

Bolton Fold Farm Alston Lane Preston PR3 3BN

Appeal against the Refusal of an application for the regularisation of erection of three commercial buildings (10 commercial units within Use Class B2, B8 and sui generis) and associated works (Ref. 3/2025/0141)

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Appendices

Appendix A – Pre-Application response from the Council (ref. RV/2022/ENQ/00042)

/1 Introduction

- 1.1.1. PWA Planning is retained by N&K Forshaw Rental Properties ('the appellant') to lodge an appeal against the refusal of planning application ref. 3/2025/0141 relating to an application for consent for the regularisation of erection of three commercial buildings (10 commercial units Use Class B2, B8 and sui generis) and associated works at Bolton Fold Farm Alston Lane Longridge PR3 3BN.
- 1.1.2. The planning application was submitted to Ribble Valley Council (the Council) on 22nd July 2025 and was accompanied by appropriate plans and supporting information. The application was subsequently refused on 9th December 2025. The application had two reasons for refusal as follows:
 - The development would result in large scale commercial development within the designated open countryside outside of a defined settlement and fails to meet any of the exception criteria for allowing development in such locations. Furthermore, the rural location of the application site with poor accessibility and connectivity means that future users would be reliant on a private motor. As such the development is contrary to Policies DMG1, DMG2 and DMG3 and Key Statements DS1, EC1 and DMI2 of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy.
 - The development, by virtue of its overall scale, footprint, design and materials, would result in the introduction of an incongruous, unsympathetic, and discordant form of development, which fails to be sympathetic to the rural and agricultural local character and distinctiveness of the surrounding open countryside, contrary to Policies DMG1, DMG2 and DME1 of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy and Policy LNPD3 of the adopted Longridge Neighbourhood Development Plan.
- 1.1.3. This Appeal Statement of Case, made under Section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, has been prepared against the above refusal. The decision notice and Officers Report relating to the planning application have been provided with the appeal appendices.
- 1.1.4. In terms of the aforementioned reasons for refusal, and contrary to the views of the Council, our view is that the proposed development does meet exception 1 of Policy DMG2 of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy and the development should be permitted as it has been demonstrated that the retention of the units is essential to the local economy.

- 1.1.5. Equally whilst we also contest the impacts on the surrounding landscape are significant, it's prudent to note that the Appellant engaged with the Council at the pre-application stage. At this time the Council stated under the heading of 'Visual Amenity' that "*the existing units within the application site are similar to the existing agricultural buildings within the adjacent farmstead in terms of their footprint, height, cubic volume and external appearance therefore it is not considered that retention of the units in their current form would have any undue impact upon the visual amenities of the area.*" Furthermore, it is also relevant that in the 'Conclusion' section of the pre-application report the Council considered "*In terms of moving forward, the applicant would need to explore options for alternative uses for the unauthorised buildings in line with the requirements of Policy DMG2. Given the issues raised with regards to the principal of the proposed development it would appear that agricultural uses may be the only viable option for retaining the buildings in this instance.*" This is at odds with reason for refusal number 2 (RfR2). The pre-application response from the Council can be found in full at Appendix A.
- 1.1.6. These comments indicate that, at the pre-application stage, the Council did not identify the scale, form or appearance of the buildings as giving rise to harm to the character or visual amenity of the area. Rather, the concerns expressed related to the principle of the proposed use, not the physical form of the development.
- 1.1.7. Although it is acknowledged that pre-application advice is informal and not binding, it is nevertheless a material consideration in establishing the Council's earlier professional assessment of the development as built. The unauthorised buildings were fully formed at the time of the pre-application enquiry, and their appearance, scale and relationship to the existing farmstead were therefore clearly understood by the Council at that stage.
- 1.1.8. In this context, Reason for Refusal 2, which alleges that the development is visually incongruous and unsympathetic by reason of its scale, footprint and materials, represents a materially different assessment of the same built form. No substantive change to the buildings or their surroundings has occurred between the pre-application advice and the determination of the application that would explain this change in position.

/2 Proposed Development

- 2.1.1. The proposal sought retrospective planning permission for the regularisation of erection of three commercial buildings (10 commercial units within Use Class B2, B8 and sui generis) and associated works including lay down areas, parking and access from Alston Lane.
- 2.1.2. The occupants of the ten units are as follows:
- 1 SMS valeting – Car Valeting
 - 2 APN Events LTD - alcohol free beer - stores the van etc for events
 - 3 Microwave antenna ltd – Antenna/communications installations
 - 4 Lucas wane – Football Coaching
 - 5 Fab & Funky - Vintage furniture sales
 - 6 Adrian harper - engineering small fabricator
 - 7 Adam hill - car detailing
 - 8 GMP cars Ltd – Used Car sales
 - 9 RJ woodworking Ltd - Woodworking machinery and equipment suppliers
 - 10 EMB woodworking Ltd - Repair and Installation of industrial machinery and equipment
- 2.1.3. The application originally applied for all units as Use Class E. However, the description of development was updated during the course of the application to refer to B2, B8 and Sui Generis uses to reflect the business operations in situ.
- 2.1.4. Building 1 no. is split into 7 units (units 2-7 - 51.51sqm and unit 1 - 46.02sqm), Building 2 is split into two units (Units 8 and 9 - 241sqm) and Building 3 houses 1 no. unit (Unit 10 - 729.93sqm). There are 2no. car parking spaces provided to the front of Building 1 and 2 and 4no. car parking spaces provided to the front of Building 3.
- 2.1.5. Each building has a dual pitched roof with a pedestrian door and a roller shutter door to the front elevation. The external materials of construction include concrete to the lower wall

levels and green corrugated sheet metal cladding to the upper walls and roof. The access road and parking areas is constructed of concrete.

