

MOUNT PLEASANT, MARSDEN

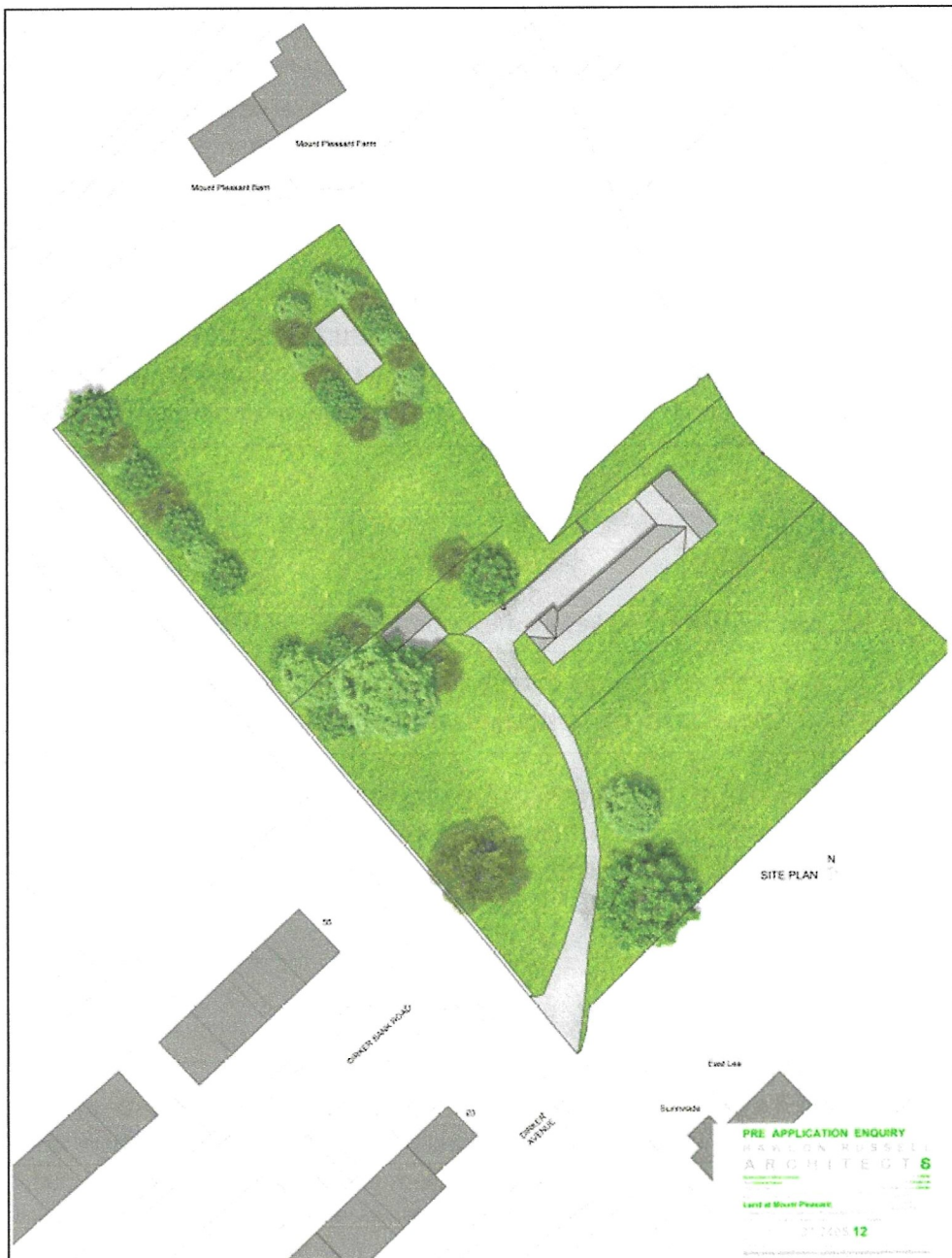
BACKGROUND INFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF THE OUTLINE PLANNING APPLICATION

APPLICANTS: Jan Walters & Chris Herring, 18 Spring Street, Marsden, Huddersfield, HD7 6HE

THE SITE

Two adjacent plots, comprising a little over one acre in total were purchased by Jan and Chris in June 2022. The plots include a stable block which received Planning Permission in 1999, a sectional garage and land which had been used at various times for agricultural purposes. There is the frame of a large polytunnel on site, and records showed that another part of the plot had been used as allotments early in the last century.

