

# Blue Bell Farm, Higher Road, Longridge, Ribbles Valley

**Stage 1 Planning in Principle Statement**  
August 2025

# REPORT CONTROL

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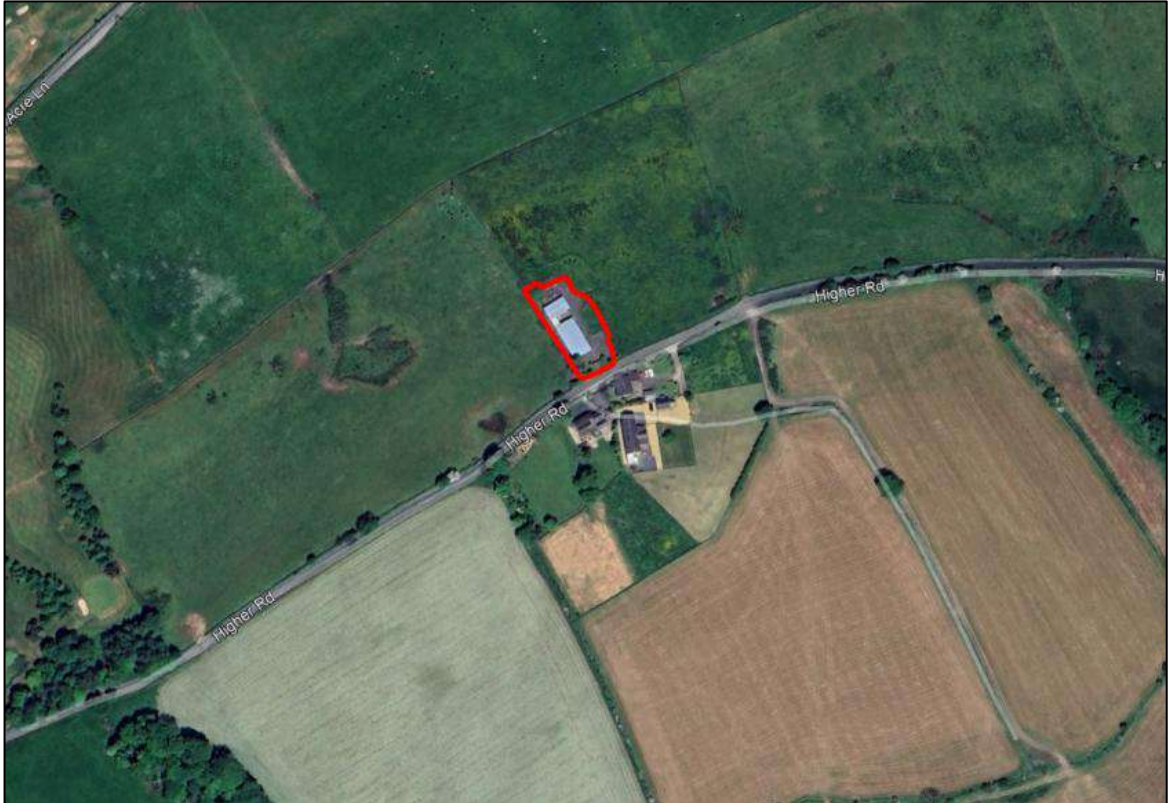
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## **/1 Introduction**

- 1.1.1. PWA Planning is retained by Alchemie Technology ('the applicant') to progress a Stage 1 Permission in Principle (PiP) application for residential conversion of an existing rural building at Blue Bell Farm, Higher Road, Longridge. The Local Planning Authority (LPA) for this application is Ribble Valley Borough Council (RVBC). The PiP process, as set out in the Town and Country Planning (Permission in Principle) Order 2017, is designed to separate the in-principle considerations of location, land use and amount from the more detailed matters addressed at the Technical Details Consent (TDC) stage.
- 1.1.2. The application therefore seeks only to confirm that the principle of changing the use of the identified building and its curtilage to a single dwelling is acceptable in planning terms. All matters relating to detailed design, access geometry, servicing and parking arrangements, ecology, drainage and construction methods will be reserved for assessment at the TDC stage should PiP be granted.
- 1.1.3. The PiP route is considered proportionate and appropriate in this case, given that the building is already established on site, the relevant policy framework allows for the conversion of rural buildings to dwellings in principle, and the applicant wishes to avoid unnecessary upfront costs for detailed drawings and technical surveys until the acceptability of the principle has been confirmed.