- 2.1.6. The measurements for each unit are as follows (approximately) Building 1: 42.6m in length, 9.1m in depth and 6m in height. Building 2: 36.5m in length, 13.7m in depth and 7m in height. Building 3: 27.4m in length, 13.6m in depth and 7m in height.
- 2.1.7. In terms of landscaping, planting is proposed along the site access including tree planting. The main portion of the site is covered in hardstanding to provide room for turning vehicles and additional car parking. The parking and hardstanding are contained to the north of the site so as not to be visible from the wider landscape, which is shielded by the existing farm buildings and proposed commercial units.
- 2.1.8. Vehicles and pedestrian access are proposed from Alston Lane to the west. The site will have a separate access track to the neighbouring farm, with the access point off Alston Lane also shared with the farm. Traffic and deliveries to and from the units is at present limited, with no HGV travel to or from the site.

/3 Site Description and Planning History

3.1. Site Description

- 3.1.1. The application site is located to the south of Bolton Fold Farm, east of Alston Lane. The site occupies land which was formally agricultural land is directly to the southern boundary of the farmstead. Access to the site runs to the south west and connects with Alston Lane. The wider area is characterised by agricultural land to the south and east. The nearest properties beyond the farmhouse lie over 150m from the commercial units.
- 3.1.2. The site at present is part of a cluster of existing built development associated with Bolton Fold Farm. The site comprises an access drive and 3no. commercial buildings, which features concrete block base walls, with a corrugated metal roof and wall cladding.
- 3.1.3. The site is within the designated open countryside, as per the Housing and Economic Development Plan Document Map. There are no listed buildings or heritage assets within the site or in the local area. The site is located within Flood Risk Zone 1 where the risk of flooding is at its lowest. There are no Tree Preservation Orders either on or in proximity to the site.
- 3.1.4. Access to the site is taken from the west, with the access road connecting to Alston Lane. The site lies in a sustainable location, lying between the settlement of Goosnargh to the north and Grimsargh to the south west. Bus stops off Preston Road within 250m of the site to the southeast provide regular bus services to Longridge and Preston City Centre via Grimsargh.
- 3.1.5. The construction of significant areas of housing off Preston Road and the consequent highways improvements delivered as part of these has significantly improved wider accessibility and the quality of public transport facilities. The site is a walkable distance from the main urban area and whilst located in the Open Countryside (as defined within the Development Plan), staff and visitors have a choice of access via sustainable modes of transport.

3.2. Planning History

- 3.2.1. The following applications have been identified to build a picture of the planning history. These relate to the adjacent dairy business.

- **Ref. 3/2023/0206:** *Proposed single storey side extension, Approved With Conditions, Fri 27th April 2023.*
- **Ref. 3/2022/0208:** *Proposed new buildings Unit 1 and Unit 3 to provide storage of animal feed to include hay/straw and machinery. Permission Required, 18th March 2022.*
- **Ref. 3/2022/0094:** *Proposed new buildings Unit 1 and Unit 3 to provide storage of animal feed to include hay/straw and machinery. Refused, 16th February 2022.*
- **Ref. 3/2021/0090:** *Proposed new building to provide storage of animal feed to include hay/straw and also machinery storage. Permission Not Required, 19th March 2021.*
- **Ref. 3/2016/1084:** *Phase 2 additional cattle housing building. (Resubmission of application 3/2015/0621). Approved With Conditions, 14th July 2017*
- **Ref. 3/2016/0896:** *Phase 2 extension of roof covering and walls to existing earth banked silo pit. Approved With Conditions, 18th April 2017*
- **Ref.3/2016/1083:** *Phase 1 extension to existing cattle housing and reconfiguration of orientation of existing building. Resubmission of planning application 3/2015/0616. Approved With Conditions, 6th March 2017.*
- **Ref. 3/2016/0897:** *Phase 1 roof covering and walls to existing earth banked silo pit. Approved With Conditions, 5th December 2016.*

/4 Relevant Planning Policy

4.1.1. Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that: *"Where in making any determination under the Planning Acts, regard is to be had to the Development Plan, the determination shall be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise."*

4.1.2. The Development Plan for the site comprises the Ribble Valley Core Strategy (2014). Key policy documents that comprise 'material considerations' include the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG), and any local supplementary planning guidance documents considered relevant to the proposal, which are considered below.

