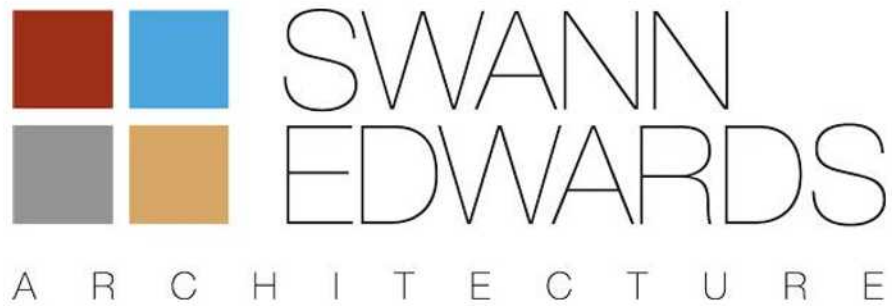




PLANNING STATEMENT

IN RELATION TO

**H18-0554-26
DEMOLITION OF EXISTING AGRICULTURAL
BUILDING WITH CLASS Q PRIOR APPROVAL AND
ERECTION OF 2-STOREY 3-BED DWELLING**

AT

**185 AVENUE FARM ROAD
SUTTON BRIDGE**

FOR

MR AND MRS GRUNDY

Job No. SE-2231

August 2026

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Planning Statement is written in support of planning application H18-0554-26 which is for the 'demolition of existing agricultural building (with Class Q prior approval, reference H18-0314-25) and erection of 2-storey 3-bed dwelling'.

Concerns have been raised during the consideration of H18-0554-26 in relation to whether the current proposal represents a betterment in planning terms than the extant Class Q prior approval. This statement seeks to provide the Local Authority with the comfort that the current proposal *is* a betterment and that the application can therefore be supported in planning terms.

2.0 STATEMENT

The proposed development represents a clear and substantial planning betterment when assessed against the extant Class Q approval, which constitutes a realistic and highly material fallback position. The principle of residential development at the site is therefore already established, with the approved Class Q scheme capable of being lawfully implemented to provide a one-bedroom dwelling.

The relevant planning assessment is consequently not a comparison between the proposed development and a scenario in which no residential development could occur, but between the planning outcome secured by the current proposal and the outcome which could lawfully arise through implementation of the extant Class Q approval. This approach is supported by the Court of Appeal in *Mansell v Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council* [2017] EWCA Civ 1314, which confirmed that a permitted development fallback can be a material consideration where there is a real prospect of it being implemented.

The Court accepted that the decision-maker could consider the planning merits and advantages of the proposed scheme by comparison with that fallback position. In this case, the fallback is particularly compelling because it is not merely a theoretical exercise based upon the potential availability of Class Q rights. That is that prior approval has already been granted for the residential conversion. There is, therefore, a clear and realistic prospect of residential development occurring at the site in any event.

Against that baseline, the proposal delivers a number of significant and identifiable planning advantages. In design terms, it provides a more coherent and carefully considered architectural response than the approved Class Q scheme, securing an improved relationship between the existing building and the proposed alterations, together with a more considered approach to the building's form, proportions, materials, fenestration and overall appearance. This is directly consistent with Policy 2 of the Local Plan, which requires development to address, amongst other matters, its size, scale, layout, quality of design and orientation, character and appearance, sustainable materials and resources, and sustainable drainage and flood risk.

Policy 3 is of particular relevance, requiring all development to create distinctive places through high-quality and inclusive design and stating that development which fails to maximise opportunities to improve the character and quality of an area will not be acceptable. The policy specifically requires consideration of residential amenity, the orientation of buildings to enable the best use of decentralised and renewable low-carbon energy technologies throughout the lifetime of the

development, and the mitigation of flood risk through flood-resistant and flood-resilient design and sustainable drainage systems.

Importantly, the supporting text to Policy 3 expressly recognises that good design has a role in adapting to and mitigating climate change and that it should include both the reuse and adaptation of existing buildings and the design of housing capable of meeting the changing needs of its occupants over its lifetime. The current proposal is therefore strongly aligned with the underlying objectives of the Local Plan. It does not simply seek to secure a larger alternative to the approved Class Q conversion; rather, it provides the opportunity to secure a better designed, more functional and more resilient dwelling which is capable of responding to the site's particular constraints and to the long-term needs of its future occupants. This approach also accords with Policy 23, which supports the reuse of buildings in the countryside for residential purposes where, amongst other things, the proposal is in keeping with its surroundings, has a design sympathetic to the character and appearance of the building in terms of architectural detailing and materials, and leads to an enhancement of the building's immediate setting.

A particularly important betterment arises in relation to flood risk and climate resilience. The proposed scheme provides an opportunity for the necessary flood-resistance and flood-resilience measures to be incorporated into the fundamental design and construction of the dwelling from the outset, rather than requiring such measures to be retrospectively accommodated within, or added to, the more constrained form of conversion permitted under the Class Q approval. This distinction is significant. The proposed development can be designed around appropriate finished floor levels, flood-resilient internal materials and finishes, the positioning and protection of electrical and mechanical equipment, suitable drainage arrangements and other passive flood-resistance and resilience measures, thereby ensuring that flood mitigation forms an integral component of the dwelling rather than a retrospective response to an already approved design.

