

Higher College Farm Blackburn Road Longridge PR3 2YY

The erection of 34 no. Class B2 units and 1 no. battery storage and maintenance unit with associated parking and access

**PLANNING STATEMENT
INCORPORATING:
DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT
BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN STATEMENT**

July 2025



REPORT CONTROL

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/1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. PWA Planning is retained to progress a Section 73 to vary Condition 2 on Planning Approval: 3/2024/0256 ('the proposed variation') for the erection of 34 no. Class B2 units and 1 no. battery storage and maintenance unit with associated parking and access ('approved development') at land associated with Higher College Farm, Blackburn Road, Longridge, PR3 2YY (application site').
- 1.2. The purpose of this Planning Statement is to assess and conclude on the acceptability of the proposed variation in terms of relevant national and local planning policy, together with any material considerations.
- 1.3. This statement should be read in conjunction with the submitted application package, which includes the following documents:
 - Application form, relevant certificates and notices;
 - Planning Statement (this document);
 - Viability Statement;
 - 3D Street Scheme Images.
 - Drawn Information:
 - Proposed Elevations Block 1 (ref. EAD_203_05_C5);
 - Proposed Elevations Block 2 (ref. EAD_203_11_C5);
 - Proposed Elevations Block 3 & 4 (ref: EAD_12_C4)

In addition to the following plans submitted as part of application 3/2024/0256:

 - EAD_203_01: Location Plan
 - EAD_203_03 Rev: C6: Proposed Site Plan
 - EAD_203_04 Rev: C3: Proposed Floor Plan Block 1
 - EAD_203_05 Rev: C4: Proposed Elevations Block 1
 - EAD_203_06 Rev: C2: Typical building Plan and Elevation
 - EAD_203_08 Rev: C2: Proposed Site section
 - EAD_203_09 Rev: C3: Proposed Floor Plan Block 2
 - EAD_203_10 Rev: C1: Proposed Floor Plan Block 3 & 4
 - EAD_203_14: Site Phasing Plan
 - 5492 01: Planting Plan



/2 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1. The application site, which extends approximately 1.5ha in size, is located at Higher College Farm, on the eastern periphery of Longridge settlement boundary. The site currently comprises an area of land used for pasture together with the residential dwelling and outbuildings at Higher College Farmhouse. The site is an allocated employment site within the Housing and Economic Development Document (2019), reference EAL3. Figure 1 below illustrates the site and its wider setting.



Figure 1: An aerial image of the site in its wider setting

- 2.2. The site is bounded to the north by Blackburn Road (B6243) which runs in an east to west direction, while mature hedgerows are present to the northern and eastern boundaries. To the west the site abuts a hedgerow lined track leading to Higher College Farmhouse located on the south of the site, beyond which lies a range of commercial buildings used by Clegg's Chilled Food Service and Anderton's Ribble Butchers for food processing, packaging, and distribution, along with external parking and servicing areas. To the east is a roadway which forms the main access to the food processing businesses, beyond which lies agricultural land.



- 2.3. The application site is located on the eastern edge of Longridge, which has a broad range of facilities and services.
- 2.4. The current access to the site is located along the western boundary, which is taken directly from Blackburn Road, located further to the north of the site.
- 2.5. There are no listed buildings within the site and, by reference to the Environment Agency's flood risk map, it does not fall within an area subject to flooding, lying wholly within Flood Risk Zone 1 which has a low probability of flooding.
- 2.6. The site is not subject to any local or national ecological designations. The site is located within the Open Countryside Area, as defined Ribble Valley Borough Council's Proposals Map. The Forest of Bowland AONB lies approximately 1km to the north of the site.



/3 PLANNING HISTORY

3.1. A search of Ribble Valley Council's planning register has been carried out to understand the planning history relevant to the site and the proposed development. Planning applications relating to the site itself include:

