

DESIGN + ACCESS STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF A DETAILED PLANNING APPLICATION

Proposed Conversion and Extension of an Existing Barn
to Provide Tourist Let Accommodation – Cilmaengwyn
Uchaf Farm, Maen Gwyn, Pontardawe, SA8 4TX

Our Ref: GSC/2021/18



Design + Access Statement re Barn Conversion at Cilmaengwyn Uchaf Farm, Pontardawe

Date: July 2021



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Report Title:	Design + Access Statement
File Location:	Cilmaengwyn Uchaf Farm, Maen Gwyn, Cilmaengwyn, Pontardawe

Client:	Mr Jason Davies
Project Number:	2021/0

Draft Report Issued:	14/07/2021
Final Report Issued:	

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 CDN Planning has been instructed to produce a Design and Access Statement to support a planning application for the conversion and extension of an existing agricultural barn into tourist let accommodation. The scheme has been designed by Huw Griffiths Architects who will also be the agents for the application.

2 THE SITE AND ITS LOCATION

- 2.1 Cilmaengwyn Uchaf Farm lies within open countryside on the Mynydd y Garth to the north west of Pontardawe. The farm grouping is typical of this type of holding with the farmhouse oriented east-west and facing a U-shaped group of agricultural buildings that helps to create a sheltered farm yard. (See the aerial view provided below) The agricultural buildings are, for the most part, built of natural local stone, although a more recent open barn built of corrugated steel on a metal framework lies to the south of the group. Vehicular access is provided by a narrow country road that links directly with Pontardawe. The barn to be converted is built wholly of natural stone beneath a slate roof and forms the southern part of the group around the farm yard.



3. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 It is proposed to convert the barn into a two-bedroom tourism holiday let. The accommodation will consist of a large kitchen/diner/lounge plus two bedrooms all within the existing footprint of the building, plus a shallow extension occupying the whole of the northern flank of the building and providing a new entrance directly from the farm yard; en-suite bathroom facilities for each bedroom; a separate toilet; and a utility space with a washer and tumble dryer. On the southern flank it is also proposed to provide a zinc clad canopy running the length of the building and giving a framework for the new glazing features to be introduced into this elevation. As part of the development the existing corrugated steel barn to the south will be removed.

4. PLANNING POLICY

- 4.1 Local planning policy in this case is provided by the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (LDP) which was adopted in 2016. A number of policies are relevant and are described below.

- 4.2 Policy EN2 – Cilmaengwyn Uchaf Farm is within the Mynydd y Garth Special Landscape Area as defined in the LDP. The designation and policy are intended to protect the high landscape quality of the area. This does not mean, however, that all development is precluded, but rather that any suitable development should meet the highest design standards and ensure the use of appropriate materials. It will be argued later in this statement that the proposal in this case does comply fully with these requirements.
- 4.3 Policy EN5 – This policy concerns all proposals to convert and extend existing buildings in the countryside, and makes it clear that conversions for tourism purposes will only be permitted where the building is structurally sound and is capable of conversion without substantial major external alteration or reconstruction. The building in this case meets this requirement.
- 4.4 Policy BE1 – This policy sets out the design requirements for all developments. It states that all proposals will be expected to demonstrate high quality design taking into account the natural, historic and built environmental context. A series of criteria are set out in the policy and against which all development applications are assessed. The first three criteria are of most relevance in this case and will be discussed later in this statement.
- 4.5 Policy TO1 – This policy relates to all proposed tourism developments in the open countryside. Whilst it is generally a permissive policy, there is a requirement in all cases to demonstrate that the proposal is viable; that it requires a countryside location; that it would not adversely impact on landscape, ecology or cultural heritage of the area; that it would not adversely impact on the social, economic, environmental or residential amenity of the area; and that it would cause a highway problem.
- 4.6 In this case there can be no doubt that the proposed conversion will be viable. There is now a very high, and to some extent an unmet demand in South Wales for high quality self-catering family holiday accommodation in the sort of attractive location that will be provided in this case. The barn at Cilmaengwyn is strategically located for holiday makers being within easy reach of the coastal attractions to the south and west, as well as the mountains to the north.