## **/2 Site Description**

- 2.1.1. The application site is situated on the northern side of Higher Road towards its eastern extent, within open countryside and the Forest of Bowland National Landscape/Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The immediate context comprises agricultural fields, hedgerow boundaries, and a small cluster of residential and agricultural buildings, with further properties spread along Higher Road.



*Figure 1: Site Location*

- 2.1.2. The building is a permanent structure of traditional rural form, previously associated with agricultural use before accommodating laboratory and office functions for Alchemie Technology under a historic personal planning permission. It is intact, weather-tight, and of a scale and form typical of rural outbuildings in the area. The existing hardstanding affords a safe and established vehicular access from Higher Road, with sufficient space to accommodate discreet domestic parking and turning within the existing developed area of the site. Its re-use would not introduce new-build development into the open countryside, but instead makes efficient use of a permanent rural structure within an established cluster of properties.

- 2.1.3. The building and its curtilage are classed as previously developed land (PDL) owing to its lawful non-agricultural use and established development. The PDL status, combined with the sealed and well-maintained condition of the structure, limits the potential for wildlife habitats. As such, no ecology constraints are expected to arise from its conversion.
- 2.1.4. The site is located in Flood Zone 1, where there is no identified risk of flooding from rivers or surface water. There are no heritage assets within or adjacent to the site, and the proposal does not give rise to any heritage considerations.
- 2.1.5. In summary, the site is free of physical, environmental, and heritage constraints that would prevent its re-use for residential purposes.

### **/3 Planning History**

- 3.1.1. The application site has an established and well-documented planning history, reflecting its transition from an agricultural building to commercial use and previous attempts to introduce a residential element. The building has remained in active or lawful use for many years, and the Council has previously accepted both its permanence and its suitability for part-residential occupation. Key planning decisions are summarised in Table 3.1 below.

<b>Planning Reference</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Decision / Date</b>
<a href="#"><u>3/2022/0927</u></a>	Proposed change of use from Class B1(a) and Class B1(b), and use of building for storage of private cars and workshops, to Class E.	Refused 01/06/2023
<a href="#"><u>3/2019/0471</u></a>	Proposed single storey extension and conversion of laboratory and office to a live work unit	Approved 29/06/2020
<a href="#"><u>3/2018/0330</u></a>	Erection of one new dwelling with occupier restricted to those associated with Alchemie Technology; extension to existing laboratory and office (use class B1a and B1b).	Withdrawn 26/06/2018
<a href="#"><u>3/2015/0918</u></a>	Retention of unauthorised change of use from Agricultural to B1(a) and B1(b) (office and laboratory) in addition to car storage and private workshop (sui generis).	Approved 24/11/2015

*Table 1: Planning History Table*

- 3.1.2. The most relevant decision in recent years is the 2020 approval for a live/work unit (3/2019/0471). In granting permission, the Council accepted that the building is permanent, structurally sound and capable of conversion without substantial rebuilding. It was assessed against Core Strategy Policy DMH4 and found acceptable for residential occupation as part of the live/work arrangement. The proposal was also found to have no adverse impact on the Forest of Bowland AONB or the character of the area, and the Local Highway Authority raised no objection to the existing access or on-site parking. Although that consent has since lapsed, it established that residential occupation of the building was acceptable in principle
- 3.1.3. By contrast, the 2022 refusal (3/2022/0927) related solely to a proposed flexible Class E commercial use. The decision focussed on a lack of marketing evidence for continued

employment use, and no objections were raised on residential amenity, landscape, or highways grounds. Importantly, the principle of residential use was not assessed or rejected in that decision.

3.1.4. Earlier approvals in 2018 and 2015 demonstrate the Council's acceptance of both the building's lawful non-agricultural use and its suitability for ancillary or residential-related development.

3.1.5. Taken together, the planning history establishes that:

- The Council has already found the building to be suitable for partial residential use under DMH4.
- Access, parking, and landscape considerations have previously been addressed and found acceptable.
- There is no in-principle policy barrier to the building's re-use as a dwelling, subject to meeting the requirements of DMH3 and DMH4.

3.1.6. This background provides a strong platform for the current PiP application, which seeks only to confirm the principle of residential conversion without committing to detailed design or technical matters at this stage.

3.1.7. The property has also been subject to extended marketing for sale without success, details of which are set out later in this Statement.



