

Report Item No: 1

APPLICATION No:	EPF/1991/05
SITE ADDRESS:	Laughters Farm Faggoters Lane High Laver Harlow Essex CM17 0NU
PARISH:	Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers
APPLICANT:	C Beetlestone
DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL:	Change of use of the existing farm buildings into two dwellings
RECOMMENDED DECISION:	REFUSE

REASONS:

- 1 The site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The proposal represents inappropriate development and is therefore at odds with Government advice, policies GB2 and GB8 of the adopted Local Plan and policies C2 and RE2 of the adopted Replacement Structure Plan. The Local Planning Authority is not completely satisfied that the use of the building for residential purposes can be accomplished without major reconstruction works.
- 2 The proposal would lead to a form of unsustainable development since the provision of new dwellings in this rural location without access to community facilities and sustainable means of transport would be contrary to policies CS4 and H2 of the adopted Replacement Structure Plan.

This item has been called to committee by Councillor Morgan.

Description of Proposal:

Consent is being sought for the change of use of the existing farm buildings into two dwellings and garage with store.

Description of Site:

A detached dwellinghouse and redundant farm buildings located on the southern side of Faggoters Lane, High Laver within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The two buildings to be converted to residential units front the road and although they are in a run down condition prove an attractive setting within the countryside when viewed from the road. The larger barn of the two to be converted to residential is weatherboarded with small brick plinth and corrugated roof. The small barn is brick built with tiling and the elevation fronting the road is open with wooden supports. The

barns to the rear to be used for garaging/store and office are weatherboarded with tiling. Laughters House to the east is located some 15m from the smaller barn with garden to the side and rear.

Relevant History:

EPO/178/63 – Utility room - Approved

EPO/28/68 – O/A conversion of barn to dwellinghouse - Refused

EPO/673/73 – Details of extensions and alterations – Approved with conditions

EPF/760/95 – Erection of rear conservatory - Approved

Policies Applied:

Structure Plan:

RE2 – Re-use of rural buildings

C2 – Development within the Metropolitan Green Belt

CS4 – Sustainable new development

H2 – Housing development (the sequential approach)

Local Plan:

GB2, GB8, GB14 – Green Belt considerations

DBE1, 2, 4, 8, 9 relating to design and amenity considerations

LL2 – Inappropriate development

T14 and T17 – Highways considerations

Issues and Considerations:

The main issues in this application relate whether or not the buildings are capable of re-use for residential purposes and whether or not it is desirable that they be put to new use, the impact of the proposal would have on the Green Belt, sustainability, effect on amenity and any highway issues.

This application was presented before the last Plans Sub Committee 'C' on the 15th March where members asked officers to negotiate with the applicant to remove the separate garage and vehicular access from the proposal, which was to serve the main farmhouse. This has subsequently been done and a revised scheme has been submitted for deliberation.

Green Belt

Policy GB8 of the Local Plan and RE2 of the replacement structure plan allow for the re-use of rural buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial appearance. To that extent the proposed conversions would accord with the policy guidance.

Policy GB8 sets out a hierarchy of uses, which must first be considered and concludes with residential only where other uses are unsuitable. However, in a statement of support of the current submission the applicant has argued that due to poor access routes to and from the site it would not be suitable for commercial purposes and this view is reinforced by the Highway Authority.

Policy GB8 is clear that residential use should only occur where the Council consider it is desirable that the buildings be brought back into beneficial use. Whether or not the necessary works of adaptation to residential could be accomplished without major or complete reconstruction is in this case of some concern.

Whether or not the necessary works of adaptation could be accomplished without major or complete reconstruction is more arguable.

Barn 1

This is the largest barn on the site and is proposed to have 4 bedrooms with a first floor added within the roof space. There is a lot of disrepair within the fabric of the building. Large sections of weatherboarding are missing; there is cracked and loose brickwork within the plinth and missing timber supports. The roof is corrugated sheeting and whilst it may be acceptable for this to be replaced, arguably, the existing beams would not support a heavier roof structure. It also appears that there would be a need for some rebuilding of the brick plinth. These shortcomings do not themselves indicate that the barn is incapable of being converted, but taken in conjunction with the proposed alterations, they suggest that the building operations necessary to create a modern dwelling would be far more than could be achieved by, or reasonably described as, works of ordinary maintenance or repair.