EXISTING SITE PLAN



THE VISION

Our vision is to create an exemplary site in Marsden which can provide inspiration and be a resource, supporting and increasing resilience in our local community together with supporting those seeking sanctuary in our community and local area.

Climate change and the ecological crisis will demand exemplary new solutions, deeper connections to each other and to the land and locality and increasing need for sanctuary including from those fleeing war and climate disaster.

This project is intended to play a part in areas where we can bring skills and experience. These areas are demonstrating truly sustainable construction, building a community growing project and working with asylum-seekers and refugees. These are the skills we want to bring to this Marsden based project and the basis of our vision for this land.

Our intention on purchasing the plots was to pursue the possibility of two connected projects.

1. A community food growing project potentially involving a mix of shared growing space, small community orchard and some private allotment spaces. This would involve both Marsden residents and refugees and asylum-seekers. This would build on Jan's experience and commitment to a similar scheme which she has run for several years (see information which follows on this). We felt that this was an ideal opportunity to expand this work with secure tenure on the land, which would be offered at a peppercorn rent, working in partnership with key community stakeholders in Marsden.
2. An application for a terrace of three modest self-build homes built to exemplary standards of low environmental impact. This would include construction to certified Passivhaus standard, net-zero emissions and detailed attention to reducing the impact of all materials used. This would build on Chris' many years of involvement and experience at local, UK and international scale in this sector (see information which follows on this).

OUTLINE PLANNING APPLICATION

The Planning Application includes the two key elements outlined in this background information.

1. Application for a new access gateway to replace the existing, internal drive and hardstanding with parking to allow usable access for the growing project and for the residential development.
2. Application for a terrace of three dwellings comprising two houses each circa 120 m² total floor area and one starter unit circa 60 m² total floor area, within the footprint of the existing permanent stables construction.

ABOUT THE APPLICANTS

JAN WALTERS

I am a Solicitor with a senior conveyancing role. I have worked in Kirklees for over 25 years and now work part time, which enables me to pursue my other passions. I have been involved in voluntary work with refugees and asylum seekers for some years, including running the Pathways to Integration (legal advice) project. I have been Chair of Sanctuary

Kirklees (SK) for several years and established and have co-ordinated the SK Growing Communities project since 2019 with a 7-year lease on land in Golcar. The project has received grant funding from a number of sources and has been successful in bringing together refugees and community volunteers in growing vegetables since the start of the 2020 growing season. I am passionate about this work, and very keen to establish a similar project in Marsden, where we could have secure tenure. I am also very excited by the prospect of establishing a community orchard for Marsden. This was the key motivation for me in the purchase of the land. As well as this work with refugees and asylum seekers I have also contributed for some years to the Colne Valley community as a founding Director of the Colne Valley Cooperative Care project.

CHRIS HERRING

I am a Founding Director of the Golcar-based Green Building Store (now rebranded as 21 degrees) and was Joint Managing Director for 25 years until sale of the business four years ago. The Company has been recognised nationally and internationally for its work in promoting more sustainable construction. This has included pioneering work on Passivhaus construction and deep retrofit. The Company designed and built one of the first Passivhaus homes in the UK in Kirklees and has also pioneered deep retrofit with the first Passivhaus retrofit in the UK in the Cre8 Barn for Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. I am now semi-retired since sale of the business although am retained to offer strategic and technical advice. In 2010 I was a founding Director of the UK Passivhaus Trust and have been Chair of the Board since inception, as well as for some time chairing the international council of Passivhaus organisations worldwide. Locally, I was a member of, and technical advisor to, the Kirklees all party Climate Emergency Working Group which reported in Autumn 2019 and have been a Kirklees Climate Commissioner since inception in 2021. I am passionate about sustainability and bring my professional expertise to a number of other national, regional and local voluntary activities. I have lived in the Colne Valley since 1975 and have supported the community in various capacities over those years, including having been a member of the Renaissance Town Team 15 years ago and being instrumental in developing the Green Valley Initiative which was supported by Kirklees Council and which initiated the redevelopment of Globe Mill in Slaithwaite. I see the refugee and climate crisis as inextricably linked and believe we need to develop both community resilience and support integrating refugees into our communities. I have therefore actively supported the Growing Communities project Jan has driven, and when the opportunity arose was keen to bring a similar project to Marsden.