4.2. Ribble Valley Core Strategy

4.2.1. The Ribble Valley Core Strategy was adopted in December 2014 and therefore can broadly be regarded as containing relevant and up to date policies in the consideration of this application. The relevant policies of the Core Strategy are considered below:

- Key Statement EC1 – Business and Employment Development
- Key Statement DS1 – Development Strategy
- Key Statement DS2: Presumption In Favour Of Sustainable Development
- Key Statement DMG1 – General Considerations
- Key Statement DMG2 – Strategic Considerations
- Key Statement DMG3 – Transport and Mobility
- Key Statement DMI2 – Transport Considerations
- Key Statement DMB1 – Supporting Business Growth and The Local Economy

4.3. Local Plan Core Strategy

4.3.1. **Policy EC1 Business and Employment Development** relates to relevant business and employment development, with the aim of allocating appropriately located employment land in sustainable locations. The policy also states that developments that contribute to farm diversification, strengthening of the wider rural will be supported in principle.

4.3.2. **Key Statement DS1: Development Strategy** states that employment developments should be concentrated in the Barrow Enterprise Site and Samlesbury Enterprise Zone.

- 4.3.3. **Key Statement DS2: Presumption In Favour Of Sustainable Development** states that the council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 4.3.4. **Policy DMG1 General Consideration** 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 and Other.
- 4.3.5. **Policy DMG2: Strategic Considerations** assists in the interpretation of the Development Strategy and underpins the settlement hierarchy for the purposes of delivering sustainable development. Within the open countryside, development will be required to be in keeping with the character of the landscape and acknowledge the special qualities of the area by virtue of its size, design, use of materials, landscaping and siting.
- 4.3.6. **Policy DMG3: Transport and Mobility** outlines that in making decisions on proposals, the Council will attach considerable weight to the availability and adequacy of public transport and associated infrastructure to serve those moving to and from the development. All major proposals must offer opportunities for the increased use of, or the provision of, bus and rail facilities.
- 4.3.7. **Policy DMI2 Transport Considerations** outlines that new developments should be located to minimise the need to travel. Developments should also incorporate convenient links to public transport to reduce the need for travel by private car. Schemes offering opportunities for more sustainable means of transport will be supported.
- 4.3.8. **Policy DMB1 Supporting Business Growth and the Local Economy** states that proposals that are intended to support business growth and the local economy will be supported in principle. The expansion of existing 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.

4.4. **National Planning Policy Framework (2024)**

- 4.4.1. 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.
- 4.4.2. The NPPF broadly defines sustainable development in Paragraph as having three overarching objectives: economic, social, environmental.
- 4.4.3. 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;
- 4.4.4. 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 well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being; and
- 4.4.5. an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.
- 4.4.6. Additionally, Paragraph 84 mentions supporting a prosperous rural economy. Planning policies and decisions should enable the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings and the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses.

4.5. Ribble Valley Economic and Employment Land Needs Study (2021)

- 4.5.1. This study identified the Ribble Valley has very limited available employment space. Whilst there are strong levels of demand for commercial and business sites across the Ribble Valley, there is an imbalance in stock with the majority located on and around Barrow Brook Business Park in Barrow, and very little in the key settlements of Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley.

4.5.2. Based on an identified need of between 22 ha to 26 ha of employment land, the quantitative assessment of demand and supply balance identified a potential deficit of between 10.5 and 14.5 ha of employment land, based on the site assessments over the plan period to 2038. With a shortage of suitable sites where there is greatest demand, Ribble Valley is at risk of losing businesses to other areas, as well as risking potential inward investment from businesses looking to move into the Ribble Valley.

/5 Case for the Appellant

5.1. Overview

- 5.1.1. This appeal concerns two principal questions. The first is whether the development can properly be regarded as essential to the local economy for the purposes of Policy DMG2(1) of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy. The second is whether any harms identified by the Council, relating to matters such as the site's location, accessibility, design or landscape impact, significantly and demonstrably outweigh the clear economic, social and environmental benefits, when assessed against the NPPF as a whole and the presumption in favour of sustainable development.
- 5.1.2. The Appellant's position is that the evidence demonstrates that the proposal meets Policy DMG2(1), complies with development plan policies that support rural economic development and farm diversification, and aligns fully with relevant provisions of the NPPF.
- 5.1.3. The Commercial Market and Economic Benefits Assessment accompanying the application, prepared by Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH), presents evidence that establishes that the units meet a documented, long-standing, and severe undersupply of small industrial and workshop floorspace in and around Longridge. This is evidenced by exceptionally low vacancy rates across the relevant size bands within Ribble Valley and the immediate and sustained full occupation of the appeal units by local businesses.
- 5.1.4. The scheme delivers twelve direct full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs, supports a further nine FTE jobs indirectly and through induced economic activity, and generates approximately £1.8 million Gross Value Added (GVA) per annum (gross). The assessment of net additional impacts within Ribble Valley identifies approximately eleven net additional FTE jobs and £0.914 million GVA per annum, together with approximately £35,000 per annum in Business Rates. These represent substantial, quantifiable public benefits to which national policy requires significant weight to be afforded.
- 5.1.5. In planning policy terms, the proposal complies with Policy DMG2(1) because it is essential to the functioning of the local economy. It is also consistent with Policy DMB1, which supports business growth and diversification, and with Key Statement EC1, which supports the provision of employment land and farm diversification within rural locations. Furthermore, the proposal aligns with NPPF provisions that support the growth of the rural

economy, the diversification of agricultural businesses, and the development of well-designed new rural commercial buildings.