This approach directly reflects Policy 4 of the Local Plan. Policy 4 requires development in areas at risk of flooding to be supported by a site-specific Flood Risk Assessment addressing all sources of flooding, including the effects of climate change, and to identify mitigation measures demonstrating how the development will be made safe for its lifetime. Specifically, criterion 3(c) requires appropriate flood-resistance and resilience measures, maximising the use of passive resistance measures which do not require human intervention, whilst criterion 3(f) requires applicants to demonstrate that opportunities through the layout, form of development and green infrastructure have been considered as a means of providing flood betterment and reducing flood risk overall. This is reinforced by the reasoned justification to Policy 3, which specifically identifies measures such as raising floor levels and adapting internal materials, electrical circuits and

plumbing so that buildings are better able to cope with a flood event. The Local Plan therefore expressly recognises the benefits of incorporating resilience measures into the design of development itself. The current proposal provides a materially better opportunity to do precisely this than the approved Class Q conversion.

The proposed approach is also wholly consistent with national policy. Paragraph 161 of the NPPF requires the planning system to take full account of climate impacts, including storm and flood risks, and to minimise vulnerability and improve resilience, whilst also encouraging the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings.

Paragraphs 163 and 164 require the need to mitigate and adapt to climate change to be considered when assessing planning applications and require new development in vulnerable areas to ensure that risks can be managed through suitable adaptation measures.

Paragraph 170 requires development in areas at risk of flooding, where necessary, to be made safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere. Paragraph 172(c) further requires opportunities provided by new development and improvements in infrastructure to be used to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding. Most directly, paragraph 181 requires development in areas at risk of flooding to be appropriately flood-resistant and resilient so that, following a flood event, it can be brought back into use without significant refurbishment, to incorporate sustainable drainage where appropriate and to ensure that residual risk can be safely managed.

The proposed development's ability to integrate such measures into the building from the outset therefore represents a clear planning advantage over the fallback scheme and provides a more robust and sustainable response to the long-term flood-risk context of the site.

The proposal also delivers a substantial betterment in the nature and quality of the accommodation provided. The approved Class Q scheme would provide a one-bedroom dwelling, whereas the current proposal provides significantly greater family accommodation, including three bedrooms and a substantially improved range of living and ancillary space.

This should not be characterised merely as an increase in floorspace. It represents a qualitative improvement in the functionality, flexibility and long-term usefulness of the dwelling. The proposal is capable of accommodating a wider range of household circumstances and of adapting to changing needs over time, including the needs of a growing family, home working, caring responsibilities and changing mobility or lifestyle requirements. This is directly supported by Policy 17 of the Local Plan, which seeks to meet the long-term needs of the Plan area through the

provision of mixed, inclusive and sustainable communities and specifically identifies family homes of two and three bedrooms as being in the highest demand. The policy also recognises the need for homes capable of adaptation to respond to mobility and disability needs. The supporting text further states that homes capable of adaptation over time will help meet the evolving needs of people with disabilities and an ageing population. Accordingly, the provision of a three-bedroom family dwelling represents a clear improvement over the restricted and inherently less adaptable one-bedroom fallback.

The National Design Guide provides further clear support for this conclusion. Paragraph 121 states that well-designed homes should meet the needs of a diverse range of users, be adequate in size, fit for purpose and adaptable to the changing needs of their occupants over time. Paragraph 124 identifies adaptability as an essential component of good design, alongside function, comfort, safety, amenity and accessibility. Paragraph 126 requires careful consideration of the quality of internal space, including room sizes and the particular requirements of family accommodation. At a wider level, paragraph 152 states that well-designed places, buildings and spaces should be adaptable to users' changing needs and evolving technologies, whilst paragraph 157 specifically states that homes should be designed to be flexible so that they can adapt to the changing needs of their users over time.

The proposed three-bedroom dwelling is materially better aligned with these principles than the approved one-bedroom Class Q scheme, providing accommodation that is more capable of serving its occupants throughout different stages of their lives and reducing the likelihood that the dwelling will become unsuitable as household circumstances change.

This is also consistent with the NPPF's approach to design. Paragraph 134 requires national design guidance, including the National Design Guide, to guide decisions on planning applications where relevant local design guidance is absent. Paragraph 135 requires planning decisions to ensure that development functions well and adds to the overall quality of an area not merely in the short term but over the lifetime of the development, as well as being visually attractive through good architecture, layout and appropriate landscaping. Paragraph 139 goes further by requiring significant weight to be given to development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design.

The proposed scheme responds directly to these objectives by securing a higher-quality and more sustainable long-term outcome than the Class Q fallback, both in terms of the appearance and design of the building and its ability to meet changing occupier needs throughout its lifetime.

Conclusion

The proposed development should therefore be afforded significant positive weight as a genuine planning betterment over a realistic and implementable fallback position. It retains the established principle that the existing building can lawfully be brought into residential use, whilst securing a materially superior outcome in a number of important respects.

Compared with the approved Class Q scheme, the proposal delivers a more coherent and higher-quality design; a more sympathetic and carefully considered architectural treatment; an improved opportunity to enhance the immediate setting in accordance with Policy 23; substantially improved family accommodation that better reflects the long-term housing objectives of Policy 17; and a more adaptable and future-proofed home consistent with paragraphs 121, 124, 126, 152 and 157 of the National Design Guide.

Pertinently, in the context of the site's constraints, it allows flood-resistance, flood-resilience and other mitigation measures to be designed into the dwelling from the outset, directly responding to the requirements of Policies 3 and 4 of the Local Plan and paragraphs 161, 163, 164, 170, 172 and 181 of the NPPF.

The proposal consequently provides an opportunity to replace a lawful but less optimal Class Q outcome with a better designed, more resilient, more adaptable and more sustainable dwelling. Applying the approach endorsed in *Mansell*, these advantages over the realistic fallback position are material considerations which should carry substantial weight in the overall planning balance.