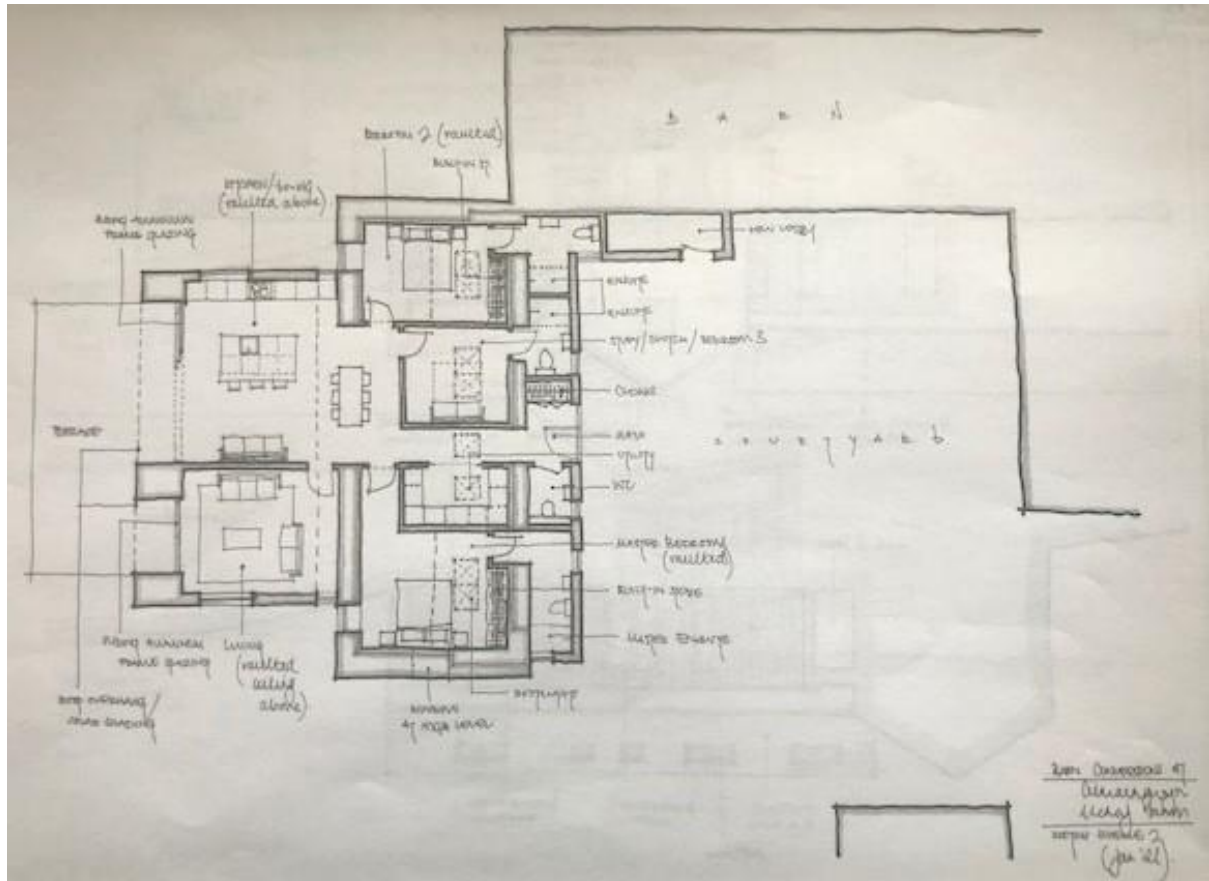
- 4.7 A Welsh Government report published in February 2020 and entitled 'Wales Tourism Performance, January to September 2019' stated that in the 12 months ending Sept 2019 there were over 10 million overnight trips to Wales which is an increase of 6.3% on the previous year. It also found out that the occupancy rate for self-catering units was up from 59% to 61%.
- 4.8 At the local level, statistics are regularly compiled by the City and County of Swansea. They use STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Model) to monitor the scale of tourism trends in the area. The most recent published statistics were in 2018 and showed percentage annual increases in all categories including economic impact of tourism (3%), total visitor days (3.5%), and staying visitor days (2.4%). Swansea are repeat visitors. The Council also conducted a visitor survey during 2019 and published the findings under the title 'Swansea Bay Visitor Survey 2019'. The summary of the report recorded that there was a slight increase in the proportion of visitors coming from outside Wales and that almost half of all visitors stay overnight. It also recorded that the most popular type of accommodation was self-catering, that some 70% are repeat visitors, and that the average spend has increased since 2015.