- 5.1.6. With regard to accessibility, design and landscape considerations, the technical consultation responses demonstrate that no unacceptable residual harm would arise. Any limited impacts identified can be appropriately mitigated, and in all cases they are decisively outweighed by the significant economic and social benefits of the development, which is located adjacent to an established farmstead and utilises materials, form and scale of buildings that integrate the development effectively within its setting.

5.2. Policy DMG2(1): “Essential to the local economy”

- 5.2.1. Policy DMG2 permits development outside defined settlement boundaries where at least one of the listed criteria is satisfied, including Criterion (1), which applies where a development is essential to the local economy. Although the Council’s position is that existing allocations and commitments provide sufficient supply until 2028, the LSH Commercial Market and Economic Benefits Assessment demonstrates that this is not the case for the sizes and types of units demanded by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Longridge functional economic market area
- 5.2.2. **Market undersupply and suppressed demand:** The LSH assessment identifies a significant market undersupply. Across Ribble Valley, only twelve industrial premises were available, representing a headline vacancy rate of approximately 1.5% against a total stock of 827 units. This is far below the 5–10% vacancy rate generally regarded as indicative of a healthy property market. Within the 50–1,000 m² size band, which corresponds directly to the scale of the appeal units, the vacancy rate fell to approximately 0.9%, evidencing a chronic and persistent shortfall in suitable floorspace for local SMEs.
- 5.2.3. **Demand evidenced by take-up:** Demand patterns reinforce this position. Since 2014, 87% of all recorded industrial lettings within Ribble Valley have involved units within the 50–1,000 m² size range. Over the longer term, the average size of industrial units within the Borough has fallen by approximately 32% since 2001, demonstrating a structural shift in demand towards smaller “starter” and “grow-on” units, precisely the type of accommodation delivered by the appeal scheme.

- 5.2.4. **Local occupancy and jobs:** The ten appeal units are fully occupied, predominantly by businesses based in Longridge and Alston. They support twelve direct FTE jobs and an estimated nine additional FTE jobs through indirect and induced economic effects, equating to approximately £1.8 million GVA per annum (gross) and approximately £0.914 million GVA per annum (net) within Ribble Valley. These are immediate and fully evidenced economic contributions that directly sustain the local economy.
- 5.2.5. For these reasons, the development is essential to the local economy. In the absence of the appeal units, local micro and small businesses would have no suitable premises within the Longridge functional market area in which to establish themselves or expand. The available evidence identifies an acute shortage of appropriate premises and clear evidence of suppressed demand. This is precisely the type of market failure that Policy DMG2(1) is intended to address.

5.3. Consideration of Alternative Employment Site – Higher College Farm

- 5.3.1. In refusing the application, the Council places significant reliance on the allocation at Higher College Farm, Longridge, asserting that this site provides a preferable alternative and that, as a result, the appeal development cannot be regarded as essential to the local economy. This position has been carefully considered by the Appellant against the available evidence.
- 5.3.2. The LSH Commercial Market and Economic Benefits Assessment confirms that, notwithstanding the existence of allocated and committed employment land within the Borough, the supply of small industrial units of the type delivered at Bolton Fold Farm remains severely constrained, particularly within the Longridge functional market area. The assessment identifies vacancy rates of below one per cent for units within the 50–1,000 square metre range, which demonstrates that existing allocations have not resulted in an effective or sufficient supply of suitable premises to meet current market demand.
- 5.3.3. Although Higher College Farm is identified within the Housing and Economic Development DPD as an employment allocation, the evidence confirms that the mere existence of an allocation does not equate to a functional or available supply of premises that meet the needs of local businesses. The appeal units differ materially in size, configuration, delivery timing and availability when compared to allocated land, and they have demonstrably succeeded in accommodating businesses that required immediate occupation of small-scale workshop and storage space.

- 5.3.4. Importantly, none of the businesses currently occupying the appeal units have displaced from premises at Higher College Farm, nor is there evidence to suggest that suitable, available accommodation at that site existed which would have met their operational requirements at the time the appeal units were taken up. The immediate occupation of all ten units at Bolton Fold Farm provides clear, factual evidence that existing and allocated sites have not met market demand for this form of accommodation.
- 5.3.5. The NPPF makes clear that planning decisions should be responsive to market signals and should recognise that rural business sites may need to be located adjacent to or beyond existing settlements where suitable opportunities exist. The NPPF does not require proposals to be refused solely because an allocated site exists elsewhere, particularly where evidence shows that such sites have not delivered the type of accommodation required by local enterprises.
- 5.3.6. Accordingly, the existence of an employment allocation at Higher College Farm does not undermine the conclusion that the appeal development is essential to the local economy. On the contrary, the appeal units demonstrably fill a gap in provision that has not been addressed by allocated land, and they therefore perform precisely the role envisaged by Policy DMG2(1).

