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PLANNING SUPPORTING DOCUMENT OUTLINING VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES FOR GREEN BELT DEVELOPMENT

at

The Huntsman Inn, Greenfield Road, Holmfirth, West Yorkshire

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1.0 INTRODUCTION**
- 2.0 PLANNING HISTORY**
- 3.0 GREEN BELT ASSESSMENT AND VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**
- 4.0 CONCLUSION**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Pre-application advice has been sought from the LPA with respect of a proposed development at The Huntsman Inn, Greenfield Road, Holmfirth for an infill extension, external beer garden works, alterations to car park and associated works (reference 2024/20237).
- 1.2 As part of pre-application communication with the LPA, the Applicant provided a detailed submission and included an application form, design & access statement, location plan, existing site plan, proposed site plan, existing ground floor plan, existing elevations plan, existing roof plan, proposed ground floor plan, proposed elevations plan and proposed roof plan.
- 1.3 The pre-application response from the LPA reads in a positive manner.
- 1.4 In terms of the Councils assessment of the proposed development against Green Belt Policy contained within the NPPF, it is the Councils view that whilst it is considered that the development to the car park or proposed beer garden would not have any overall impact upon the openness of the Green Belt, in terms of the proposed infill extension, the Council state that:

“given that the existing extensions cumulatively amount to more than the original built form, and that the proposed infill extension appears to be substantial in size / scale; this element of the proposal would be concluded to be a disproportionate addition to the original building. This would be inappropriate development in principle, posing further harm to the visual and spatial openness of the Green Belt, due to the additional built form proposed and the associated intensified use of the site. Given this conclusion, any future planning application would need to be supported by your ‘other considerations’ (very special circumstances) to be taken into account during the assessment of the scheme; see next section”.

- 1.5 The Council conclude that:

“In my view, whilst the infill extension is inappropriate development in the Green Belt in principle, other Policies within both the Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan might provide such circumstances which amount to VSC which outweigh the harm of the development to the Green Belt posed by the infill extension. These would need to be supported by robust justification accompanying

the application. However, on the basis of the information submitted as part of this pre application enquiry, this is only an opinion that there is a potential that this could be the case”.

2.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- 2.1 80/442 - Single storey toilet block.
- 2.2 82/2774 - Two storey bar lounge / toilet extension.
- 2.3 85/1181 - Conversion of attached barn to function room.
- 2.4 91/03819 - Outline application for erection of extension. Conditional Outline Permission.
- 2.5 92/00138 - Erection of single storey extension. Conditional Full Permission.
- 2.6 2003/91562 - Erection of extension to form function room, toilets, kitchen and guest bedrooms. Conditional Full Permission.
- 2.7 2017/93595 - Erection of new entrance, pergola and log store, formation of level access, removal of chimney and erection of replacement chimney. Conditional Full Permission.

3.0 GREEN BELT ASSESSMENT AND VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

- 3.1 Paragraph 154 of the NPPF states that “A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt”. One of the exceptions to this, which is relevant to this case is criteria c of paragraph 154 which states “*the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building*”.
- 3.2 The NPPF does not explain what is defined for the purposes of paragraph 154 as a “disproportionate addition”. An assessment of whether the proposal would be disproportionate to the original building is therefore a matter of planning judgement. Within the Councils pre-application response, the Council are of the view that the “proposed infill extension together with the existing extension cumulatively amount to more than the original built form and that the proposed infill extension appears to be substantial in size /

scale; this element of the proposal would be concluded to be a disproportionate addition to the original building. This would be inappropriate development in principle, posing further harm to the visual and spatial openness of the Green Belt, due to the additional built form proposed and the associated intensified use of the site”.

