

## FULL PLANNING APPLICATION AT LLANCAIACH ISAF FARM

### 1. Introduction

This Planning, Design, Access and Green Infrastructure (GI) Statement (incorporating a Drainage Statement) is submitted in support of a full planning application for proposed alterations and extension to the existing farmhouse at Llancaiaich Isaf, along with the conversion of two existing agricultural barns to residential use, together with access, parking, drainage, landscaping and associated works. The proposals also take account of a public footpath that crosses the site, which will be diverted under a separate Public Path Order in due course.

This Statement has been prepared on behalf of the applicant to:

- Describe the site and proposed development;
- Set out the relevant national and local planning policy context;
- Assess the proposals against that policy framework;
- Provide an integrated Green Infrastructure Statement following Planning Policy Wales' (PPW) step-wise approach; and
- Incorporate a proportionate Drainage Statement for the development.

Alongside this Statement, the application is supported by the following key documents (in addition to plans and drawings):

- Pre-application Consultation (PAC) Report – Highlight Planning (to form part of application submission);
- Coal Mining Risk Assessment (CMRA) – Blandford Consulting;
- Bat Survey Report / Building Inspection (Protected Species) – Soltys Brewster Ecology;
- Structural Survey Report – WM Clarke Structural Engineer;
- Highway access drawings and swept path analysis.

These documents collectively confirm that the site is capable of accommodating the proposed residential conversions and farmhouse works without unacceptable impacts in respect of ground conditions, ecology, access or drainage.

### 2. Site and Surroundings

The application site is located at Llancaiaich Isaf Farm, off Gelligaer Road, approximately 350m north-east of Nelson within Caerphilly County Borough. It comprises a traditional farmstead set within a rural agricultural landscape between Nelson, Gelligaer and Trelewis.

The site includes:

- An existing farmhouse;
- Two agricultural barns (Barn A and Barn B);
- Associated hardstanding, tracks and yard areas; and
- Surrounding improved and poor semi-improved grassland, mature species-rich hedgerows and scattered broadleaved trees within and around the site.

Immediately to the west is a narrow strip of semi-natural woodland, located within approximately 20m of the farmhouse and within around 5m of Barn A at its closest point. An artificial drain runs through

the centre of this woodland corridor and is hydrologically connected to the Nant Caeach some 360m to the west.

The wider area is characterised by small to medium-sized agricultural fields defined by mature hedgerows and trees, with Nelson to the south-west and further scattered farmsteads within the surrounding countryside.

Vehicular access to the farm is currently gained from Gelligaer Road via an existing access track. A public footpath runs in the vicinity of the farmstead and forms part of the local public rights of way network that connects to the wider countryside.

### 3. Planning History

The farmstead is long established and has operated historically as an agricultural unit.

Of particular relevance is the fact that one of the barns (Barn A) has previously benefitted from planning permission for conversion to a residential dwelling. That permission establishes the principle of residential conversion at the farm complex.

### 4. Description of Development, Design and Access

The application seeks full planning permission for:

- **Alteration and extension of the existing farmhouse** to create an upgraded, modern family dwelling, retaining its core form and character while providing improved internal layout, energy efficiency and amenity.
- **Conversion of Barn A** to a self-contained residential unit, broadly reflecting the previously approved conversion in terms of principle, but updated in design and layout.
- **Conversion of Barn B** to a self-contained residential unit, making beneficial use of a currently underutilised agricultural building that is no longer required for modern farming operations.
- **Associated works**, including:
  - Demolition of structures to facilitate the development;
  - Formation and improvement of vehicular access (with passing bays added) and internal circulation arrangements;
  - Provision of on-site car parking and turning for each unit;
  - Private garden and amenity space for each dwelling;
  - Refuse storage and collection arrangements;
  - Sustainable surface water drainage infrastructure (SuDS) and associated engineering works;
  - Soft landscaping, including new planting and management of existing hedgerows and trees.

The proposals will also necessitate diversion of an existing public footpath, which will be secured under separate legislation. The development layout has been designed to ensure that a convenient, safe and continuous public route can be maintained while enabling the farmstead to function as a small residential cluster.

The structural survey confirms that the barns are physically capable of conversion without substantial demolition or rebuilding, ensuring that the conversion proposals are genuine re-use of existing rural buildings rather than effectively new build.

**Design principles and concepts (character)**

The design approach is **conversion-led**, retaining the existing farmstead form and reusing buildings to minimise new built footprint and visual change. External interventions are limited and proportionate, with any new openings and domestic elements kept subservient to the original agricultural character. The farmhouse extension is single storey to respect the scale of the host building and the rural setting. The intent is to clearly explain the design rationale and “why it is like that”, in a proportionate way.

