

## **PLANNING AND DESIGN STATEMENT**

**Proposed erection of Agricultural Building  
At  
Blackstones Farm, Bleadon, Weston Super Mare  
For  
Mr S Warburton**

Permission is sought for the erection of an agricultural building for the storage of feed and cattle at the above.



Aerial View Blackstones Farm

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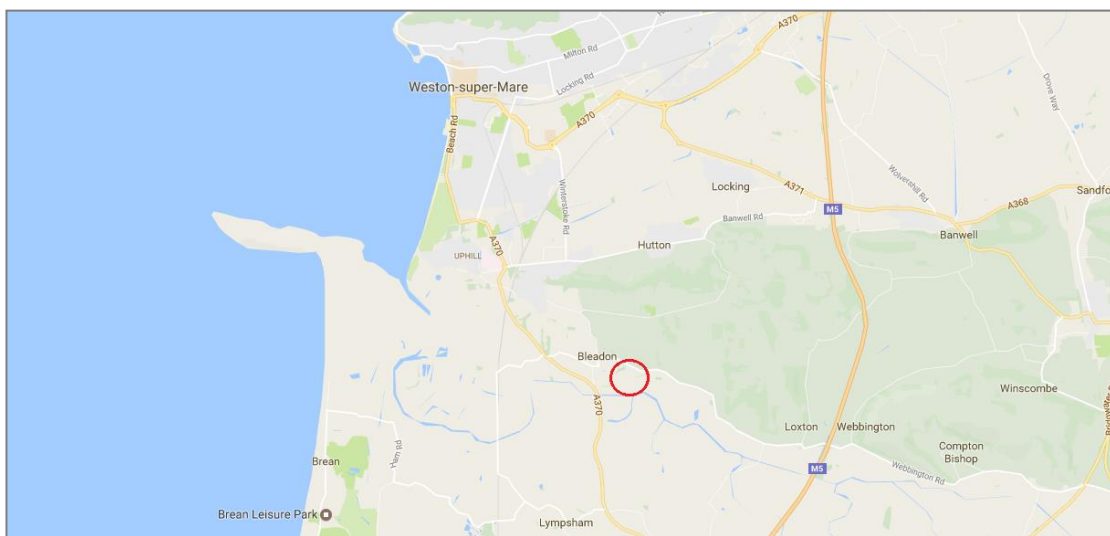
## 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This statement has been submitted to support the planning application submitted by Simon Warburton of Blackstones Farm, proposing the development of a storage barn to provide livestock housing, and a feed and machinery store on land south of Purn Road, Bleadon, Weston-super-Mare.

1.2 This statement addresses the key planning and design issues to be considered in the determination of this application, with particular reference to the location and design of the proposals, the proposed access track, and the planning policy context of the site.

## 2 LOCATION AND CONTEXT

2.1 Blackstones Farm is rurally located to the west of the village of Bleadon in North Somerset, about 4 miles (6.4 km) south of Weston-super-Mare at the foot of Bleadon Hill to the north and the River Axe to the south.



Location plan; Blackstones Farm, Bleadon

2.2 The village of Bleadon has a church, shop and public house as well as other facilities and is clearly a sustainable location.

2.3 Blackstones Farm extends to modest proportions with land extending to the north of the access form the main road. A separate access is present off Purn Lane, which gives direct access to the fields on the north side.

2.4 The agricultural land straddles either side of a valley running down to the south. At the southern end at the bottom of the valley are some farm buildings, currently used by the applicant. This application is for a building to be used for storage of feed and animals, immediately adjacent to the land itself, which is at a higher level to the north.

2.5 The property has an existing agricultural access from the north from Purn Lane. No vehicular access can be achieved from the south end of the site as the incline is too steep.