## **/4 Planning Policy Context**

### **4.1. Development Plan**

4.1.1. The statutory Development Plan for Ribble Valley comprises:

- Ribble Valley Core Strategy 2008–2028 (adopted 2014)
- Housing and Economic Development DPD (adopted 2019)
- Proposals Map and associated Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

4.1.2. The application site is located outside any defined settlement boundary and lies within the Forest of Bowland AONB. In such locations, the principal policies relevant to the proposed residential conversion are Core Strategy Policy DMH3 (Dwellings in the Open Countryside and AONB) and DMH4 (The Conversion of Barns and Other Buildings to Dwellings).

4.1.3. These are supported by other strategic policies, including Policy EN2 (Landscape), which seeks to protect and enhance the distinctive character of the AONB, and Policy DS1 (Development Strategy), which sets the overall spatial framework for development across the borough.

4.1.4. **Policy DMH3 – Dwellings in the Open Countryside and AONB:** Policy DMH3 strictly controls new dwellings in the open countryside and the Forest of Bowland AONB, limiting them to defined circumstances. One such circumstance is the re-use of existing rural buildings in accordance with Policy DMH4.

4.1.5. **Policy DMH4 – Conversion of Barns and Other Buildings to Dwellings:** establishes the detailed criteria for assessing proposals for residential conversions. It requires that:

- The building is not isolated in the landscape, being either within a settlement or part of an existing group of buildings;
- The conversion would not require unnecessary new infrastructure, would avoid material landscape harm, and would not detract from nature conservation interests, the rural economy, or the natural beauty of the AONB;
- Any nature conservation aspects of the building must be properly surveyed and, where necessary, preserved or mitigated.

4.1.6. In addition, the building itself must:

- Be structurally sound and capable of conversion without substantial rebuilding or major alteration, supported by a structural survey;
- Be of a sufficient size to provide accommodation without large extensions that would harm its character;
- Be of a form and materials appropriate to its surroundings and worthy of retention; and
- Have a genuine history of agricultural use or association with a rural enterprise.

4.1.7. The application building is a permanent, weather-tight rural structure of traditional form and materials, clearly worthy of retention. It is structurally sound and capable of conversion without wholesale rebuilding, with sufficient floorspace to provide a viable dwelling without the need for extension. Its established agricultural origins, and more recent use by Alchemie Technology, demonstrate a genuine history relating to both agriculture and a rural enterprise use. The building sits within an existing cluster of properties at Blue Bell Farm, ensuring it is not isolated in the landscape, while established hardstanding allows safe access and on-site parking without encroaching into undeveloped land. No infrastructure requirements arise, and the modest scale of re-use would not harm landscape qualities, the rural economy, or the natural beauty of the AONB. Any ecological matters can be proportionately addressed at the TDC stage. Accordingly, the proposal satisfies both the general and building-specific criteria in Policy DMH4.

## 4.2. National Planning Policy Framework

4.2.1. The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and is a material consideration in decision-making. It reinforces the statutory presumption in favour of sustainable development and the need for local planning authorities to positively seek opportunities to meet development needs.

4.2.2. **Paragraph 11** establishes that plans and decisions should apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision-taking, this means approving proposals that accord with the development plan without delay, or where the plan is absent, silent, or out of date, granting permission unless any adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. While RVBC currently claim a housing land supply of 6.2 years (May 2025), the presumption still applies to schemes which are consistent with the development plan and deliver clear social, economic, and environmental benefits.

- 4.2.3. **Paragraph 84(c)** identifies the re-use of redundant or disused buildings, where the development would enhance the building's immediate setting, as one of the specific circumstances in which new homes in the countryside may be appropriate.
- 4.2.4. The proposal concerns the re-use of a vacant, permanent building in sound structural condition. Its conversion would secure a viable long-term use and facilitate modest external and environmental enhancements.
- 4.2.5. **Paragraphs 88 and 89** state that planning policies and decisions should enable the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings. They also support the diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses, and the re-use of rural buildings for residential purposes where this is sustainable and appropriate to its setting.
- 4.2.6. The application building is a permanent rural structure capable of conversion without substantial reconstruction and located within a modest cluster of existing development.
- 4.2.7. **Paragraph 124** supports making effective use of land by re-using previously developed land and buildings where appropriate, provided it is of a suitable scale and respects the character of the area.
- 4.2.8. The proposal would bring a vacant rural building back into productive use for housing, consistent with these objectives.
- 4.2.9. **Paragraph 135** confirms that planning decisions should ensure developments function well, are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and landscaping, and are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting.
- 4.2.10. At the PiP stage, these matters are reserved for later consideration under Technical Details Consent (TDC), but the existing form and materials of the building are consistent with the prevailing character of the area, providing a sound basis for an appropriate and sympathetic conversion design at the detailed stage.