**Access and movement (inclusive design)**

Inclusive access has been considered from the outset, with the layout providing convenient and legible routes between parking areas and entrances, and level/step-free access where practicable (or otherwise managed through detailed design). Vehicular access utilises the existing access point, with localised improvements to facilitate safe ingress/egress, and on-site manoeuvring arranged so vehicles can enter and leave in a forward gear. Any public footpath diversion will be progressed through the separate Public Path Order process to maintain a safe and convenient route.

**Environmental sustainability and drainage**

The proposals make efficient use of existing buildings and previously used yard areas. Surface water is managed through SuDS principles, integrated with the landscape strategy to control runoff sustainably and support green infrastructure objectives.

**Community safety**

The arrangement of access, parking and circulation is designed to be clear and well-overlooked, supporting natural, passive surveillance and safe movement within the site.

**5. Planning Policy Context****National Planning Policy**

Key national policy includes:

- **Future Wales: The National Plan 2040** – supporting the sustainable use of land, protection and enhancement of biodiversity and the rural environment, and re-use of existing buildings where appropriate.
- **Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12)** – establishes the overarching objective of sustainable development and a placemaking approach, including:
  - Efficient use of land and existing buildings;
  - Protection and enhancement of green infrastructure and biodiversity;
  - Promotion of sustainable rural communities and diversification of the rural economy.
- **Technical Advice Notes (TANs)**, in particular:
  - **TAN 6 – Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities** (supporting appropriate conversion of traditional rural buildings to residential use where they are structurally sound and capable of conversion without major rebuilding);
  - **TAN 5 – Nature Conservation and Planning** (protection of protected species and habitats);
  - **TAN 12 – Design** (high-quality, context-responsive design);

- **TAN 18 – Transport** (safe access and appropriate parking provision);
- **TAN 15 – Development, Flooding and Coastal Erosion** (locating development away from areas of highest flood risk and managing residual risk).

PPW also sets out a step-wise approach to Green Infrastructure, requiring avoidance, mitigation, compensation and enhancement in turn.

### **Local Planning Policy**

The site lies within Caerphilly County Borough and is subject to the adopted Local Development Plan (LDP). The farmstead is located outside defined settlement limits in the open countryside.

### **Strategic Policies**

Relevant strategic policies in the Caerphilly LDP include:

- SP2 – Development Strategy – Development in the Northern Connections Corridor
- SP4 – Settlement Strategy
- SP5 – Settlement Boundaries
- SP6 – Place Making
- SP10 – Conservation of Natural Heritage
- SP11 – Countryside Recreation (for PROW / access to countryside)
- SP14 – Total Housing Requirements
- SP15 – Affordable Housing Target
- SP21 – Parking Standards

### **Countywide Policies**

- CW1 – Sustainable Transport, Accessibility and Social Inclusion
- CW2 – Amenity
- CW3 – Design Considerations – Highways
- CW4 – Natural Heritage Protection
- CW5 – Protection of the Water Environment
- CW6 – Trees, Woodland and Hedgerow Protection
- CW10 – Leisure and Open Space Provision
- CW15 – General Locational Constraints
- CW19 – Locational Constraints – Rural Development and Diversification
- CW20 – Locational Constraints – Conversion, Extension and Replacement of Buildings in the Countryside
- CW22 – Locational Constraints – Minerals
- CW23 – Locational Constraints – Mineral Site Buffer Zones

### **Area / Topic-Specific (as applicable to the site)**

- SI1 – Green Wedges (e.g. West of Nelson, if relevant to the red line)
- NH1 – Special Landscape Areas (e.g. Mynydd Eglwysilan, if applicable)
- NH2 – Visually Important Local Landscapes
- NH3 – Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)

LDP Policy CW20 is of key relevance and includes specific criteria-based policies that support conversion of suitable rural buildings to residential use where:

- The building is structurally sound and capable of conversion without substantial reconstruction;
- The proposal safeguards the character and appearance of the building and its setting;
- The use is appropriate to the rural location; and
- There are no unacceptable impacts on highway safety, landscape or biodiversity.

The proposals must be considered in the context of this policy framework.

## **6. Planning Assessment**

### **6.1 Principle of Development**

The application relates to:

- Re-use and upgrading of an existing farmhouse (established residential use); and
- Conversion of two existing agricultural barns to residential use on a traditional farmstead.