### **3 PLANNING HISTORY**

3.1 In 2018 we applied on behalf of the existing owner for a barn under ref no: 18-P-2709-FUL for planning permission to place a barn to the west side of the site. This application generated a number of objections, resulting in a site meeting with the planner concerned. The outcome of the meeting was that there is a need for agricultural storage as identified, therefore confirming the need, but concern was expressed regarding the location.

3.2 The application was withdrawn and a revised application was submitted for a storage barn to house livestock, feed store and machinery (18/P/4105/FUL). That application was refused by North Somerset District Council on 7 February 2019, for the following reasons:-

1. The proposed agricultural building and associated track, by reason of their siting within prominent locations within the field, and the need for engineering works would harm the character and appearance of the rural field which would adversely affect the landscape of the rural countryside and it is considered that the agricultural need does not outweigh the harm to the rural landscape and as such it is contrary to policies CS5 and CS12 of the North Somerset Core Strategy, policies DM10, DM32 and DM51 of the North Somerset Sites and policies Plan - Part 1 and North Somerset Landscape Character Assessment SPD.
2. The proposed agricultural building for accommodating livestock in the field, by reason of its siting only 80 metres from the closest residential dwelling, would adversely affect the living conditions of the occupiers of the surrounding dwellings through noise disturbance, odours, and general disturbance from the farm animals, which would be unacceptable and would conflict with policy CS3 of the North Somerset Core Strategy and policy DM32 of the North Somerset Sites and Policies Plan - Part 1.
3. The proposed agricultural building and track, by reason of their siting within

the Combe Farm Drains and Adjacent Lands Local Wildlife Site, would adversely affect the protected species within the wildlife site and as no information has been submitted with the application that demonstrates that the development would not impact upon the wildlife, it is considered that protected species on the site are not safeguarded and as such is unacceptable and is contrary to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, policy CS4 of the North Somerset Core Strategy, policy DM8 of the North Somerset Sites and Policies Plan - Part 1 and the North Somerset Council's Biodiversity and Trees SPD.

3.3 The new application has now been submitted and seeks to overcome the previous concerns. The application is accompanied by various plans, drawings and documents; in addition to this Planning and Design Statement, the application is also supported by an Ecology Report.

## 4 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

4.1 The overall planning policy context is provided by the :-

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF),
- North Somerset Core Strategy,
- North Somerset Sites and Policies Plan.

4.2 Further local guidance is provided in the North Somerset Landscape Character Assessment.

### National Planning Policy Framework

4.3 At the heart of the recently revised NPPF is the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as set out in paragraph 11 of the NPPF.

4.4 Specifically in relation to this application, with regard to supporting a prosperous rural economy, paragraph 83 of the NPPF advises that planning policies and decisions should enable the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, and the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses.

4.5 Also relevant are paragraphs 170 to 177 of the NPPF, which provide further guidance on conserving and enhancing the natural environment. This requires planning policies and decisions to contribute to, and enhance, the natural and local environment, by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, and sites of biodiversity or geological value, and by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty

of the countryside. This should also consider the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystems – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.

4.6 NPPF paragraph 175 advises that, when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply seek to protect habitats and biodiversity. One of the Council's reasons for refusing the previous application reflected a concern that the potential harmful impact on local habitats had not been appropriately assessed; however, this issue is now fully assessed in the accompanying Ecology report.

#### **North Somerset Core Strategy**

4.7 Of particular relevance to this application is policy CS5, which concerns landscape and the historic environment, and Policy CS12 which concerns design.

4.8 Policy C5 advises that the character, distinctiveness, diversity and quality of North Somerset's landscape will be protected and enhanced by the careful, sensitive management and design of development.