ABOUT THE GROWING PROJECT

Building on our experience of running the Sanctuary Kirklees Growing Communities Project in Golcar we are starting to develop the site to offer a shared growing space and a small community orchard. Our vision is for a vibrant community resource, providing for a range of needs in our Marsden community while offering sanctuary – to those with mental health or other needs as well as incomers seeking sanctuary in our Huddersfield and Colne Valley communities. Providing meaningful voluntary activity while connecting with nature and with each other can be a powerful way to support and enhance the community and individuals.

About our previous experience

The Growing Communities Project is an initiative developed by Jan in 2019. The project currently leases approximately half an acre of land on a 7 year lease starting in 2020. Over the past 4 years we have built a thriving shared growing project involving local asylum-seekers, refugees, members of the local community and those with mental health needs in many ways providing sanctuary to all in the broadest sense. We have a composting toilet, two polytunnels, a large pond and range of growing plots which everyone works on. We have received grant funding for some of the infrastructure including the toilet and pond. We have formed links with local small shops and a café as outlets as well as providing vegetables for our volunteers and sometimes supplying the Welcome Centre. Over those 4 years we have provided nature-based activity, community and sanctuary to around a total of 200 people and have built a small core group of regular volunteers who attend on Sunday mornings throughout most of the year. We have also worked with Growing Works, the mental health charity working with vulnerable people.



While the project has been successful there are a number of challenges with the existing site.

- As the land is leased, there is some insecurity looking forward. It is also difficult to know how much to invest in the site in terms of obtaining funding for further development, for example a water supply.
- The site is very secluded and as a result there has been ongoing petty vandalism since the beginning of the project. In 2024 this has increased very significantly resulting in significant damage and theft of equipment at present making the site potentially untenable.
- As project leads, Jan and Chris are not from Golcar and consequently it is harder to build and maintain community links as well as harder to deal with vandalism issues.

Because of the vandalism in particular the site is now being wound down and over the next 6 months activity and resources will be transferred to Marsden and the site made safe and reverted to the owner.

About the Marsden site

The opportunity to acquire the current Marsden site has given us a chance to put a growing project onto a sound and permanent footing. Chris acquired some funds with the sale of his business, and wanted to give back something through the acquisition. While the top part of the site is quite steep, as a whole the site is almost ideal for horticultural activity. It is almost south facing, with well drained soil. It has previously been used for some horticulture with the lower part having been allotments early in the 20th century, while there is a large commercial polytunnel frame on the upper field which has had planting to give wind protection.

Our plans for the site

When considering the purchase of the land, from the experience of the Golcar project we knew that there was the potential to replicate that project or indeed to move it to Marsden. In the circumstances we have now decided to relocate the existing project and see the upper field as offering this opportunity.

The lower area of the site would lend itself well to two linked uses. There is considerable interest in Marsden in the establishment of a community orchard and this could sit well in part of the lower area. This might be as a part of the growing project or could be envisaged as a stand-alone project on peppercorn rent. There could also be the opportunity for some allotments and/or wildlife area.

Exemplary approach to growing and biodiversity

We recognise that with the challenges of a warming and changing climate and the need to build more 'localism', we will need to explore novel approaches to growing food.

- Taking the best from Permaculture principles, using natural co-location and intergrowing of plants to complement each other.
- Agro-forestry approaches, growing crops and trees together to optimise food yields, based on the ground-breaking work of Professor Stephen Newman.
- Exploring new plant strains and heritage strains able to work best in the changing Pennine environment.
- Encouraging biodiversity and wildlife across the site, while also setting some space aside as dedicated wildlife and rewilding areas.