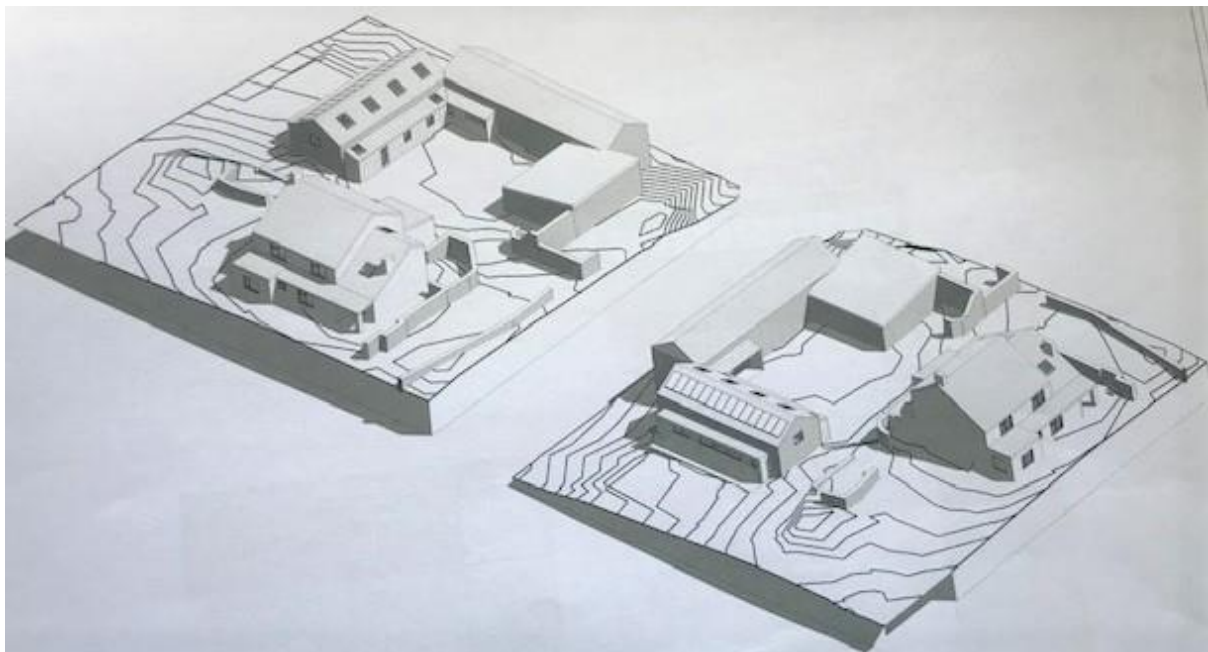
- 4.9 In terms of demand for the type of accommodation proposed in this case, therefore, it seems clear that this is increasing annually, and that the well publicised impact of the Covid epidemic has served only to accelerate this situation as more and more people look to spend their holiday time in the UK. The clear conclusion that can be drawn from the studies carried out is that tourism continues to grow in importance as part of the Welsh, and particularly rural Welsh economy. This is fully reflected in the supportive nature of both National and Local policy provided, of course, that any new accommodation to be provided is fully protective of the character and appearance of the environment.
- 4.10 In regard to the other TO1 criteria, the location of the building in the countryside is, of course, already fixed, whilst it is suggested that the details of this development will positively impact the area by removing an existing unsightly corrugated steel barn, and by giving new life and visual importance to a traditional stone barn, thus enhancing the cultural heritage of the area. The development would certainly make a positive economic impact on the area, both in terms of its value as a diversification of activity on the farm itself, as well as a small increase in trade for other local businesses. Finally there will be no adverse impact on either residential amenity or highway safety.

5. DESIGN DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

- 5.1 The applicants approached Huw Griffiths Architects at the beginning of this year to advise on the possibilities of converting the stone barn. Two possible scenarios were considered, namely a conversion into annexed residential accommodation, or the creation of holiday-let tourism accommodation. Pre-application submissions were then made by Huw Griffiths (Q2021/0021) and were accompanied by initial sketch drawings that demonstrated both the conversion and extension of the building to provide a three bedroom unit with a significant rear extension. (See below)



Pre-app sketch layout



3-D Views of the final scheme

- 5.2 The letter from the planning authority in response to the pre-app was dated March 5th 2021. In summary it advised that the residential annex was of a scale that meant it could readily be used as a separate dwelling, and as such would have to be considered against policies which may well not be favourable. In contrast the tourism proposal would be considered acceptable subject to compliance with policy.
- 5.3 In terms of design it was noted that the rear extension would replace the existing metal barn and the introduction of metal panels on the front and rear extensions to the barn will both complement the stone structure and retain elements of the former character of the farm yard. As such the final design for the holiday-let as a two bedroom unit only has evolved and aims to both respect and respond positively to the existing materials and shapes and will, in our view, appear harmoniously against the adjoining outbuilding as well as the landscape.

GSC/2021/024

July 2021