5.4. Consistency with EC1, DMB1 and NPPF in relation to Rural Economy & Sustainable Development

- 5.4.1. Key Statement EC1 seeks to direct employment development to sustainable locations and expressly supports farm diversification. The appeal units form an integral part of the Bolton Fold Farm building group and provide an additional income stream to the dairy enterprise. They deliver employment floorspace for local businesses in a location that is functionally related to Longridge and the Preston–Grimsargh corridor. This is fully consistent with the express objectives of EC1.
- 5.4.2. Policy DMB1 supports development that promotes business growth and strengthens the local economy. The appeal scheme provides much-needed starter and grow-on units that are occupied by local firms, contributing to local employment and addressing a recognised shortage of such premises within Longridge and the surrounding area.

5.4.3. At the national level, the NPPF requires significant weight to be given to proposals that support economic growth. It recognises that rural business needs may necessitate sites located beyond settlement boundaries, and in some cases in areas that are not well served by public transport, provided that impacts are acceptable and opportunities to improve sustainability are taken. The NPPF also supports the diversification of agricultural enterprises and the creation of new rural business space where it is well designed. The appeal proposal meets all of these requirements.

5.5. Location, Accessibility and Transport (DMI2 / DMG3)

5.5.1. The Council's delegated report suggests that the site's rural location would result in unavoidable car dependency and that pedestrian routes are substandard. However, the Local Highway Authority (LHA) has reviewed the scheme in full, including swept-path analysis, parking provision and internal site layout. The LHA has raised no objections, confirming that the access arrangements are safe, that internal manoeuvring is adequate, and that sufficient car parking is provided. The LHA supports the use of conditions to secure improvements including electric vehicle charging points, cycle storage and targeted bus stop upgrades. This constitutes clear and authoritative technical evidence that no unacceptable highway impact arises.

5.5.2. The site lies approximately 2 kilometres from Longridge town centre and has access to regular bus services on Preston Road, with bus stops located approximately 400 metres from the site. The LSH report also identifies that households in Ribble Valley demonstrate very high levels of car availability and that residents typically travel longer distances to work than regional and national averages. The creation of local employment opportunities at Bolton Fold Farm therefore reduces overall travel distances and contributes positively to the sustainability of commuting patterns.

5.5.3. The NPPF acknowledges that, in rural areas, some degree of car use is inevitable. The relevant test is whether reasonable opportunities to improve sustainability have been taken. The inclusion of cycle storage and electric vehicle charging along with the targeted bus stop upgrades suggested by the LHA will satisfy this requirement.

5.5.4. Accordingly, the residual transport impacts associated with the development are acceptable and compliant with Policies DMI2 and DMG3, when interpreted in the context of the NPPF's rural sustainability provisions.

5.6. Design, Landscape and Visual Amenity (DMG1/DMG2/LNDP3)

- 5.6.1. The Council considers the buildings “incongruous.” The Appellant does not accept this assessment.
- 5.6.2. In terms of siting and form, the units extend the existing farmstead in a logical and coherent manner to the south. Parking and servicing areas are internalised between buildings so that the visual impact on the wider countryside is minimised and the openness of the landscape beyond the building group is maintained.
- 5.6.3. The buildings are constructed using green profiled cladding and concrete plinths, which reflect contemporary agricultural building materials and the visual character of the existing Bolton Fold Farm buildings. The design approach was intentionally developed to ensure that the units read as part of the wider farm cluster when viewed from near and mid-range positions.
- 5.6.4. Existing hedgerow boundaries and the surrounding built form provide baseline screening. The Appellant is willing to reinforce this through additional native hedgerow planting and supplementary field-edge tree planting, should the Inspector consider that further mitigation is appropriate.
- 5.6.5. Overall, the design responds positively to its setting and delivers functional rural employment space that is visually consistent with modern farm building clusters. Any limited residual visual effects can be comfortably addressed through planning conditions.

5.7. Amenity, Ecology, Flood Risk and Other Technical Matters

- 5.7.1. The nearest unrelated dwelling lies more than 150 metres from the closest unit. The Council’s Environmental Health Officer has confirmed that, subject to controls on hours of operation and external lighting, both of which the Appellant accepts, there are no unacceptable residential amenity impacts.
- 5.7.2. The site is located within Flood Zone 1, where the probability of flooding is lowest. The Lead Local Flood Authority has withdrawn its initial objection and is satisfied that appropriate surface water drainage can be secured through standard SuDS and verification conditions, which can be adapted to the retrospective nature of the development.

5.7.3. There are no statutory ecological designations affecting the site, and the Council's Countryside Officer is satisfied that the submitted lighting design is appropriate for protecting foraging bat activity. Any further ecological mitigation can be secured via condition.

5.7.4. Collectively, the technical evidence demonstrates that there is no basis on amenity, ecology or drainage grounds to withhold planning permission.

5.8. Weight and Planning Balance

5.8.1. **Economic benefits** carry very substantial weight. The development provides twelve direct and approximately nine indirect and induced FTE jobs (gross), generating around £1.8 million GVA per annum, and approximately £0.914 million GVA per annum in net additional benefits within Ribble Valley. It also secures approximately £35,000 per annum in Business Rates and provides much-needed starter and grow-on units in a market with vacancy rates below 1% for the relevant floorspace bands. The proposal also contributes positively to the long-term resilience of Bolton Fold Farm by diversifying its income streams.