- 4.2.11. **Paragraph 189** states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes (formerly AONB), which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.
- 4.2.12. The re-use of an existing building, rather than new-build development, avoids additional land take or built encroachment into the open countryside, thereby safeguarding the intrinsic qualities of the AONB.

### **4.3. Other Material Considerations**

#### Emerging Local Plan

- 4.3.1. RVBC is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan which will replace the existing Core Strategy and Housing and Economic Development DPD with a single document setting the vision, objectives and policies for the borough to 2038. The first stage (Regulation 18 – Strategic Matters Consultation) took place in May–July 2022. The Local Development Scheme adopted in May 2022 is currently under review, and no draft policies have yet been published for consultation or given weight in decision-making.
- 4.3.2. At this early stage of preparation, the emerging plan carries only very limited weight. Accordingly, the adopted Core Strategy remains the primary basis for decision-making, and Policies DMH3 and DMH4 continue to provide the most relevant policy framework for the re-use of rural buildings as dwellings.

#### National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

- 4.3.3. The NPPG confirms the purpose of Permission in Principle as providing a “fast-track” route to establish the in-principle acceptability of housing-led development without the need for full technical details at the outset (Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 58-001-20180615). It explains that PiP may be granted for both new-build housing and the change of use of existing buildings, including rural conversions, provided that the main in-principle matters of location, land use and amount can be appropriately addressed (Paragraph: 013 Reference ID: 58-013-20180615).
- 4.3.4. In relation to rural housing, the NPPG highlights that planning policies should support sustainable rural communities and reflect the particular challenges of housing supply and affordability in rural areas (Paragraph 009, Ref. ID: 67-009-20190722). It recognises that a

wide range of settlements and development opportunities can contribute to sustainable rural living, not only those within defined settlement boundaries.

- 4.3.5. Taken together, the NPPG supports the use of PiP to establish the principle of converting an existing rural building to a dwelling, with technical detail addressed later, and acknowledges the contribution such proposals can make to maintaining sustainable rural communities.

#### Housing Land Supply

- 4.3.6. RVBC's most recent Five-Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS) Statement, published in May 2025, claims a deliverable supply equivalent to 6.2 years. While this exceeds the minimum requirement in paragraph 78 of the NPPF, it remains subject to ongoing scrutiny. Recent appeal decisions in the borough have identified delivery uncertainties on key sites (APP/T2350/W/24/3352614) and wider questions remain about aspects of the Council's methodology.
- 4.3.7. Even accepting the Council's position, the Government's objective to "significantly boost the supply of homes" (NPPF, para. 61) applies regardless of whether a shortfall exists. The contribution of small-scale rural schemes remains important in meeting local needs, supporting choice and competition in the housing market, and diversifying the rural housing stock. The re-use of an existing rural building within a modest cluster of development is entirely consistent with these aims and delivers housing without additional countryside encroachment.

## **/5 Principle of Development**

### **5.1. Planning Policy**

- 5.1.1. The application site lies outside a defined settlement boundary and within the Forest of Bowland AONB. In such locations, the principle of new housing is tightly controlled by the Ribble Valley Core Strategy, with Policies DMH3 and DMH4 providing the relevant policy tests.
- 5.1.2. Policy DMH3 (Dwellings in the Open Countryside and AONB) seeks to limit new residential development to specific circumstances. These include the re-use of existing buildings in accordance with Policy DMH4. The proposal involves the re-use and conversion of a permanent, weather-tight rural building which has already accommodated non-agricultural uses. It therefore falls within the scope of DMH3 and requires assessment against the detailed provisions of DMH4.
- 5.1.3. Policy DMH4 (The Conversion of Barns and Other Buildings to Dwellings) provides detailed criteria for assessing residential conversions. The application building is structurally sound, permanent, and weather-tight, and is clearly capable of conversion without wholesale rebuilding. Its floorspace is sufficient to provide necessary living accommodation without extensions, and its form, materials and character are typical of rural outbuildings in the locality, meaning they can be preserved through sensitive adaptation.
- 5.1.4. The building was originally constructed for agricultural purposes before being adapted to accommodate Alchemie Technology, and therefore has a genuine history of agricultural and rural enterprise use. The site lies within an established cluster of properties around Blue Bell Farm, ensuring the building is not isolated in the landscape. Existing hardstanding allows discreet domestic parking and turning without encroaching into undeveloped land, and the established access onto Higher Road can safely serve a single dwelling without requiring new infrastructure. The modest scale of the proposal avoids adverse impacts on landscape qualities, nature conservation or the rural economy, and is consistent with conserving the natural beauty of the AONB.
- 5.1.5. Taken together, these factors demonstrate that both the general and building-specific requirements of Policy DMH4 are satisfied. This conclusion is reinforced by the Council's previous approach at the New Drop Inn (ref. 3/2018/1138), where a smaller grouping of