Community involvement

We are engaged with Marsden Matters, the Marsden Community Trust (and Community Association) and working with Kirklees Local Democracy Officer, Luc Bride as well as others on synergies between needs that have come out of the Marsden Matters consultation and how this site can offer the opportunity to develop projects relating to those needs. In particular at the moment we are starting to explore the potential for a small community orchard within the site.

We have also been working with Marsden Junior School and have to date done hedge planting with them on the site. The school has expressed an interest in developing this connection further which we hope to be exploring during the Autumn term.

We are hoping that some of our existing Golcar volunteers will become involved with the new Marsden growing site. We have also had a small group of Marsden based volunteers who did work with us earlier in the year on site and we hope to pick this up and develop the work as we move into the next growing cycle.

Access problems

Access to the top field is difficult as there is a steep gradient separating the lower and upper fields. This has limited what we have been able to achieve on that field this year as it is extremely difficult to have anything heavy delivered to that field at present, for example materials to refurbish the polytunnel, manure, gravel etc. Apart from access through the bottom field, the only access to this field is from the top and this access while never ideal was severely restricted some years ago by work done on landscaping and embankments to the cottage above. This has resulted in this access being too narrow to accommodate vehicles. We are proposing a common access with the housing development to facilitate the implementation of the growing project.

ABOUT THE HOUSING PROJECT

We have brought together a group of three households committed to a prospective self-build combined with an element of shared involvement in the site project. We are committed to minimising the environmental impact of the self-build as far as possible to act as an exemplary development.

About the self-builders

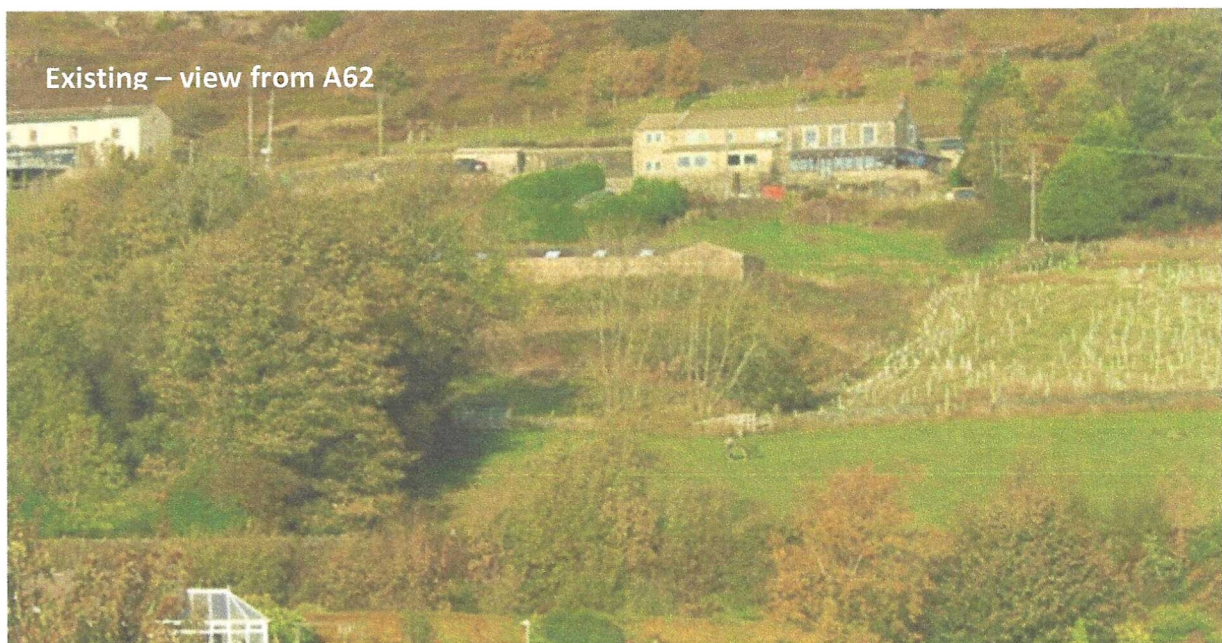
Household one. Chris and Jan.