4.9 Policy CS12 states that the Council is committed to achieving high quality buildings and places across North Somerset. Proposals of all scales will be required to demonstrate sensitivity to the existing local character

4.10 The Core Strategy also includes (as part of it's vision), a statement setting out a vision for smaller infill villages such as Bleadon. This states that

*“Rural areas will retain and enhance their countryside character where the quality of the natural environment is the prime objective and any new development will be small scale and strictly controlled. The infill villages will have maintained or enhanced their individual character, identity and sense of community. Accessibility will be improved to facilities and services not locally available within nearby larger settlements. The surrounding countryside will have retained its open natural character, its distinctive landscapes protected from inappropriate development, agricultural use supported and valued for its biodiversity”*

#### **North Somerset Sites and Policies Plan Part 1 and North Somerset Landscape Character Assessment SPD.**

4.11 In considering the previous application, the planning officer also referred to the policies and guidance provided in the Sites and Policies Plan and the Landscape Character Assessment.

4.12 Policy DM51 of the North Somerset Sites & Policies Plan (Part 1) allows



agricultural buildings in the countryside, provided that they are reasonably necessary for agriculture. The officer report for the previous application acknowledged that the applicant is a working farmer and the land is in agricultural use for grazing of livestock. It also recognised that the existing buildings are not sufficient for farming the land, so additional agricultural storage and accommodation for livestock is required on the landholding, and there is a legitimate need for bio security.

4.13 The report also highlighted the need for the proposals to respect the character, distinctiveness, diversity and quality of North Somerset's landscape, by careful, sensitive management and design of development. Regard is also given to landscape; the application sites falls within landscape type E1: Mendip Ridges and Combes, as defined in the North Somerset Landscape Character Assessment. The Council's strategy for this landscape type is to conserve peaceful rural landscape and open pasture.

4.14 Policy DM32 of Sites & Policies Plan (part 1) also requires that design and planning of any development should demonstrate sensitivity to the local character and setting. This also states that, whilst agricultural buildings are an acceptable form of development within the countryside, they still need to be well sited and sensitive to the local landscape. The officer report considered that the new farm building would be sited in too prominent a position within the field, because it would be on view from dwellings and roads within Weston settlement boundary. However, the report also acknowledged that the constraints of the field, its topography and woodland and the close proximity to houses, meant that the barn could not be sited close to the field boundaries or to the field access, which would normally be the preferred siting of agricultural buildings within the countryside. The report also considered that the proposed new agricultural building should be grouped with existing buildings, rather than sited in an isolated position, and concluded that this option had not been fully investigated.

4.15 The refusal reasons also related to the potential noise that the proposals could generate and the potential impact on the living conditions of residents to the north of the site. The land has been in agricultural use for over many years; the potential for noise from livestock has long been recognised as a feature of living in rural communities and there is no reason to believe that this will be significantly or unacceptably increased by the proposals.

4.16 The Council's Core Strategy Vision states that agriculture will be supported and, given the further investigations of the potential alternative options for the proposed building's location, and the additional information on the ecological impacts, it is considered that the Council should now give additional and fuller weight to the benefits of the proposals.

### **Bleadon Neighbourhood Development Plan**

4.17 Bleadon Parish has begun the preparation of an NDP for the whole Parish. It is understood that a first survey of residents has been conducted, but at this early stage of preparation, there is no detailed guidance or advice, beyond that established through the North Somerset District Council plans and policies.

## **5 THE PROPOSAL**

### **The Need**

5.1 As the Council is aware, the Applicant has a barn at the southern end of the site just off the main A road. As inspected the site is steeply sloping, and at the bottom end is significantly lower than the upper section. The site itself has a central valley which runs south-west/north-east, which essentially divides two raised areas of pasture. The valley is heavily wooded and shaded, but opens out to the area where there the barns are located at the south-western limit of the site. Historically this valley was a quarry.

5.2 While a storage facility exists at the bottom end of the land, it is not adequate for the capacity of the field and further storage is required. Linked to this are two important points, firstly that the existing storage facility is remote from the pasture and secondly that there is an important consideration of bio security in enabling separation to be preserved in the event of disease or infection.