The principle of residential use at the site is supported by:

1. **Existing residential use of the farmhouse**, which is a longstanding dwelling.
2. **Previous planning permission for conversion of Barn A**, which establishes an extant fallback position for at least one additional dwelling.
3. **PPW and TAN 6**, which encourage the appropriate re-use of traditional rural buildings where they are structurally capable of conversion and where this supports the rural economy and communities.
4. The fact that the barns are no longer essential to modern agricultural operations and can be beneficially re-used to provide high-quality rural homes. The land forms part of a wider holding farmed by Price and Co Farming which have the requisite farm buildings at the adjacent Gelliargwellt Uchaf Farm.

The Structural Survey confirms that both barns are structurally capable of conversion without major demolition or rebuilding, meeting a key policy test for rural building conversions.

The proposals therefore represent an efficient and sustainable use of existing built fabric in the countryside, aligning with national and local policy objectives to make better use of existing buildings and to support rural communities.

### **6.2 Design, Character and Landscape**

The farmstead has a clear traditional character: stone or brick barns, simple agricultural forms and a farmhouse that reads as the principal building.

The proposals have been designed to:

- **Retain and respect the form and character of the existing barns**, with new openings kept to a minimum, and where introduced, designed in a simple and agricultural manner (for example, utilising existing openings where possible and using timber/metal doors and windows appropriate to the rural context).
- **Ensure that the extension to the farmhouse is subservient**, both in scale and massing, sitting comfortably against the existing building and preserving its role as the primary dwelling on the site.
- Use an appropriate **palette of materials**, reflecting the existing fabric (e.g. stone, brick, render and slate/tiles) with high-quality contemporary detailing where appropriate.
- Maintain the **courtyard-style arrangement** of buildings, with parking, turning and amenity spaces arranged to reduce visual clutter and maintain a coherent farmstead character.

In landscape terms:

- The development is contained within the existing built envelope of the farmstead, with **no encroachment into the wider open fields** beyond what is necessary for access, gardens and drainage infrastructure.
- Existing **mature hedgerows, trees and the adjacent woodland strip** will be retained and appropriately managed.
- Any minor hedgerow loss required for visibility or access improvements will be compensated by **new native hedgerow planting** and tree planting within and around the site.

Given the modest scale of the works, the re-use of existing buildings and the retention/enhancement of surrounding green infrastructure, the proposals will have no unacceptable landscape or visual impact and will conserve the rural character of the area.

### 6.3 Transport, Access and Parking

Vehicular access to the site will continue to be taken from Gelligaer Road via the existing access point, with improvements as shown on the submitted access layout and swept path drawings.

Key points:

- The proposed access geometry has been designed to achieve appropriate visibility splays onto Gelligaer Road, subject to local speed environment and any vegetation management required within the highway boundary.
- Internal circulation allows for safe access and turning within the site, as demonstrated by the junction swept paths plan, indicating that service and emergency vehicles can enter, manoeuvre and exit the site in a forward gear.
- Car parking spaces will be provided for each dwelling in line with local parking standards, together with visitor parking where appropriate.
- Secure cycle storage can be accommodated within the plot curtilages or barns, encouraging sustainable travel.

The modest number of dwellings will result in a very small increase in traffic when compared with the existing farm use. The proposals are not expected to give rise to any material impact on the operation or safety of the local highway network.

Overall, the scheme is considered acceptable in highway and access terms and accords with relevant transport and highway policies.

### 6.4 Ground Conditions and Coal Mining Legacy

The Coal Mining Risk Assessment confirms that:

- The site lies within an area with a history of coal mining activity within the South Wales Coalfield.
- Published geological and mining information indicates that **no recorded shallow mine workings** are present directly beneath the site.
- There are no recorded mine entries within the site.
- The site is overlain by superficial glacial sands and gravels, underlain by coal measures at depth.

The CMRA concludes that the risk to the proposed development from historic coal mining is **low**, subject to the usual precautions and adherence to any recommendations set out in the report. Any further intrusive investigation or specific foundation design measures can be secured by condition if required by the Coal Authority.

Accordingly, ground conditions and coal mining legacy do not present a constraint that would preclude the proposed development.

### 6.5 Ecology and Biodiversity

The Bat Survey Report by Soltys Brewster Ecology provides a comprehensive ecological appraisal, including desk study, building inspections, static detector surveys and emergence surveys.