- 3.3 It is not clear from the pre-application response how the Council have made the judgement on how the development proposed is a “disproportionate addition” to the original building. The application building has been significantly extended over the years (see planning history in paragraph 2.0 above) and it is unclear from reading previous Council Officer Reports why extensions granted in 2003 and 2017 were not assessed as being ‘disproportionate’ but the current proposal is seen as being a “disproportionate addition” even though the development proposed is contained within the existing build form of the public house.
- 3.4 Nevertheless, as the Council have assessed and advised that the development is “inappropriate development”, paragraph 152 of the NPPF is relevant and states that “Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances”.
- 3.5 It is noted that the Council within their pre-application response have recommended that the Applicant puts forward any very special circumstances in a robust justification. Whilst again, the NPPF does not provide any guidance or justification to what “very special circumstances” are, it generally falls to the determining authority to decide what very special circumstances are and do they outweigh the harm to the green belt.
- 3.6 On referring to case law, it is clear that ‘very special circumstances’ in relation to Green Belt development can be based on a number of factors that may be site-specific circumstances and whilst none of the factors may be considered “very special” when considered in isolation, may, when combined together, amount to very special circumstances to outweigh any potential harm to the Green Belt.
- 3.7 The Council have provided the Applicant with advice and recommend that any very special circumstances draw on the site as a community facility / service, referring to Policy LP48 of the Kirklees Local Plan. The Council suggest that the Applicant include details of, and demonstrate, how the site operates at present and whether there would be wider community benefits as a result of the scheme and/or how this scheme would help support the viability of the public house.

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- 3.8 The Huntsman Inn can be described by many visitors as a 'cosy country inn nestled in Holmfirth' that provides traditional food, cask ales, roaring open fires, cosy corners and stunning views over the Yorkshire Hills.
- 3.9 The building subject to this application was formally a dwelling and has been extended over time as the business has altered and expanded. The ground floor of the building consists of a number of sectioned trade areas with bar and restaurant facilities and a function room that accommodates private functions covering a wide range of events from weddings to birthday celebrations and wakes. The hotel includes 15 ensuite guest bedrooms.
- 3.10 The proposals to The Huntsman Inn, particularly the "infill extension" is located within the existing courtyard, between existing walls of the building. The extension will provide an improved entrance feature for the existing hotel and pub business. The proposed new floor area will create a new entrance hallway leading to the hotel reception and an additional trade area for the pub that will provide a separate pub area for use by visitors using the function room facility at change over times.
- 3.11 To ensure minimal encroachment onto the Green Belt, the extension was carefully considered at the design stages. On this basis, a proposed infill extension has been designed to fit within the existing horse shoe courtyard area (within existing walls of the building). The height and external appearance of the proposed infill extension has also been designed to complement the existing building on site whilst remaining a subservient addition to the host building.
- 3.12 Whilst we are the view that the development would not have any impact upon the openness of the Green Belt as it is contained within the existing envelope of the building, the Council have requested 'very special circumstances' to be demonstrated, which are listed below:

Community benefit plus site-specific circumstances

- 3.13 Policy LP48 of the Kirklees Local Plan sets out that proposals will be supported for development that protects, retains or enhances provision, quality or accessibility of existing community, education, leisure and cultural facilities that meets the needs of all members of the community.