The structural survey submitted with the application argues that its former users have adapted the frame possibly to fit in large modern farming machinery. Some structural timbers have been removed or damaged and the internal flank wall between the two frames has been removed and would need to be replaced by new timbers and that whilst the main frame and posts are suitable to form the main structure for the proposed conversion, new oak timbers would be required along with extra diagonal bracing to ensure the roof's stability.

The existing lean to is falling down and would have to be demolished and replaced.

On the information available and the economic reality of a conversion of this magnitude, officers are not convinced that the development would not entail a radical reconstruction of the principal building elements. This would be at odds one of the main criteria of policies RE2 and GB8.

Barn 2

This is a smaller barn attached to Barn 1 and proposes a conversion to a 2 bedroom dwelling utilising the roof space. The barn is a mixture of brick and weather boarded walls, open to the front facing the road. The roof is finished with tiling. The brickwork is relatively new and the roof appears to be in a reasonably sound condition. New supporting beams have been added internally and apart from some renovation work associated with the use for a dwelling this barn would appear adequate to convert without major reconstruction. It is proposed that half of the existing attached garage would be removed and a replacement structure built adjacent to the Laughter's House to provide garaging for that property with the remaining half being retained as garaging for this barn.

Garage with store

This existing barn is located to the south of the main barns and is not visible from the road. It is currently used for both storage and garaging, however an element of the eastern section would be removed in order to allow greater turning space within the site. It would still house 4 parking spaces and a storage area for the occupiers of Barn 1. Although the barn has some areas of disrepair, mainly damage to the weatherboarding, it is essentially of sound construction and given the intended use is considered acceptable for the proposed use. The garage is divided internally however both areas are deep and wide enough to house 2 cars each with dimensions of 4.1m wide x 4.9m deep and 4.1m x 4.9m deep respectively.

Office

This is located in the south west corner of the site and appears to have been used as a granary in the past. The building is relatively unobtrusive and although it is in some state of disrepair due to its proposed use as an office it is not considered that works to renovate the building would need to be major.

Sustainability

The concern here, as is the case with many barn conversions is the comparative remote siting of the barns, isolated as it is from any large settlement which could provide local services, particularly public transport. Laughter's Farm is some $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the nearest village of Matching Tye. Although only a small village it does provide a basic level of services but the fact remains that the occupiers of the barns would be totally reliant on private cars from transport to and from the site.

Whilst this is a concern of officer's it has to be acknowledged that the traffic generated by two barns would not be great and needs to be offset against traffic movements generated by the barns original use. However this would be for a more acceptable form of traffic movement as it would have been associated with the purposes of agriculture and not solely related to a residential use.

A recent Inspectors decision relating to a barn conversion to residential use was that the development would inevitably promote car borne journeys by the occupiers of the dwellings which given the lack of sustainable community would be contrary to the approach of national and strategic planning guidance. It is considered that the Inspectors comments can be similarly applied here with the proposal being contrary to Policy CS4 of the Structure Plan.

Other Issues

The amenity space areas would be located to the rear of both converted dwellings. The amenity space for barn 1 is in line with Local Plan policy DBE8 in that it is to the rear, is easily accessible, is of a size and shape which enables reasonable use, would received sunlight throughout the year and would achieve privacy on a continuing basis through the erection of a fence diving the two barns.

The amenity space for Barn 2 is smaller but reflects the smaller size of the barn, however it is less private than the garden for barn 1 as it would be adjacent to the driveway into the neighbouring property. It will be inevitable that the future occupiers in order to maintain a higher level of privacy would wish to erect around this area. Although this would be additional element of paraphernalia typical of a residential use as it is well hidden from the surrounding area this aspect is probably acceptable.

Apart from the additional traffic movements there would be little or no impact on the amenity of neighbours.