buildings was accepted as sufficient to meet the “non-isolation” test. Blue Bell Farm, with its more substantial cluster, represents an even stronger case for compliance.

- 5.1.6. The NPPG also provides relevant support. The guidance on rural housing (Paragraph 009, Ref. ID: 67-009-20190722) highlights that a wide range of development opportunities can help deliver sustainable rural communities, and that local planning should respond positively to rural housing needs. Paragraph 010 (Ref. ID: 67-010-20190722) adds further context on isolated dwellings, reflecting the approach in NPPF paragraph 84, which includes the re-use of redundant buildings as a potential exception. These provisions underline the acceptability of re-using this building for residential purposes, provided it respects its setting, which is clearly the case here.
- 5.1.7. Within the AONB context specifically, the re-use of a building that already forms part of a cluster of properties avoids the landscape harm associated with new-build development. No additional footprint is introduced, and the modest scale of the structure means that its conversion can be achieved without undermining the wider scenic qualities of the AONB. On the contrary, the long-term maintenance of the building as a viable dwelling provides an opportunity to ensure its setting is conserved and modestly enhanced.
- 5.1.8. Although RVBC currently claims a 6.2 year housing land supply, the delivery of small-scale rural housing remains consistent with the Government’s objective to significantly boost supply. The contribution of a single dwelling in this location, through the re-use of an existing building, is modest but nevertheless positive in both policy and practical terms.

## **5.2. Site History and Marketing Context**

- 5.2.1. The principle of introducing a residential element at the site has already been accepted by the Council. In 2019, planning permission was granted under reference 3/2019/0471 for a live/work unit within the same building. Although that consent has since lapsed, it established that residential occupation of the building was acceptable in principle.
- 5.2.2. By contrast, a subsequent application for a broad Class E use was refused in 2022. The Council concluded that a general commercial use of the building conflicted with countryside policy and would not represent sustainable development. This reinforces the case that residential re-use is the more appropriate and viable solution, aligning with both local and national planning objectives.

- 5.2.3. In parallel, the property has been marketed extensively since Alchemie Technology relocated its operations to Cambridge in 2018–2019. The building was formally listed by Richard Turner estate agents in 2022 (Appendix 1), attracting four offers in the region of £275,000–£285,000. However, none progressed to completion after prospective purchasers’ legal advisers identified the lawful use and restrictive planning conditions as a barrier to any use. Interest subsequently diminished, and the agent has since confirmed there is little realistic prospect of a commercial sale unless the planning status is resolved.
- 5.2.4. This evidence confirms there is no viable demand for the building in its current form and use, underlining the need to secure an alternative long-term use through residential conversion.

### **5.3. Summary**

- 5.3.1. In summary, the proposal complies with Policies DMH3 and DMH4, is consistent with national policy in the NPPF and NPPG, builds on the established principle of residential use from the 2019 permission, demonstrates that residential re-use is more appropriate than commercial re-use, safeguards the qualities of the AONB, and represents sustainable development. The principle of converting the building to a dwelling is therefore acceptable.



## **/6 Conclusion**

- 6.1.1. This application seeks a PiP for the residential conversion of an existing rural building at Blue Bell Farm, Longridge. The PiP route is designed to establish whether a site is suitable for housing in principle, with detailed design, access, ecology, drainage and construction matters deferred to the subsequent TDC stage.
- 6.1.2. The proposal represents the sustainable re-use of a permanent, weather-tight building within an established cluster of properties in the Forest of Bowland AONB. Residential occupation has already been accepted in principle through the 2019 live/work permission, while subsequent marketing has shown there is no realistic prospect of commercial re-use. A later refusal for Class E use further demonstrates that residential conversion is the most suitable long-term solution.
- 6.1.3. The scheme is consistent with Core Strategy Policies DMH3 and DMH4, with national policy in the NPPF encouraging the re-use of redundant buildings and the efficient use of land, and with the NPPG's recognition of the role rural housing can play in sustaining communities. It will secure the future of a redundant rural building, provide a modest contribution to housing supply, and do so without harm to the character or scenic qualities of the AONB.
- 6.1.4. Accordingly, the principle of development is sound, and Permission in Principle should be granted.