- **3/2024/0256:** *Proposed change of use of existing dwelling (use class C3) to children's assessment centre for care (use class C2 residential institution).*
Withdrawn: 10 January 2025.
- **3/2023/0706:** *Proposed erection of 34 Class E(g) units and one battery storage and maintenance unit with associated parking and access. Resubmission of application 3/2022/0553. Approved :14 March 2025*
- **3/2022/0553:** *Full planning permission for the erection of commercial units (Use Class E (g)) including conversion and extension of existing farmhouse for purposes of Use Class E (g). Approved 19th January 2023.*
- **3/2022/0553:** *Full planning permission for the erection of commercial units (Use Class E (g)) including conversion and extension of existing farmhouse for purposes of Use Class E (g). Approved 19th January 2023.*
- **3/2018/1105:** *Outline planning permission for 21 dwellings and associated works.*
Refused 3rd June 2019.
- **3/2017/0602:** *Outline planning permission for industrial units (use classes B1, B2, B8) and associated access, parking, landscaping and services infrastructure with all matters reserved except access and change of use of farmhouse to office (B1).*
Approved 1st December 2017.

3.2. In addition, the following planning applications have been made relating to nearby sites:

- **3/2020/0507:** *Outline Planning application for business units use classes B1(b)(c) and B2 and storage use class B8 and associated improvements to existing access with all matters reserved except for access. Approved 18th November 2020.*



- **3/2019/0644:** *Land south of Blackburn Road, Erection of business units (use class B1) comprising three new buildings with access, parking and provision of secure compounds. Approved 29th November 2019.*
- **3/2017/0317:** *Land South of Blackburn Road, Outline Planning application for Employment Floorspace (use Class B1, B2, B8). Approved 4th September 2017.*



/4 BACKGROUND

- 4.1. Planning permission was granted on 14 March 2025 under application reference 3/2023/0706 for the erection of 34 Class E(g) units and one battery storage and maintenance unit, along with associated access and parking. This followed a previous consent (ref: 3/2022/0553) and was supported by a revised design approach brought forward to address Member concerns raised at the November 2024 Planning and Development Committee meeting.
- 4.2. At that meeting, Members had been minded to refuse the application on the basis that the proposed development would, by virtue of its uniformity and utilitarian form, result in harm to the character and appearance of the open countryside. In response, the applicant undertook a series of negotiated design revisions with the Local Planning Authority to secure planning permission. These included:
- Revised roof form, introducing a dual mono-pitch design with a recessed central spine to create visual articulation across each unit block. This adjustment added complexity to the roof construction but was intended to soften the perception of massing and introduce variation to the silhouette of the buildings.
 - Enhanced materials palette, including vertical timber cladding and reconstituted stone plinths at ground floor level, combined with full-height recessed panel elements to break up elevations. These changes aimed to reflect a more 'vernacular-inspired' industrial typology in keeping with the site's edge-of-countryside setting.
 - Façade detailing improvements such as the removal of continuous roller shutters across unit frontages, the introduction of articulated bays, and the suggestion of window insertions to improve activation of building frontages (though some remained non-glazed for operational reasons).
 - Intensive landscape enhancements, most notably the formation of landscape bunds to the north (fronting Blackburn Road), reinforced with the planting of 67 trees, native shrubs, hedgerow enhancements and species-rich meadow grassland. The intent was to create a multilayered green buffer that would filter views of the built form and help integrate the development into its semi-rural context.
- 4.3. While the revised scheme was ultimately approved, these changes collectively introduced a significant increase in build cost, material specification, and maintenance liabilities. In



practice, the cumulative effect of these enhancements — though arguably beneficial from a landscape perspective — has presented a clear challenge to the financial viability and deliverability of the scheme.



/5 PROPOSED VARIATION

5.1. This Section 73 application seeks the following variation to Condition 2 of approval 3/2023/0706. Which states:

Unless explicitly required by condition within this consent, the development hereby permitted shall be carried out in complete accordance with the proposals as detailed on drawings:

- *EAD_203_01: Location Plan*
- *EAD_203_03 Rev: C6: Proposed Site Plan*
- *EAD_203_04 Rev: C3: Proposed Floor Plan Block 1*
- **EAD 203 05 Rev: C4: Proposed Elevations Block 1**
- *EAD_203_06 Rev: C2: Typical building Plan and Elevation*
- *EAD_203_08 Rev: C2: Proposed Site section*
- *EAD_203_09 Rev: C3: Proposed Floor Plan Block 2*
- *EAD_203_10 Rev: C1: Proposed Floor Plan Block 3 & 4*
- **EAD 203 11 Rev: C4: Proposed Elevations Block 2**
- **EAD 203 12 Rev: C3: Proposed Elevations Block 3 & 4**
- *EAD_203_14: Site Phasing Plan*
- *5492 01: Planting Plan*
- *5492 02: Indicative Section*
- *Arboricultural Impact Assessment (October 2023)*
- *Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*