5.3 The size of the barn can be justified by the fact that cattle are bedded on straw daily; the barn floors are not concrete but deep littered and therefore there is no slurry. This helps create manure that is later spread on the grass instead of fertiliser as has been done for centuries and now called organic. The straw takes up a bay of the barn. Hay has to be stored in the dry and will share that bay. Each cow has to have a minimum of 9 square metres excluding eating areas, taking 2 bays, depending on how many cattle you over winter. This only leaves 1 bay for machinery, handling etc.

5.4 It is unquestionably the case that there is a need for further storage and housing of animals for the field area in question and the Council recognised this in the consideration of the previous proposal. There is a logical conclusion that this should be provided adjacent to the pasture area; this would make the land more manageable and efficient.

5.5 The need is therefore satisfied, but consideration still needed to be given in respect of the location of buildings on the areas of pasture.



### **Siting of the Building**

5.6 Various locations have been considered with regard to the siting of the agricultural building. Due consideration was given to North Somerset District Council's Planning Policies, along with general design principles.

5.7 The site to the western side of the field, as per the application, was selected for the following reasons and considerations.

5.7.1 This site is the least visible of all possible locations and consequently has minimal impact. The barn could be sited close to Purn Lane, but would then be positioned at the top of the field and views of the hill from Bleadon would see the barn puncture the skyline. In addition, the barn could have been located on the eastern side of the field, but is then more visible from the public view points of both Purn Lane and the footpath which leads to Purn Hill. The location of the barn in its proposed position will result in it being visible from some properties on Purn Road, but there is no prescribed right to a private view and also the barn will be at a notably lower level than these properties and the properties would look over the top of this barn to the view beyond. The barn will be lower than the trees located behind it.

5.7.2 Consideration was given to the public view. The chosen site is not visible from any public view points to the north and only distant view points to the south. The public view of the barn would be much more prominent if it were located on the eastern side of the field.

5.7.3 A decision was made to keep the barn away from Purn Lane as far as possible in order to reduce the impact of the barn on the residential area.

5.7.4 Selected sites were on generally flat areas of land in order to reduce the amount of impact on the natural contours of the site.

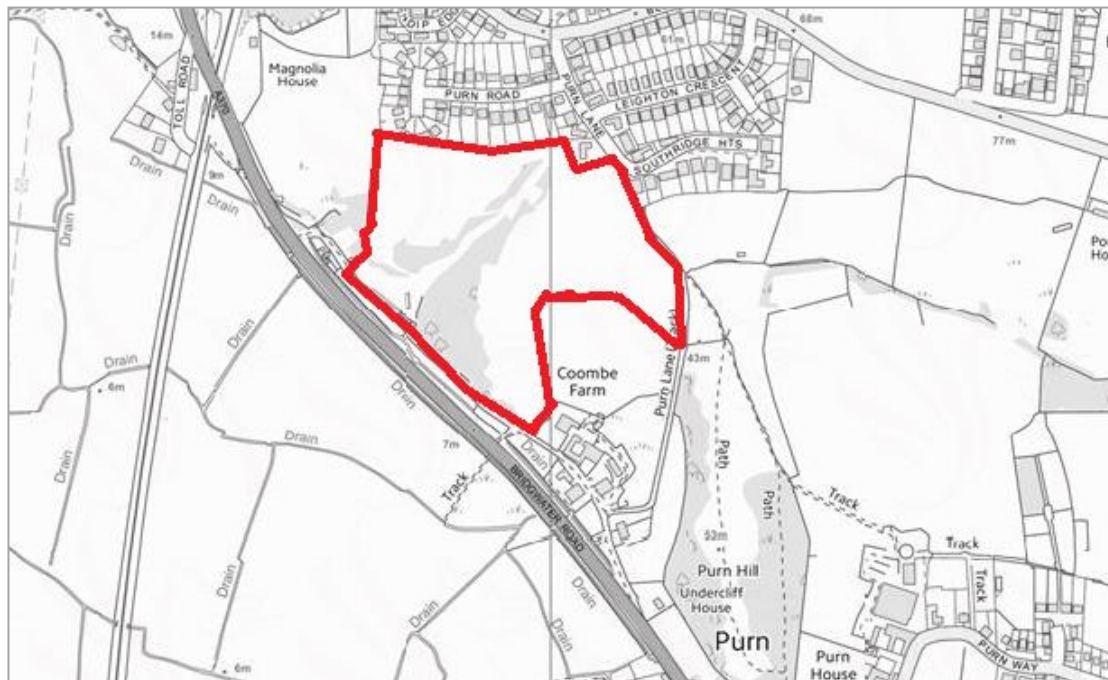
5.8 On balance the site to the west side was preferred to any site on the east as it is less visible and also not as vulnerable to the winter south-westerly winds which would have more of an effect on the building if located to the south side of the woodland.