Key findings include:

- The site supports suitable habitat for bats, with existing records indicating historic use of the farmhouse and Barn A by bats (e.g. small roosts of common pipistrelle and brown long-eared bat), and foraging/commuting activity in the wider area by several species.
- The farmstead and adjacent woodland/hedgerows provide foraging and commuting corridors for bats and other wildlife.
- The site also has potential for use by nesting birds and other common species typical of the rural environment.

The proposals will result in the internal conversion and upgrading of buildings that are currently used, or have historically been used, by bats. The Bat Survey Report sets out a mitigation and enhancement strategy which will include, as appropriate:

- Retention and/or creation of dedicated roosting features within the converted buildings (e.g. bat lofts, crevice roosts, access slates or bat bricks);
- A sensitive lighting strategy to minimise light spill onto key bat foraging and commuting routes (hedgerows, woodland edge and watercourse);
- Timing of works and any necessary supervision to avoid disturbance of roosts and nesting birds;
- Provision of bird nesting boxes on buildings or within trees/hedgerows.

Where required, works will be undertaken under an appropriate bat licence from Natural Resources Wales, ensuring that the proposals comply with relevant legislation and policy on European Protected Species.

In addition, the scheme will deliver enhancement measures, including:

- Strengthening and gapping-up of existing hedgerows with native species;

- New native tree and shrub planting within garden and courtyard areas;
- Management of grassed areas to incorporate more diverse, pollinator-friendly planting where practicable.

These measures will ensure a net benefit for biodiversity, in line with PPW and local policy objectives.

### 6.6 Residential Amenity

The proposals have been designed to provide high standards of amenity for future occupiers:

- Each unit (farmhouse and two barn conversions) will benefit from private garden/amenity space, providing usable outdoor areas for sitting out, play and drying clothes.
- Internal layouts (as set out in the plans) have been arranged to provide good levels of natural light, outlook and internal circulation.
- The cluster of dwellings is arranged to avoid harmful overlooking between properties, with typical rural levels of mutual visibility that are acceptable and characteristic of traditional farmsteads.

The nearest existing residential properties in Nelson are some distance away and separated by open fields, such that there will be no adverse impacts on the amenity of neighbouring residents in terms of privacy, overshadowing or overbearing effects.

### 6.7 Flood Risk and Drainage (Drainage Statement)

#### Flood Risk

The site is located on sloping ground within an established farmyard setting. On the basis of available mapping and the nature of the proposal (limited intensification, primarily re-use of existing buildings), it is not understood to be at high risk of fluvial flooding. Any localised surface water pathways across the farmyard will be managed as part of the proposed drainage strategy and levels design.

The scale and nature of the development mean that it is appropriate to address flood risk primarily through layout, finished floor levels and a robust surface water drainage strategy, with details capable of being controlled by condition and, where relevant, via a separate SAB approval under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

#### Surface Water Drainage

The proposals will **not** materially increase impermeable area within the site beyond existing hardstanding and building footprints, and in some locations may reduce it through rationalisation of yard areas.

The drainage strategy will be based on the following principles:

- Compliance with Welsh Government SuDS standards, treating surface water as a resource and managing run-off close to source;
- Discharge rates from the site restricted to greenfield or betterment rates where practicable, subject to site investigation and SAB approval;
- Use of infiltration-based SuDS measures where feasible (e.g. permeable paving, soakaways, swales or infiltration basins), informed by ground investigation and percolation testing of the superficial glacial sands and gravels;
- Where infiltration is not feasible locally, provision of attenuation features (e.g. oversized pipes, cellular storage, small basins) with controlled discharge to the existing farm drainage system / watercourse network.

The layout provides space for SuDS components to be integrated as part of the wider green infrastructure, including potential for:

- Permeable surfacing within parking and courtyard areas;
- Grass swales or shallow channels directing run-off;
- Filter strips and rain-garden type planting next to buildings and hard surfaces.

Detailed design will be agreed at condition stage and through the separate SAB process, but the information submitted demonstrates clearly that a policy-compliant, sustainable drainage strategy can be delivered within the site.

### **Foul Drainage**

Foul drainage will be dealt with via either:

- Connection to the existing farm treatment arrangements (if suitable and with capacity); or
- Provision of an appropriately designed package treatment plant/discharge in line with NRW guidance and Building Regulations.

The precise solution will be agreed with the statutory sewerage undertaker / NRW and controlled by condition. In any event, foul drainage can be managed without unacceptable impact on water quality.

Overall, flood risk to and from the development is acceptable and can be satisfactorily controlled through the proposed drainage approach.

## **6.8 Public Rights of Way**

A public footpath currently runs within or adjacent to the farmstead, providing an important route through the countryside.