The variation sought relates to the replacement of plans underlined in bold with the plans listed below:

- **EAD 203 05 Rev: C5: Proposed Elevations Block 1**
- **EAD 203 11 Rev: C5: Proposed Elevations Block 2**
- **EAD 203 12 Rev: C3: Proposed Elevations Block 3 & 4**

5.2. These updated plans reflect the following changes to the approved buildings.

-Overall reduction in eaves and ridge height;

-removal of recess and associated dual mono pitched roof, and return to a dual pitch roof across the building.

With the retention:



- retention of the contrasting mono-pitch roof forming the buildings entrance
- retention of contrasting Vertical Timber Marchall Marchmarlite stone.

- 5.3. This is to allow for a more practical and economically deliverable version of the scheme. The proposed changes focus on simplifying the external design of the buildings, including a reduction in eaves and ridge height, removal of recessed elements, and the adoption of a consistent dual-pitch roof profile across the blocks. The mono-pitch roof feature at the building entrances will be retained to help define access points.
- 5.4. The revised buildings will maintain a straightforward, functional appearance suitable for their Class E9(g) use. They will continue to be constructed using durable and low-maintenance materials, including vertical timber-effect cladding and Marchalite stone, which are appropriate for a modern rural business setting. No changes are proposed to the approved landscaping, which includes boundary planting, hedgerow reinforcement, and other soft landscaping measures that help reduce the visual impact of the development.
- 5.5. While the previous version of the scheme introduced additional detailing, these changes are not considered necessary to meet policy requirements or improve the planning merits of the scheme. The revised design continues to offer a clear and professional appearance that fits its employment function and the surrounding context.
- 5.6. Importantly, the simplified design is essential to ensuring the viability and timely delivery of the development. The site forms part of a strategic employment land allocation under Policy EAL3, and delivering high-quality business space at this location is key to supporting local economic growth. Delays caused by an unviable scheme would undermine this opportunity, particularly given the current lack of a five-year employment land supply within the local authority area.
- 5.7. This application aims to strike a sensible balance between visual quality and commercial practicality, ensuring that a policy-compliant, well-designed employment development can be delivered without unnecessary delay.



/6 DESIGN AND ACCESS

- 6.1. This Design and Access Statement supports a Section 73 application to vary the approved plans for planning permission 3/2023/0706 at Higher College Farm, Longridge. The proposed amendments relate to the external appearance of the buildings. The changes aim to simplify the overall design while maintaining the approved layout, use, and number of employment units.
- 6.2. The scheme still provides 34 business units arranged in four blocks, along with a separate battery storage and maintenance building. The approved site layout, access strategy, and building footprints remain unchanged. The overall scale of development is consistent with the original approval, though the revised scheme introduces a modest reduction in both eaves and ridge height across all buildings.
- 6.3. Architectural changes include the removal of recessed sections and a move to a more regular roof profile. All blocks will now feature a dual-pitch roof, with the exception of the building entrances, where a contrasting mono-pitch roof element is retained to mark and define key access points. The updated elevations also retain the approved material approach, including the use of Marchalite stone at the lower sections of the buildings and vertical timber-effect composite cladding above. These materials are durable, low-maintenance, and appropriate for a rural commercial setting.
- 6.4. Each block contains a series of uniform units measuring approximately 70–75m², accessed from the internal road and footpath network. Parking is provided to the north and south of each block, with refuse stores located at convenient points across the site. The layout ensures safe and efficient circulation for both vehicles and pedestrians, and all previously approved access arrangements, including visibility splays and internal road widths, remain unchanged.
- 6.5. The buildings are of portal-frame construction, with a straightforward and practical appearance typical of rural employment developments. The combination of Marchalite stone and vertical cladding creates a simple but high-quality finish. Roofs are clad in composite sheet with rooflights to provide natural daylight. Openings include powder-coated roller shutter doors and separate pedestrian doors, ensuring a consistent and functional façade



design. The battery storage and maintenance building will use the same materials and detailing to maintain a unified appearance across the site.