## 6 DESIGN

6.1 The barn is a simple Yorkshire boarded construction in traditional form for agricultural purposes. Drawings are attached showing the detail.

## 7 ACCESS

7.1 The site is approached via an existing agricultural access through the existing residential development. There are no proposed alterations to the site access, although it is proposed to introduce a cattle grid to give additional security to the residential development by reducing the risk of animals escaping the field.



### OS location plan

7.2 A site inspection identifies that it is impossible to provide a satisfactory safe access from the bottom end of the site. The access from this side is rarely used and the Applicant utilises the farm entrance off Purn Lane to service the main area of pasture. Any access must be safe to use in all weathers and it would be proposed that construction of this purely remove the top soil for the area of the track and replace with a clean stone on a sound base. With ageing and maturity, grass will again grow through, illustrated by photographs below of a similar track incorporated into South Hill Farm five years ago.

7.3 This track is formed by removing the topsoil, and laying down a clean stone, and the softness of this track can clearly be seen in the photographs. I do not believe that

## CHARTERED BUILDING SURVEYORS

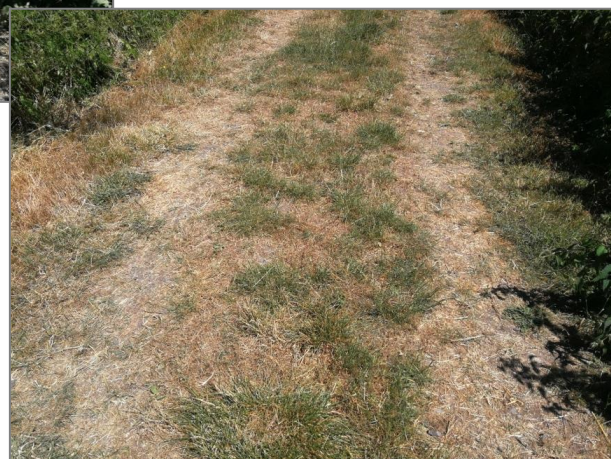
the introduction of a track will have an undue detrimental effect on the field and it is necessary in order to provide satisfactory and safe access for the servicing of the barn and animals. A tracked access will need to be provided whether the barn is located to the west or the east side of the field.

7.4 Government requirement for Livestock and agricultural tracks through the Rural Payments Agency and Natural England requires that hardcore tracks should be constructed as follows:

- excavate a trench at least 2.4m wide and at least 150mm deep, or down to a naturally occurring hard surface
- profile the edge of the track with the excavated soil
- overlay the area with a geotextile membrane if the base of the trench lies on subsoil (a geotextile membrane is not needed if the base is bedrock or chalk)
- fill the trench with stone or hardcore to a depth of at least 150mm, and compact it
- finish the top of the track with a finer material (of 18mm to dust) to a depth of 25 to 50mm, and compact it into a convex camber
- direct any track runoff to a ditch or other stable drainage outlet, or divert it on to grassland