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- 3.14 Chapter 8 of the NPPF requires that, amongst other things, developments achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places and beautiful buildings which: a) promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs.
- 3.15 Policy 9 of the Holme Valley Neighbourhood Development Plan relates to 'Protecting and Enhancing Local Community Facilities'.
- 3.16 The Huntsman Inn not just provides a community facility by means of a public house and restaurant, but is also able to host function and events like weddings, / celebrations of life / significant family occasions (Birthday parties / Golden Wedding celebrations etc). By extending the public house, as proposed, the new floor area will create an entrance hallway leading to the hotel reception and an additional trade area for the pub that will provide a separate pub area for use by visitors using the function room facility at change over times.
- 3.17 Currently, it could be said that the local community access / visitor experience potentially suffers when a wedding / celebration of life is taking place at the Inn, as the public amenity space (public house) is not always available for locals when a busy private local event is filling the premises, given its currently limited capacity. The proposed development therefore will allow the Applicant to improve the facilities within the building, to the benefit of the local community who may just be visiting for a drink or something to eat with family or friends - and keeping this separate from a private event.
- 3.18 The proposed extension at The Huntman Inn will allow for extra capacity within the building and the Applicant, as a result, envisages that they will be able to run additional social interaction activities across community groups that would not normally meet. The Applicant is looking at setting up regular workshops, which are becoming extremely popular, such as wreath making, art / paint groups, drama classes, educational and local dignitary presentations as well as continuing to provide a facility for music nights / tribute acts for local entertainment. The additional floor space will allow these events to take place, whilst also being able to maintain the public house facility for locals who aren't visiting for the event. This option is currently constrained given the public house capacity limitations when events are being run. It is considered that these matters will be overcome by the proposed extension.

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- 3.19 The Huntsman Inn also includes 15 ensuite guest bedrooms. By maintaining an attractive public facility, it is considered that the Inn will also promote visitors to the Holmfirth area who may be visiting the Inn for a private event or to visit the local area (tourism). The hotel provision within the Inn will have enhanced attractiveness as a result of the sympathetic yet contemporary extension proposed.
- 3.20 It is worthy of noting, that according to CAMRA (the Campaign for Real Ale), around 21 pubs a week are closing for business or losing their licensees (https://camra.org.uk/press_release/plea-for-spring-budget-action-as-21-pubs-close-doors-to-the-public-every-week-in-britain/).
- 3.21 This is not surprising news, as over recent years, there has been an energy bill crisis, eye-watering inflation and a cost-of-living crisis. This together with staff shortages, supply chain issues and a rise in alcohol duty it is clear that these trading conditions have understandably become too much and many public houses have had to unfortunately shut their doors - not only a loss to the economy but ending a vital role so many of our pubs play in their local communities.
- 3.22 It is considered that the proposed development at The Huntsman Inn will enrich and vastly improve the current facilities. It is envisaged that the improvements to the Inn will encourage regulars to remain but also boost new visitors to use the facilities as their local hub and meeting place. To ensure that the Inn remains viable, it is considered that the investment to improve the facilities within the Inn will prolong not just the business, but also the building life and generally benefit the character of the local area.

Economic benefit plus site-specific circumstances

- 3.23 As well as the proposed development improving the visitor experience and providing a betterment to an existing community facility at The Huntsman Inn, the development will also provide benefits to the local economy.
- 3.24 The Huntsman Inn currently employs 44 people. It is considered the the proposed development not will only maintain these jobs for local people, but it is also expected that the Applicant will have to employ further staff once the Inn has been extended.
- 3.25 By extending the capacity and capability within the building the Applicant envisages that further front of house staff and kitchen team members will need to be employed bringing the staffing to around 50 people. Improved facilities will also attract additional visitors,

more private events which will equate to more regular stays in the hotel side of the business - which also employs hotel management staff, cleaners etc.

- 3.26 The expanded capabilities of the public house will also generate employment to small businesses within the local area, by running regular workshops and hiring live entertainment groups.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 This application seeks to achieve full planning consent for an infill extension, external beer garden works, alterations to car park and associated works.
- 4.2 Pre-application communication with the Council outlined that the Applicant on any further application submitted to the LPA would have to demonstrate very special circumstances to justify the development in this Green Belt location.
- 4.3 Whilst we consider that the development proposed has been designed as such to have minimal impact on the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt, in that it has been sited between existing walls of the building and kept to a minimum height with a subservient design - this document lists very special circumstances which centre around the application. In our view, collectively, the very special circumstances listed outweighs any perceived harm to the Green Belt.
- 4.4 Therefore, we consider that the development would comply with paragraphs 152 and 154 of the NPPF and should be recommended for approval.