- 6.6. The landscaping strategy is unchanged from the approved scheme. It includes boundary hedgerow planting, bunding to soften the site edges, and areas of species-rich grassland and low-maintenance shrubs. These elements provide effective visual screening, contribute to biodiversity, and help the development blend into its surroundings.
- 6.7. Vehicle access will continue to be taken from a single 7.3m-wide point off Blackburn Road, with 2.4m x 61m visibility splays in both directions. On-site provision includes 83 car parking spaces, 10 accessible bays, 8 electric vehicle charging points, covered cycle parking for 10 bicycles, and 4 motorcycle bays. The layout supports a range of transport modes and is compliant with modern access and sustainability standards.
- 6.8. Overall, the proposed design changes are limited to the appearance of the buildings and do not affect the layout or function of the development. The simplified roofline and consistent material treatment result in a practical, robust, and visually appropriate scheme that remains in keeping with the rural character of the area.



17 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 7.1. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that *'if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise'* including any supplementary / supporting planning documents and government guidance as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021).
- 7.2. In this instance, the Development Plan for the application site comprises of the Ribble Valley Borough Council Core Strategy 2008 – 2028 (2014) and the Housing and Economic Development – Development Plan Document (2019). Additionally, key policy documents that comprise 'material considerations' include the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF), and any local supplementary planning guidance documents considered relevant to the proposal.
- 7.3. An extract from the adopted Proposal Map is provided in Figure 2, which illustrates the site is located with the countryside, outside of the defined settlement boundaries. However, the extract shows that the site is an allocated employment site, as per Policy EAL3 of the HED DPD.

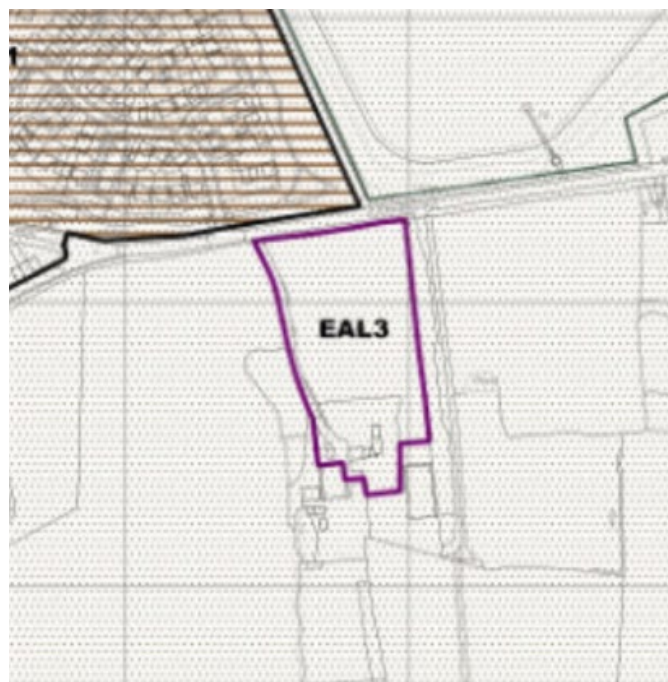


Figure 2: Extract from the Proposals Map



general coverage by linking the policy to the protection of all landscapes outlining that the Council expects all development to be in-keeping with the character of the local landscape.

- 7.10. **Key Statement EN3: Sustainable Development and Climate Change** shows that the Council will seek to ensure all development is sustainable in its design and building standards, in order to address climate change.
- 7.11. **Policy DMG1: General Considerations** states that new development should be of a high standard, being sympathetic to its surrounds.
- 7.12. **Policy DMG2: Strategic Considerations** shows that proposals within the principal settlements of Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley should consolidate, expand or round-off existing development, in keeping with the surrounds.
- 7.13. **Policy DMB1: Supporting Business Growth and the Local Economy** relates to business growth and the local economy. It states that proposals for supporting business growth will be supported in principle and approved so long as they adhere to the remainder of the core strategy and Local Development Framework.
- 7.14. **Policy EAL3: Higher College Farm** is the allocation of the site as employment land, found in the Housing and Economic Development Document (2019), to which this application relates. Land will be allocated for employment uses (defined as uses falling within classes B1 to B8) to meet employment land requirements in the plan period (2008-2028) as follows and as shown on the Proposals Map.