5.8.2. **Social benefits** arise through the provision of local employment opportunities for local residents, reducing outward commuting and supporting the retention and growth of small and medium-sized enterprises within Longridge and Grimsargh. The social benefits carry substantial weight.

5.8.3. **Environmental benefits** include the consolidation of built form within an existing farmstead, opportunities for sustainable transport through cycle storage, EV charging and bus infrastructure enhancements, and development within Flood Zone 1 with appropriate SuDS measures secured. These benefits carry moderate weight.

5.8.4. **Adverse effects (limited/modest weight with mitigation):**

5.8.5. Any adverse effects carry only limited or moderate weight. While the rural location means that some car use is inevitable, the LHA has not objected and appropriate measures are secured by condition. Visual impacts are limited and can be mitigated through landscaping. These effects do not outweigh the substantial benefits of the scheme.

5.8.6. Applying Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the NPPF's planning balance, the compelling economic and social benefits, together with the demonstrated need, full occupation of units, job creation and significant GVA contributions, decisively outweigh the limited harms identified. The proposal satisfies Policy DMG2(1), is supported in principle by Policies DMB1 and EC1, and aligns fully with NPPF guidance supporting rural economic growth and agricultural diversification. It therefore follows that planning permission should be granted.

/6 Conclusion

- 6.1.1. This appeal concerns the retention of ten commercial units at Bolton Fold Farm, delivered as a farm diversification scheme on land adjacent to the existing farmstead and occupied by established local businesses. The proposal has been assessed against the Ribble Valley Core Strategy, the Longridge Neighbourhood Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework, with particular regard to the principles of sustainable development and the planning balance required by Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 6.1.2. The evidence before the Inspector demonstrates that the development meets the requirements of Policy DMG2(1) in that it is essential to the local economy. The independently prepared Commercial Market and Economic Benefits Assessment by LSH confirms a severe and long-standing shortage of small industrial and workshop units within the Longridge functional market area, with vacancy rates below one per cent for units of comparable size. The full occupation of the appeal units by local businesses provides clear, factual evidence of unmet demand that is not being addressed by allocated or committed employment sites.
- 6.1.3. The development delivers significant economic benefits, including twelve direct full-time equivalent jobs, additional indirect and induced employment, and gross economic output of approximately £1.8 million per annum, with meaningful net additional impacts retained within Ribble Valley. The scheme also generates ongoing Business Rates income and contributes directly to the long-term viability of Bolton Fold Farm through diversification. These benefits attract substantial weight and are supported by Policies DMB1 and EC1, which promote business growth, employment creation and rural diversification.
- 6.1.4. In locational and accessibility terms, the proposal has been fully assessed by the Local Highway Authority, which raises no objection. The site benefits from safe vehicular access, sufficient parking and turning provision, and reasonable connectivity to public transport, with further sustainability measures capable of being secured by condition. When assessed in the context of the NPPF's recognition of rural circumstances, the development is in an accessible and acceptable location for this type of use.
- 6.1.5. With regard to design, landscape and amenity, the units are sited adjacent to an established cluster of agricultural buildings and use materials and forms characteristic of contemporary

farm development. Any visual effects are localised and capable of appropriate mitigation. Technical consultees raise no objections in relation to residential amenity, ecology or flood risk, subject to conditions that the Appellant is willing to accept.

- 6.1.6. While the proposal lies outside defined settlement boundaries, the development satisfies a clear policy exception, responds directly to evidenced economic need, and accords with national policy which recognises that rural business sites may appropriately be located beyond settlements where impacts are acceptable and benefits are demonstrable.
- 6.1.7. When applying the planning balance required by the NPPF as a whole, the substantial and demonstrable economic, social and environmental benefits of the development significantly outweigh the limited and localised harms identified by the Council. The proposal therefore constitutes sustainable development.
- 6.1.8. For these reasons, it is respectfully submitted that the appeal should be allowed and planning permission granted for the retention of the commercial units at Bolton Fold Farm, subject to appropriate conditions.

Appendices

Appendix A - Pre-Application response from the Council (ref. RV/2022/ENQ/00042)



RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Officer:	Ben Taylor	Tel:	01200 414200	Council Offices Church Walk Clitheroe Lancashire BB7 2RA
Email:	planning@ribblevalley.gov.uk			
Our Ref:	RV/2022/ENQ/00042			
Proposal:	Retrospective unauthorised change of use of agricultural building approved under application 3/2021/0090 to B8 / Sui Generis use (Unit 2 – comprising commercial units 8 & 9). Regularisation of two unauthorised buildings to be utilised under use classes E (g) & B8 (Units 1 & 3 – comprising commercial units 1-7 & 10).			
Location	Bolton Fold Farm, Alston Lane, Longridge. PR3 3BN			
Date of site visit	3/8/22			
Date:	3/2/23			

Pre-Application Enquiry Response

Dear Mr. Hellawell,

I write further to your submission of a request for pre-application advice at Bolton Fold Farm, Alston Lane, Longridge. The enquiry seeks the Council's views in relation to the following:

- Retrospective change of use of agricultural building approved under application 3/2021/0090 to B8 / Sui Generis use (Unit 2 - comprising commercial units 8 & 9)
- Regularisation of two unauthorised buildings to be utilised under use classes E (g) & B8 (Units 1 & 3 - comprising commercial units 1-7 & 10)