The development has been designed to ensure:

- The continuity of the public right of way, with the alignment to be formally diverted under a separate Public Path Order;
- A safe and convenient route for walkers, with opportunities to improve surfacing and waymarking as part of the scheme;
- Appropriate separation from private garden spaces and parking areas, through fencing, planting or subtle boundary treatments as required.

The principle of diverting the footpath alongside the conversion of the farmstead is therefore acceptable in planning terms and will be fully addressed through the separate legal process.

## **7. Green Infrastructure Statement (PPW Step-Wise Approach)**

The scheme has been designed in line with PPW's step-wise approach to green infrastructure:

### **7.1 Avoidance**

- The proposals reuse existing farm buildings, avoiding the need for new-build development on greenfield land.
- The development footprint is largely confined to the existing farmyard, minimising encroachment into surrounding fields and retaining the existing field pattern.

- The adjacent woodland strip, hedgerows and mature trees are retained in situ, avoiding direct impact on this key habitat and green infrastructure corridor.
- The layout allows for the public right of way to be maintained (albeit on a slightly different alignment), ensuring continued access to the surrounding countryside.

## 7.2 Mitigation

Where potential impacts cannot be wholly avoided, mitigation measures are incorporated:

- Lighting strategy to minimise light spill onto hedgerows, woodland and watercourse, thereby protecting bat commuting and foraging routes.
- Timing of works and ecological supervision where required to avoid disturbance to bats and nesting birds.
- Maintenance and strengthening of existing boundary features (hedgerows and fences) to maintain habitat connectivity.
- Use of SuDS components to control run-off rates and improve water quality before discharge to the wider network.

## 7.3 Compensation

Any unavoidable loss or modification of habitat (e.g. small areas of hardstanding, minor hedgerow trimming for visibility) will be compensated by:

- New native hedgerow planting and infilling of gaps within existing hedgerows;
- New native tree planting within the site, complementing the existing woodland and tree structure;
- Replacement roosting and nesting features (bat and bird boxes) where existing potential features within buildings are altered during conversion works.

## 7.4 Enhancement

The scheme will deliver tangible enhancements to green infrastructure and biodiversity, including:

- Creation of well-vegetated garden and courtyard spaces with appropriate planting;
- Enhancement of the setting of the woodland edge and drain through sensitive landscaping and SuDS features;
- Provision of bat roosting features (e.g. bat lofts/boxes/bricks) and bird boxes integrated into the buildings and on trees;
- Opportunities for wildlife-friendly management of grassland and planting areas (reduced mowing, wildflower and pollinator planting where practicable).

Taken together, these measures ensure that the development not only avoids harm to existing green infrastructure but positively contributes to the wider GI network, in accordance with PPW and relevant LDP policies.

## 8. Conclusions and Benefits

This Planning and Green Infrastructure Statement has demonstrated that:

- The proposals relate to the re-use and sensitive adaptation of an existing farmstead, rather than intrusive new-build development on greenfield land.
- The principle of development is supported by:

- The existing residential use of the farmhouse;
- Previous planning permission for conversion of Barn A;
- National and local policy support for conversion of suitable rural buildings.
- The design and layout respect the agricultural character of the buildings and their rural setting, with subservient extensions and appropriate, locally distinctive materials.
- Highway, access and parking arrangements can be delivered safely, with modest traffic levels and satisfactory visibility and turning, as demonstrated by the submitted access and swept path drawings.
- Ground conditions and coal mining legacy do not preclude the development, subject to any standard mitigation identified in the CMRA.
- The proposals are supported by a comprehensive Bat Survey and ecological appraisal, and will be implemented alongside a robust package of mitigation and enhancement, securing a net benefit for biodiversity.
- Flood risk is acceptable and the scheme can deliver a sustainable drainage strategy compliant with Welsh Government SuDS requirements, improving the management of surface water within the farmstead.
- The public footpath can be maintained and enhanced through a formal diversion, ensuring continued public access and enjoyment of the countryside.

The development will have a range of positive outcomes, including:

- Bringing a traditional farmstead back into beneficial use with three high-quality rural homes;
- Securing the long-term conservation of traditional agricultural buildings that may otherwise fall into disrepair;
- Delivering biodiversity net gains and strengthened green infrastructure;
- Improving the visual appearance and environmental performance of the site;
- Supporting the local rural economy and community, including during construction and through subsequent occupation.

In light of the above, it is respectfully submitted that the proposals accord with the relevant provisions of PPW, Future Wales and the adopted Local Development Plan, and that planning permission should be granted.