National Planning Policy Framework (2024) (NPPF)

- 7.15. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a material consideration in planning decisions as per Paragraph 2 and Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 7.16. The NPPF sets out Government planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The presumption in favour of sustainable development (**Paragraph 11**) is at the heart of the NPPF, whereby proposed 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 strongly supports economic development.

- 7.17. Sustainable development is broadly defined in **Paragraph 8** of the Framework as having three overarching objectives:
- 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
 - 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.
- 7.18. **Paragraph 48** states that applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Decisions on applications should be made swiftly, and within statutory timescales unless an extension has been agreed with the applicant in writing.
- 7.19. **Section 6** of the NPPF establishes that building a strong, competitive economy, with planning policies and decisions working to promote investment, expansion, and adaptation within the economy.
- 7.20. **Paragraph 85** shows that planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand, and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow



each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future.

- 7.21. **Paragraph 86** states that: *"Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable."* The proposed development will, directly and indirectly, support the principles of the NPPF by supporting a rural business and by making an important contribution to the local economy.
- 7.22. **Paragraph 131**, in relation to design, states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.
- 7.23. **Paragraph 135** states that planning policies and decisions should ensure that:
- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
 - b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
 - c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
 - d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
 - e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
 - f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where



crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.



/8 PLANNING POLICY ASSESSMENT

Design

- 8.1. RVCS Policy DMG1 makes the following provisions regarding design, stating that: "*all development must:*
1. *Be of a high standard of building design which considers the 8 building in context principles (from the cbe/english heritage building on context toolkit).*
 2. *Be sympathetic to existing and proposed land uses in terms of its size, intensity and nature as well as scale, massing, style, features and building materials.*
 3. *Consider the density, layout and relationship between buildings, which is of major importance. Particular emphasis will be placed on visual appearance and the relationship to surroundings, including impact on landscape character, as well as the effects of development on existing amenities.*
 4. *Use sustainable construction techniques where possible and provide evidence that energy efficiency, as described within policy DME5, has been incorporated into schemes where possible.*
 5. *The code for sustainable homes and lifetime homes, or any subsequent nationally recognised equivalent standards, should be incorporated into schemes."*
- 8.2. Whilst NPPF Para 139 States that significant weight should be given to: a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes.
- 8.3. While it is acknowledged that the recessed elements in the previously approved scheme contributed to softening the appearance of the development in its semi-rural setting, the revised approach, featuring a simplified dual-pitch roof form combined with the retained use of contrasting materials and the reduction in eaves and ridge height achieves a comparable outcome.
- 8.4. The entrance features, marked by a contrasting mono-pitch roof, are also retained, providing visual interest, aiding legibility, and reinforcing a clear and consistent site identity.



- 8.5. The layout remains as approved, preserving the established arrangement of blocks, access routes, parking and landscaping. This supports intuitive wayfinding, protects existing relationships with the surrounding landscape.
- 8.6. Notwithstanding this the applicant remains committed to implementing the approved extensive landscaping scheme, which further softens the appearance of the proposed development. And once matured the viability of the building in question from public vantage points will be significantly reduced.
- 8.7. This is illustrated by the supplied 3D images which are included in the application package, and have been supplied to show how the approved and varied development would appear in the landscape, when viewed from public vantage points.
- 8.8. Overall, the revised design responds positively to the criteria set out in Policy DMG1 and continues to reflect the principles of good design as described in the NPPF — including the need for development to function well, respond to local character, and maintain a clear and attractive sense of place over the long term.

Viability

- 8.9. The revised scheme results in a significant cost saving when compared to the previously approved design. Based on the cost appraisal prepared by Conlon Consulting (June 2025), the construction cost of the original design (Option 1) was estimated at £4,889,107 (excluding VAT). In contrast, the simplified revised design (Option 2) brings the total construction cost down to £4,040,105. This represents a cost saving of £849,002, equating to a reduction of approximately 17.4%.



8.10. These savings are considered especially significant when evaluated in the context of the projected total development costs and the forecast revenue from unit sales. The viability assessment indicates that the scheme would fail to achieve a positive residual land value or developer return, and would therefore be deemed unviable in its current form. As set out in the table below.

