. THE AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AND WILL BE USED BY THE COUNCIL IN DETERMINING PLANNING APPLICATIONS.'

- 6.3. Turning to each criterion in turn, it is not anticipated that the proposed development would have an unacceptable impact on nearby neighbours. Alchemie Technology have operated at the site over numerous years, and to our client's knowledge, no issues have been raised by neighbours. Existing residential properties are separated from the site by Higher Road, which provides a barrier of sort to onsite activity. Additionally, should a specific activity with Class E be of concern to the Council, this use could be removed from a planning approval via a suitable worded planning condition.
- 6.4. Criterion 2 relates to the building having a genuine agricultural history, which is the case in this instance. Originally the building was a piggery. In terms of criteria 3 to 7, the application is merely a change of use and not a conversion. The infrastructure already exists, and any changes will not be perceptible externally. It's use for a commercial enterprise already exists, and the building is therefore structurally sound. From a design and appearance perspective, no changes are applied for. Likewise, the access is to remain as existing, which has operated safely over numerous years.
- 6.5. In terms of national guidance, Class E clearly now allows for town centre uses that have historically triggered a requirement for a sequential assessment. It is argued that one is not required in this instance, certainly with the extant Class B usages that exist at the site, and furthermore given the government's intentions with the introduction of Class E is to create flexibility in the planning uses, avoiding the red tape of planning.

If one is required, it is respectfully requested that this also could be dealt with via a suitable worded planning condition, in that should a use be sought that falls within what is classified as a town centre use, a sequential assessment would be required to be submitted and approved by the Council prior to the use starting. This is a pragmatic approach to the matter, allowing non-town centre uses within the Class E category to commence immediately, and a sequential assessment (if considered to be needed) to be dealt with prior to the town centre use commencing at the building, allowing the assessment to be time relevant to sites available on the market at that time of the intended commencement of the town centre use at the site.

- 6.6. Along with this, Policy DMB1 states that proposals intended to support business growth and the local economy will be supported in principle. It is felt that the change of use to Class E would allow for a greater flexibility in terms the range of uses and potential occupiers able to use the site. As such, it puts the development site in a stronger position to attract new businesses and support the local economy.
- 6.7. Taking the above into account, it is felt that this proposal is acceptable in principle given that the proposal would support a local economic need without causing undue harm to the AONB.
- 6.8. As mentioned above, no structural changes or amendments to the design of the unit are proposed as part of this scheme. Furthermore, no new roads are proposed to allow to the unit to be accessed. As such, this scheme can demonstrate compliance with the design element of Policy DMG1 (like Policy DMB2) which requires rural buildings for employment uses to be structurally sound prior to their conversion. The existing unit is in a suitable condition to allow to Class E usage as soon as planning permission allows.
- 6.9. Furthermore, given that there are no changes proposed to the structure or design of the unit, this maintains sensitivity with the surrounding landscape and would not foster

any undue harm to the natural environment in line with Policies DME2 and DME3 of the local plan.

- 6.10. Chapter 9 of the NPPF relates to sustainable transport and looks to ensure that future developments are accessible and do not foster severe impacts on the existing transport network. While it is recognised that the increase in flexibility of uses and occupiers through the scheme could see uses which would increase the amount of traffic to and from the site, any impact would be low and the existing transport network around the site is capable of catering for any potential increase. As such, no amendments to the transport network are needed and this scheme can demonstrate compliance with this element of the NPPF.
- 6.11. Taking all matters into account, there are no issues that should preclude the change of use of this site. Therefore, the proposed development is considered acceptable and should be approved without delay.

/7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1. PWA Planning are retained by Alchemie Technology to submit a planning application for the change of use of an existing unit at Blue Bell Farm, Longridge, Preston, PR3 2YX from Class B1(a) and B1(b), and use of building for private vehicle storage and workshop, to Class E.
- 7.2. The proposal seeks to retain the employment use on site in line with the policy constraints of the site. The change to Class E would also allow for a higher flexibility in uses and prospective occupiers for the site. As such, it is felt that this would put the development site in a stronger position to foster a positive contribution to the local economy. No changes are proposed to the external appearance of the site and no technical impacts are anticipated.
- 7.3. Taking all matters into account, there are no issues that should preclude the change of use of this site. This statement has demonstrated that the application is compliant with local and national policy. Therefore, the proposed development is considered acceptable and should be approved without delay.



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