Relevant Core Strategy Policies:

- Key Statement DS1: Development Strategy
- Key Statement DS2: Sustainable development
- Key Statement EC1: Business And Employment Development
- Key Statement DMI2: Transport Considerations
- Policy DMG1: General considerations
- Policy DMG2: Strategic considerations
- Policy DMG3: Transport and Mobility
- Policy DMB1: Supporting Business Growth And The Local Economy

Principle of Development:

The request for pre-application advice relates to the retention of three buildings located on land bordering the Southern boundary of Bolton Fold farmstead. Access to the site is from the South-west from Alston Lane. The application site is located approximately 600 metres outside of Longridge's defined settlement boundary and as such lies within the open countryside as designated by the Ribble Valley Core Strategy.

Key Statement DS1 of the Core Strategy states:

Strategic employment opportunities will be promoted through the development of:

- the Barrow Enterprise Site as a main location for employment;
- the Samlesbury Enterprise Zone

In addition, Key Statement EC1 states:

'Employment development will be directed towards the main settlement of Clitheroe, Whalley and Longridge as the preferred locations to accommodate employment growth together with land at Barrow Enterprise Site, the Lancashire Enterprise Zone at Samlesbury and locations well related to the A59 corridor.'

In this instance, the proposed development is located outside of the Borough's Enterprise Zones well away from the A59 corridor and outside of Longridge's defined settlement boundary therefore the proposal fails to accord with the aims and objectives of Key Statements DS1 and EC1.

Policy DMG2 of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy makes provision for development outside of the Borough's defined settlement areas on the basis of the development in question meeting at least one of the following considerations:

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

Information provided in support of the pre-application enquiry states that the existing commercial units provide local employment opportunities in addition to supporting local businesses and the local economy. Additional references are made to a lack of vacant commercial units within the local area along with references to the findings of the Ribble Valley Economic and Employment Land Needs Study (2021) which identified relative to the Borough a requirement to identify additional employment land. Notwithstanding this, no evidence has been provided to suggest that retention of the unauthorised units would be essential to the local economy or social well-being of the area in question. In addition, planning permission has recently been granted on the allocated employment site in Longridge (Higher College Farm) for commercial units (Class E(g) use class) which would be able to meet local demand. Therefore the proposal is not considered to accord with point 1 of the above policy.

Furthermore, the three unauthorised buildings contain a total of ten commercial units comprising a total floorspace of 1632m² which in turn would place the unauthorised works within the realm of a major development and well beyond a small scale use therefore the proposal is not considered to accord with point 5 of the above policy. As such, the proposal fails to meet the necessary requirements of Policy DMG2.

Moreover, Key Statement DMI2 of the Core Strategy states that *'new development should be located to minimise the need to travel and incorporate good access by foot and cycle.'*

In addition, Policy DMG3 of the Core Strategy states:

'In making decisions on development proposals the local planning authority will, attach considerable weight to the provision made for access to the development by pedestrian, cyclists and those with reduced mobility [and]

proposals which locate development in areas which maintain and improve choice for people to walk, cycle or catch public transport rather than drive between homes and facilities which they need to visit regularly’.

In this instance, the application site is located within reasonably close proximity to bus services on Preston Road however pedestrian access from the nearby bus stops to the application site is via Alston Lane which is an unlit road with limited footways. In addition, there are no footways or lighting on the access track leading into the application site from Alston Lane. As such, pedestrian access to and from the site is considered to be substandard which in turn has the likelihood to increase reliance on the private motor vehicle. Accordingly, the proposal fails to accord with the aims and objectives Key Statement DMI2 and Policy DMG3.

Policy DMB1 of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy seeks to support proposals that are intended to support business growth and the local economy however the policy also states that such proposals will be assessed with regards to their compatibility with the other policies within the Core Strategy. In this instance, retention of the unauthorised development would be in contravention of Key Statements DS1, EC1, DMI2 and Policies DMG2 and DMG3 of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy therefore the proposal would by extension be in conflict with Policy DMB1.

The application’s supporting information states that the revenue from the existing units provides a valuable additional income stream for the applicant’s existing agricultural operation and as such ‘contributes to farm diversification and strengthens the rural economy’.

Broadly speaking, farm diversification is defined as non-agricultural work of an entrepreneurial nature on or off farm but which utilises farm resources and as such could potentially cover a range of uses to supplement an existing agricultural enterprise.

Notwithstanding this, the proposed development would be in conflict with numerous policies within the Core Strategy as outlined above therefore the question of whether or not the development would meet the definition of a farm diversification is considered to be a redundant issue in this instance.

Taking account of all of the above, retention of the proposed development is considered to be unacceptable in principle.

Residential Amenity:

The existing units are located over 150 metres away from the nearest residential properties on Alston Lane with the proposed use of the units relating to storage (Use Class B8) and other uses that could be carried out without detriment to the amenity of the surrounding area by reason of noise, vibration, smell, fumes, smoke etc (Use Class E (g) (iii)). Notwithstanding this, frequent visits from members of the public for the purposes of on-site commerce and regular deliveries to the units during unsociable hours could potentially invite disturbance to neighbouring residential properties on Alston Lane therefore it would be helpful if clarification could be provided with regards to anticipated visitor numbers to the site and proposed hours of operation / business in the event of a full planning application being submitted. Details of any external lighting required on the building or around the site should also be provided.