	As Approved	Varied Scheme
Site Acquisition Cost	£300,000	£300,000
Projected Build Cost	£4,889,107	£4,040,105
Projected Planning & Professional Fees	£200,000	£200,000
Projected Legal Costs	£50,000	£50,000
Projected Total Outgoing Costs	£5,439,107	£4,590,105
Projected Sale Figures Based on £175/sq ft	£5,250,000	£5,250,000
Gross Profit	<u>-£189,107</u>	<u>£659,895</u>
% Return on Investment	<u>-3.48%</u>	<u>14.38%</u>

Figure 4: Projected Cost/Return

8.11. The aforementioned savings have been achieved through a more efficient and practical building design. The revised scheme removes recessed elements, adopts a consistent dual-pitch roof profile, and simplifies internal arrangements. These changes reduce structural complexity and improve buildability without compromising the quality of the development. Key architectural features—such as the contrasting mono-pitch roofs at the entrances and the use of durable materials including Marchalite stone and vertical timber-effect cladding—are retained to ensure the scheme remains attractive and contextually appropriate.

8.12. In addition to improving buildability and controlling costs, the revised design also enhances the scheme's adaptability. The simplified building form and internal layout will allow the operator to more easily combine or reconfigure unit spaces in response to the needs of future tenants. This flexibility will help future-proof the development, making it more attractive to a range of occupiers and reducing the risk of long-term vacancies.

8.13. Implementation of the varied scheme would allow for a projected gross profit of £659,895 which amounts to a 14.38% return on investment.



- 8.14. In assessing the financial viability of development schemes, it is standard practice to benchmark developer return at a level that reflects the risk, complexity and capital commitment of the project. The RICS Research Report *Performance Metrics, Required Returns and Achieved Returns for UK Real Estate Development* (2019) found that a developer profit of 20% on cost is commonly used as a threshold for schemes without significant risk. This 20% return is considered by the industry as the minimum acceptable to bring forward schemes, and is consistent with both viability guidance and appeal precedent.
- 8.15. In this instance, the applicant, Mr Myers, is a local businessman with strong ties to Longridge and the surrounding area. He is committed to delivering high-quality employment space that will provide a much-needed opportunity for local enterprises to establish and grow within the town. While Mr Myers is naturally seeking a reasonable return, he is also willing to forgo the higher margins that could potentially be achieved on similar schemes elsewhere in the country. His motivation is rooted in supporting the local business community, of which he is a longstanding and passionate member, and in bringing forward a scheme that complements and enhances the character and appearance of the area. However, like any developer, he must operate within rational fiscal limits. This approach stands in contrast to more commercially driven developers, who may either pursue more intensive development via appeal or simply dismiss this site if it cannot deliver higher returns.
- 8.16. The financial implications of the revised design are critical to the viability of the scheme. The original design, while visually refined, has become increasingly difficult to deliver due to rising construction costs and the wider economic climate. The revised approach restores commercial feasibility, enabling the scheme to come forward in line with Policy EAL3 of the adopted Housing and Economic Development DPD, which identifies the site as a key strategic employment location for Longridge.

Employment Land Supply

- 8.17. Without these the proposed variation, there is a significant risk that the proposals would not be financially viable for the applicant or any other potential developments. Creating the risk that the site would remain undeveloped in the short to medium term, undermining the delivery of allocated employment land.



- 8.18. The Ribble Valley Core Strategy (2014) and the Housing and Economic Development Plan Document (HED DPD) (2019) together set out the Local Planning Authority's strategic and detailed approach to employment land supply across the Borough. This framework is designed to support sustainable economic growth while ensuring an appropriate spatial distribution of employment opportunities.
- 8.19. At the strategic level, Key Statement EC1 of the Core Strategy establishes the Council's commitment to supporting business and employment development. It confirms that employment growth will be supported through the protection of existing employment sites where they remain suitable, and through the identification and promotion of new sites in appropriate, sustainable locations. The Council recognises the need for flexibility in the supply of employment land in order to respond to changing market conditions and business needs.
- 8.20. The Ribble Valley Core Strategy (2014) identified a strategic requirement for the delivery of 8 hectares of additional employment land over the plan period from 2008 to 2028. This figure was based on evidence of local economic needs and was intended to ensure that sufficient land would be available to support business growth, inward investment, and the economic development objectives of the borough. The Core Strategy did not identify specific sites for allocation but instead established the overall quantum of land to be brought forward through future development plan documents.
- 8.21. This more detailed allocation work was undertaken through the Housing and Economic Development DPD (2019), which sought to identify specific sites to meet the residual employment land requirement. However, rather than allocating the full 8 hectares identified in the Core Strategy, the DPD allocated only 4.05 hectares of employment land across three sites: Sykes Holt, Mellor (1.7ha), Time Technology Park, Simonstone (0.8ha), and Higher College Farm, Longridge (1.55ha). These sites are allocated under Policies EAL1 to EAL3. The allocation at Higher College Farm specifically reflects the role of Longridge as a principal settlement and forms a key part of the Council's employment land strategy.
- 8.22. The Housing and Economic Development DPD explains that the decision to allocate only 4.05 hectares—approximately half of the Core Strategy requirement—was based on an expectation that the remainder of the employment land needs would be met through windfall developments, existing planning commitments, and extensions to existing