Conclusion:

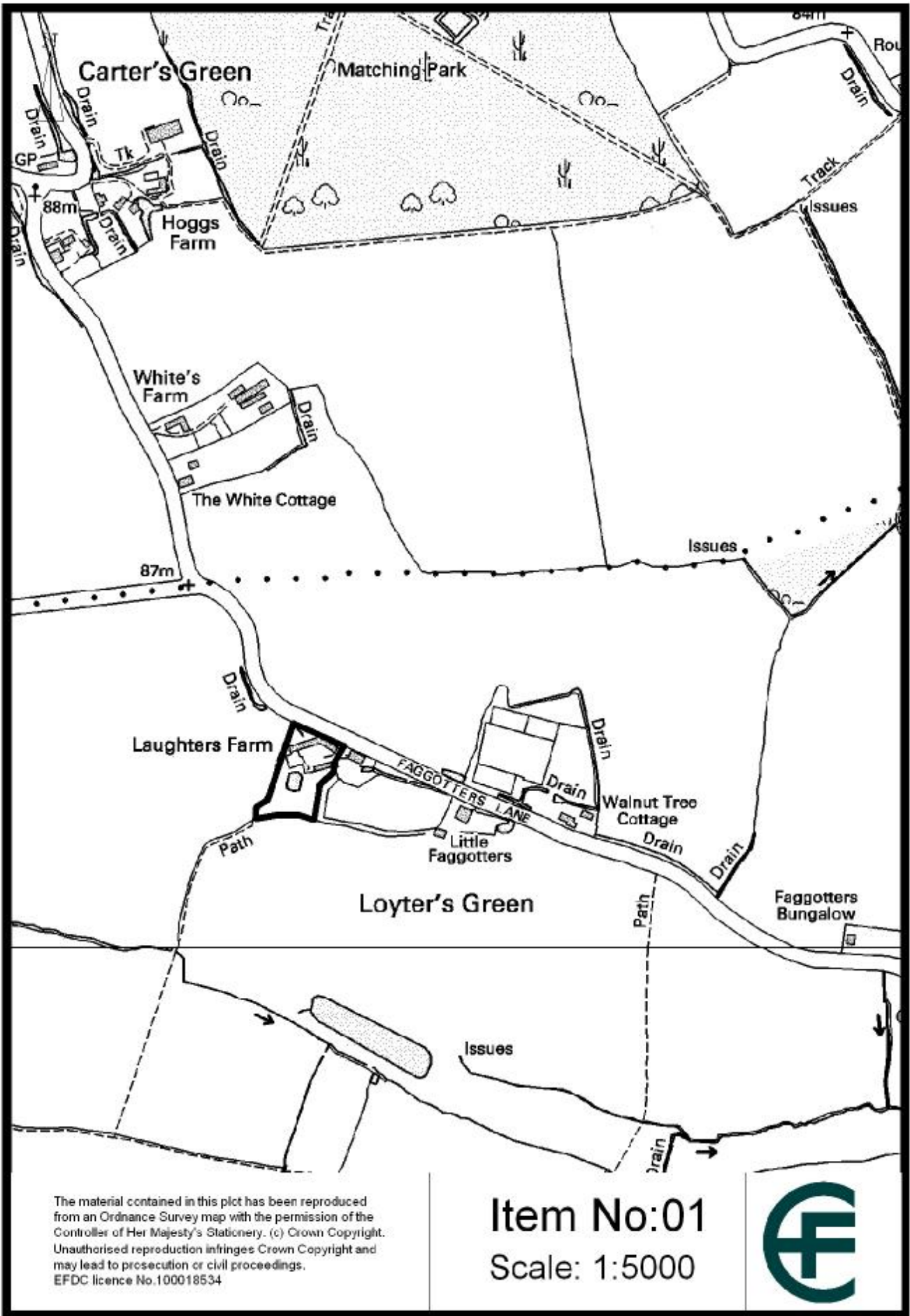
There is policy support for the conversion of rural buildings to residential use provided the Council are satisfied that it is desirable that the building/s be brought back to a beneficial use. These buildings although not listed are both traditional and attractive and create a pleasant vernacular scene. Being fairly prominent it is befitting that a use be found for the buildings if they are not to become further dilapidated and thus a visual eyesore.

The buildings are, however, in poor structural condition and almost certainly will require major work to convert to residential use. This is contrary to the main tenure of Policy GB8 and if allowed could set a precedent on many other sites in the area.

On balance whilst it would be regrettable to see these traditional buildings decline further, the proposals are contrary to Green Belt policy and are therefore recommended for refusal.

SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS:

PARISH COUNCIL – No objections (to the previous larger scheme)



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