Example of form of track



Close up of track

## 8 PREVIOUS REASONS FOR REFUSAL

8.1 The previous application was refused for the three reasons set out in the Council's decision notice and repeated at para 3.2 of this statement. The revised application has now addressed each of those reasons as follows:-

- The Council has acknowledged that the applicant has a legitimate agricultural need for the proposed storage building. As we have explained above, the applicant has considered all of the potential alternative locations and concluded that none of them would be better suited and have less impact than the revised proposals. The applicant has also sought to reduce the impact of the proposals on both the landscape setting and on the local community. Given the benefits of the proposals to the operation of the farm, and we consider that the proposals now fully reflect the NPPF and the vision of the North Somerset Core Strategy vision of supporting agriculture.
- The proposed storage building is located in the best position to minimise impact on the landscape, woodland and wildlife and it will not significantly impact the residential amenity in Purn Lane. The application has been in agricultural use for many years and there is no justifiable reason to believe that the impact on residents over 80 metres away would be significant enough to warrant refusal of the application.
- The ecology report submitted with the application has assessed the potential impact of the proposals on the local wildlife and ecology and advised, where appropriate, on mitigation measures, which the applicant is willing to agree to as planning conditions.

## 9 CONCLUSIONS

9.1 The Council needs to consider the benefits and potential impacts of any proposal. The previous proposal raised a number of concerns, and the Council felt, on balance, that it could not support the application. Whilst the Council did acknowledge the agricultural need for the proposals, it was particularly concerned that the potential ecological impacts had not been given sufficient consideration, and that a further assessment was necessary of potential alternative locations.

9.2 It is accepted that there is an agricultural use present to the land and that, in servicing that use, there must be safe storage and shelter for animals and food stuffs. The principle therefore of having a building on the land is accepted in planning terms.

9.3 The revised application has now been submitted following a detailed ecological assessment, and this Statement highlights the benefits of the proposed location over the potential alternative locations.

9.4 There has been an indication through the planning process that Planning Permission would be granted for a barn located on the eastern side of the field. We have given serious consideration to this proposal but are of the opinion that, from a design point of view and in relation to its location in the countryside, that the position to the west is more favourable for the following reasons:

- The Western location is less visible to houses on the Purn Lane estate. There are some houses that will see the barn, but amendments have been made to its original form to reduce the intrusion.
- If sited to the eastern side of the land the barn will be visible from the public footpath leading to Purn Hill, which is not the case on the west side.
- If sited to the eastern side, the barn will be visible from the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) on Purn Hill.
- If sited on the eastern side of the site the barn will be more visible from the low land to the south.
- A location on the western side keeps the barn in closer pedestrian proximity to the existing buildings to the south of the site.

9.5 There are clear and logical reasons as to why any barn should be located to the top side of the field, due to the separate location of the current barn storage to the lower end of the site, and also the inadequacy of this storage in terms of size. Servicing of the pasture area is more sensibly achieved from the top side of the site where there is an existing agricultural access off the highway.



9.6 Any barn located on the site must have safe access across the field. It is agreed that this should be as unobtrusive as possible, but must provide safe tracking for agricultural vehicles. Proposals as submitted by the photographs show a way that this can be achieved with minimum intrusion.

9.7 The need for the proposal has been clearly demonstrated and is supported by planning policy. We wish to maintain the application of siting the barn on the western side of the field for sound planning reasons, but have reduced the size of the barn to reduce its impact and visibility to local residents.

9.8 It is considered that the proposals now represent a balanced approach that takes full account of landscape characteristics, ecological impact, overall impact on the area and the needs of the farm if it to remain as a valuable and viable local asset.

9.9 The form and proportion of the building is suitable for the location and the need has been demonstrated and accepted by the planning authority. The access is an existing one and the proposed track is very simple in form.

9.10 The main question is over siting and reasons have been put forward with regard to the decision making process in planning terms for the proposed location.

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**October 2019**