employment areas. However, subsequent evidence has shown that these sources have not delivered to the extent anticipated, resulting in a growing shortfall in employment land supply across the borough.

- 8.23. As such Ribble Valley Borough Council is currently under-delivering against its identified employment land requirements. Although the Core Strategy originally anticipated the need for 8 hectares of additional employment land over the plan period, only 4.05 hectares were allocated in the subsequent Housing and Economic Development DPD. As of mid-2024, two of the three allocated sites have already been developed and are no longer available, leaving only the site at Higher College Farm in Longridge undeveloped. This means the deliverable supply from allocated employment land is now limited to just 1.55 hectares.
- 8.24. The Economic and Employment Land Needs Study (EELNS), prepared by Lichfields and commissioned by the Council, highlights the scale of this shortfall. The documents conclusion states that
- "when set against the demand forecasts, Ribble Valley has a quantitative and a qualitative undersupply of employment land available, based on the sites assessed. The potential shortfall against a need of between 22 and 26 ha, is at the very least 10.5 ha, and potentially as much as 14.5 ha depending on whether the Council decides to pursue an employment land requirement at the upper or lower end of the recommended range."*
- 8.25. The market evidence presented within the EELNS confirms that the borough's employment land supply is not aligned with business demand. The report notes extremely low vacancy rates for industrial premises and limited availability of developable land, particularly in the southern part of the borough, where market activity is concentrated. The study identifies suppressed demand due to lack of premises and warns that this presents a risk to local economic growth and business retention (EELNS, paras 9.41–9.44, pp.140–141).
- 8.26. In addition, it is para 9.53, confirms that research conducted in consultation with Commercial Property Agents state a preference for employment lands within the areas of Clitheroe, Whalley, Longridge (where the application site is located) and the A59 corridor should be the primary locations for new development.
- 8.27. Taken together, these findings present a clear case that Ribble Valley Borough Council is falling behind on the delivery of employment land and must act to address the gap. The delivery of the Higher College Farm site is essential in this context. As the only undeveloped



allocated employment site in the borough, its development would help reduce the current shortfall and provide much-needed space in an area of known demand. Moreover, the findings of the EELNS, commissioned by the Council itself, lend strong policy support to the immediate release and development of this site.

Planning Balance

- 8.28. The revised scheme represents an appropriate and well-justified variation to the consented development, delivering tangible benefits in terms of design quality, commercial viability, and the ability to support the Council's strategic objectives for employment land delivery.
- 8.29. In terms of design, the revised proposals continue to meet the requirements of the NPPF and Policy DMG1 of the Core Strategy. The simplified dual-pitch roof profile, reduced ridge and eaves heights, and consistent use of robust materials ensure the development remains sympathetic to its rural setting. Key features such as the mono-pitch roof at entrances and a clear site layout are retained, ensuring the revised scheme maintains legibility and architectural coherence. While some of the articulation present in the original approval has been removed, the design continues to reflect local character and delivers the high standard of development sought under Policy DMG1. In line with paragraph 139 of the NPPF, the development should be supported as it clearly reflects local and national design policies and contributes positively to place-making.
- 8.30. From a viability perspective, the revised scheme achieves a substantial cost saving of £849,002 (approximately 17.4%) compared to the original approval, which is considered unviable in terms of its ability to return a profit. The savings are achieved through the simplification of form and structure, without any reduction in quality or functionality. These changes are essential in the context of rising construction costs and a constrained economic environment. Crucially, the revised design also enhances the adaptability of the units, allowing spaces to be combined or reconfigured in response to future tenant needs. This ensures the development remains attractive and market-responsive over the long term.
- 8.31. The applicant, a local businessman, is bringing forward a high-quality employment scheme motivated by a commitment to the local community rather than maximising profit, accepting lower-than-typical returns to support Longridge's economic growth. The viability benefits of the revised design are directly linked to the deliverability of the site. Without these changes,



there is a significant risk that the scheme would become financially unviable, delaying or preventing the development of one of the borough's few remaining allocated employment sites. This would be contrary to the adopted spatial strategy and undermine the objectives of Policy EAL3.