## **/7 Appendices**

### **7.1. Appendix 1 – Blue Bell Farm Sale Listing**



## **Blue Bell Farm**

**Higher Road, Longridge, Preston, Lancashire**  
**PR3 2YX**  
**5 acres**  
**£250,000 guide**

An exciting opportunity to acquire a multi use property in the heart of the Ribble Valley. Blue Bell Farm offers a wealth of features desirable to a large audience of buyers. With the potential for live work accommodation subject to planning or simply existing commercial usage for the lifestyle buyer.

- \* 4,570 sq ft commercial unit
- \* Car parking area
- \* B1 commercial use office and workshop
- \* Mains Services
- \* 5 acres adjoining agricultural land
- \* Great location

Viewing by appointment only through the selling agents Ref JT. For sale by informal tender offers are invited with proof of funds by 12noon 28th May 2021 to the Sawley office, clearly marked Tender Blue Bell Farm.

Old Sawley Grange, Gisburn Road, Sawley, Clitheroe BB7 4LH

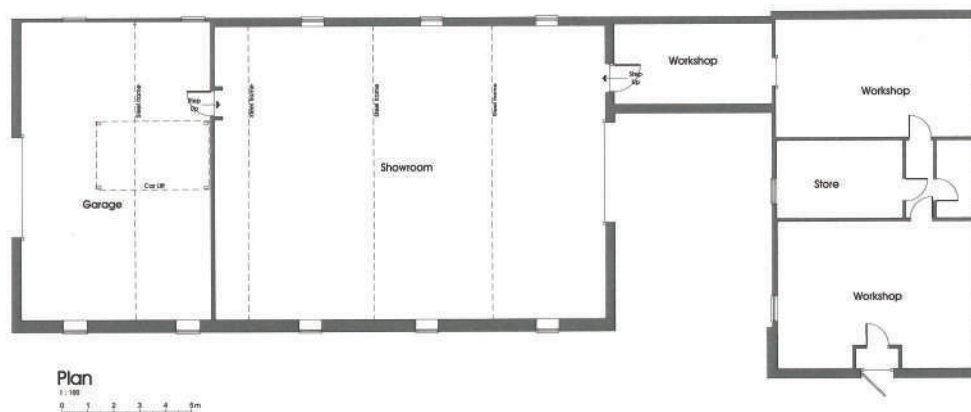
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## Description

Blue Bell Farm is located in the heart of the Ribble Valley on the outskirts of Longridge along Higher Road in the Forest of Bowland AONB. Currently used as office space and garage/workshop facilities this commercial unit spans over 4,500 sq ft. Access is good from the public highway into a large hardcore parking area with landscaped borders and lawned verge. The property comprises of two steel portal framed buildings that are joined together by a further interlocking 10ft wide x 20' long building. The buildings are stone clad to the lower half with timber clad to the upper with corrugated sheet roof. The larger of the two buildings is fully insulated with a raised, weight bearing floor, fracture mat, is fully tiled and has an underfloor heating system. The rear of the two buildings has a concrete floor and exposed painted concrete block work walls. This particular building has been sectioned off to form the basics of a kitchen, living area, bathroom/wc and box room. There is currently an LPG fired central heating system installed throughout, with radiators in some rooms, fluorescent lights throughout and double glazed window units to the sides. Mains water and mains electricity services are connected to the building.

Currently under planning permission 3/2015/0918 the unit is used commercially under B1(a) and B1(b) permissions. A recent application 3/2019/0471 was approved by Ribble Valley Borough Council for conversion of the building to a single story live work unit SPECIFIC ONLY to the current owner and business operator.











## Rates & Services

Local Authority - Ribble Valley Borough Council

Tenure - Freehold with vacant possession business rates payable currently circa £8,500p/a

Services - Mains Water, Mains Electric, LPG gas central heating, mains sewerage.



Plan of Land



0m 10m 20m 30m

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