Visual Amenity:

The existing units within the application site are similar to the existing agricultural buildings within the adjacent farmstead in terms of their footprint, height, cubic volume and external appearance therefore it is not considered that retention of the units in their current form would have any undue impact upon the visual amenities of the area.

Ecology:

No ecological constraints identified in relation to the application site.

Highways:

The Local Planning Authority cannot offer any highways related advice therefore the applicant may wish to consider undertaking separate consultation with the Local Highways Authority prior to any formal submission in order to address the following issues:

- Absence of pedestrian footways and streetlighting on Alston Lane
- Suitability of existing vehicle access / vehicle track to the application site & potential conflicts with the second vehicle access serving the farmstead
- Absence of pedestrian footways and lighting on access track to application site
- On-site parking capacity / turning facilities / provision of electric vehicle charging points / cycle storage

Flood Risk and Drainage:

A Drainage Strategy should be provided within the application which demonstrates that surface water from the site would promote the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and satisfy the drainage hierarchy outlined in National Planning Practice Guidance.

Pre-application advice from the Lead Local Flood Authority with regards to drainage and flooding would be beneficial prior to any formal submission given that the unauthorised works fall within the realm of major development and with respect to the application site lying within an area with a 25% – 50% risk of groundwater flooding and therefore a flood risk assessment is likely to be needed.

Other Matters:

Due to recent changes in planning legislation the Council must now seek the formal agreement of the applicant (or their agent) to impose pre-commencement conditions, should it be minded to grant planning permission.

Therefore, you may wish to consider providing a greater level of information at the outset for the Council to assess, in order to avoid the need for such conditions. A provisional validation checklist is provided below, however I'm sure you appreciate that requests for further technical information may be made by third party consultees during the application which cannot necessarily be anticipated at this stage. The below link is to the Council's recently adopted Validation checklist.

[adopted-validation-checklist-27-august-2021 \(ribblevalley.gov.uk\)](https://www.ribblevalley.gov.uk/adopted-validation-checklist-27-august-2021)

Conclusion:

Retention of the unauthorised development would be in conflict with Key Statements DS1, EC1, DMI2 and Policies DMG2, DMG3 and DMB1 of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy therefore the proposal is considered to be unacceptable in principle.

In terms of moving forward, the applicant would need to explore options for alternative uses for the unauthorised buildings in line with the requirements of Policy DMG2. Given the issues raised with regards to the principal of the proposed development it would appear that agricultural uses may be the only viable option for retaining the buildings in this instance.

Continued use of the application site as proposed could pose numerous highway safety issues with regards to potential conflicts between the application site vehicle access and vehicle access for Bolton Fold Farm. Pedestrian access to and from the application site also remains a significant safety issue due to the lack of

footways and lighting on Alston Lane and on the access track leading into the application site. With the above in mind, it would be beneficial for the applicant to seek pre-application advice from the Local Highways Authority before making any formal planning application submission in order to address issues relating to highway safety.

Submission Requirements:

Should you proceed to submission of a formal application, based on the nature of the proposal / site constraints identified above, it is my opinion that the Local Planning Authority would require the following information to accompany such an application:

- Completed application form
- Red edged Location Plan (at a scale of 1:250 or 1:2500, showing North arrow)
- Proposed site plan (at a scale of 1:100 or 1:200) showing any site boundaries and;
 - proposed car parking layout including length / width dimensions of proposed car spaces
 - details of proposed materials used in any areas of hardstanding
 - details of any other proposed landscaping (if applicable)
- Proposed floor plans of units (at a scale of 1:50 or 1:100)
- Proposed elevations of units (at a scale of 1:50 or 1:100)
- Design and Access Statement
- Transport Statement
- Sustainable Drainage Strategy
- Lighting Strategy (if external lights are proposed on the building or within the site)
- Flood Risk Assessment (applicant to confirm with LLFA)
- The appropriate fee

There are three possible options for the submission of the above documents:

- Online through the Planning Portal (recommended)
- By post or in person to the following address:

Economic Development and Planning Department
Ribble Valley Borough Council
Church Walk
Clitheroe
BB7 2RA

Please note this aforementioned required information may not be exhaustive and is provided on the basis of the level of information submitted. Failure to provide required information is likely to result in an application

being made invalid until such information is received or potentially refused on the basis of insufficient information.

Please also be advised that Lancashire County Council provide a separate, chargeable pre-application service for highway related matters and drainage matters. You should contact the County Council directly to discuss any such issues - <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/business/business-services/pre-planning-application-advice-service/pre-planning-application-highways-advice-service>

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/business/business-services/pre-planning-application-advice-service/pre-planning-application-flood-risk-and-land-drainage-advice-service/>

The above observations have been provided on the basis of the level of information submitted and the comments contained within this response represent officer opinion only, at the time of writing, without prejudice to the final determination of any application submitted. Should you wish to discuss any of these matters further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

Ben Taylor

Senior Planning Officer



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