- 8.32. The strategic importance of the site is reinforced by the Council's own evidence base. While the Core Strategy identified a need for 8 hectares of employment land over the plan period, only 4.05 hectares were allocated in the HED DPD. Of this, the majority has now been built out, leaving just 1.55 hectares at Higher College Farm available. The 2021 Economic and Employment Land Needs Study, concludes the potential shortfall against a need of between is at the very least 10.5 ha, and potentially as much as 14.5 ha.
- 8.33. This context gives considerable weight to the timely delivery of the Higher College Farm site. It is a key component of the Council's employment land strategy, and its development is critical to meeting local economic needs, supporting business growth, and reducing pressure on unallocated greenfield sites elsewhere in the borough.
- 8.34. In summary , the proposed variation to the approved scheme represents a well-balanced and policy-compliant approach that maintains high design standards, ensures commercial deliverability, and responds to urgent economic need. The benefits of the scheme clearly outweigh any perceived harm, and as such the planning balance is tipped firmly in favour of the approving the proposed variation.



/9 CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1. This Section 73 application seeks approval for a minor but commercially significant variation to the approved employment development at Higher College Farm. The proposed design changes—principally the simplification of the roof form and removal of recessed elements—are modest in visual terms and do not detract from the quality of the scheme. Crucially, the extensive and already approved landscaping, including bunding and native tree planting, will remain unchanged and will continue to effectively soften and integrate the development into its rural surroundings.
- 9.2. The need for the proposed varied scheme is grounded in viability. Under the approved scheme, the construction cost was estimated at £4.89 million (excluding VAT). The revised design brings this down to £4.04 million, a saving of £849,000 or approximately 17.4% (Conlon Consulting, June 2025). Even with these savings, the projected gross profit is £659,895—equating to a return on cost of 14.38%. This remains below the commonly accepted viability threshold of 20% on cost, as recognised in national guidance and appeal precedent.
- 9.3. Nevertheless, the applicant, is a local businessman with long-standing ties to Longridge and a clear commitment to supporting the local economy. Unlike a volume/profit-driven developer, he is willing to proceed on the basis of a reduced return in order to deliver much-needed employment floorspace for local businesses. His willingness to accept a sub-threshold return enables the delivery of a high-quality, policy-compliant development that may not otherwise come forward in current market conditions.
- 9.4. The importance of enabling delivery cannot be overstated. The site is allocated under Policy EAL3 of the Housing and Economic Development DPD and is the last remaining undeveloped employment allocation in the borough. The Council’s own Economic and Employment Land Needs Study (Lichfields, 2021) identifies a current shortfall of between 10.5 and 14.5 hectares of employment land, with particularly strong demand identified in and around Longridge. If the development is stalled due to viability constraints, the borough risks failing to meet its strategic objectives under Core Strategy Key Statement EC1 and Policy DMB1, and missing the opportunity to secure sustainable economic growth.



9.5. In this context, the proposed variation represents a proportionate, justified and policy-aligned adjustment to the proposed scheme, that enables delivery while maintaining design integrity. It ensures the development of a key allocated employment site, responds to local economic needs, and reflects the applicant's unique community-focused approach. Planning permission should therefore be granted without delay.



/10 BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN (BNG) STATEMENT

10.1. NPPG Paragraph: 002 Reference ID: 74-002-20240214 states that:

“Biodiversity net gain does not apply to section 73 permissions where the original permission which the section 73 relates to was either granted before 12 February 2024 or the application for the original permission was made before 12 February 2024.”

10.2. Planning application 3/2023/0706, which this application seeks to vary, was received by the council on 04 September 2023 and registered on 03/01/2024. As such BNG does not apply in this instance.



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