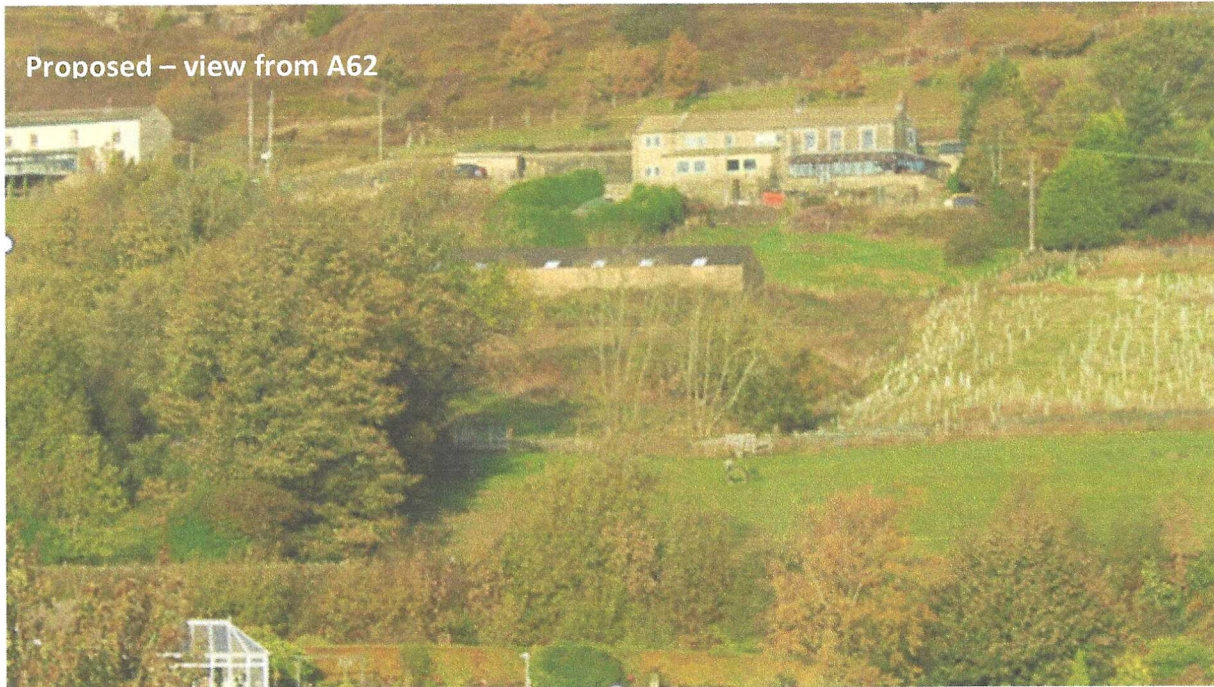
Household two. Bill Butcher and Jean Parker. Bill was Chris's business partner at Green Building Store for 25 years, the lead on the construction side and a leading UK Passivhaus consultant and trainer.

Household three. Ondrej Janis and Veronika Susedkova.

While this project is not envisaged as co-housing, we do see the terrace form plus closeness to the growing projects as being something that will be shared across the households. Some facilities will be shared as the project progresses.

About the proposed build





Subject to planning constraints we would like to incorporate the following key features.

- Certified Passivhaus construction. Passivhaus is the leading international exemplary standard for building. Typically, regulated energy use is around 75% less than for buildings built to the current Building Regulations (Part L). Furthermore, Passivhaus dwellings provide exemplary levels of comfort and indoor air quality, with no drafts or mould growth while utilising minimal energy for heating. There are now many projects in the UK with certified Passivhaus status undertaken by a diverse range of clients including Local Authorities, Housing Associations, Universities and self-builders. The Scottish Government has committed to adopting the 'Scottish equivalent of Passivhaus' for the next iteration of its Building Regulations, with enabling legislation to be enacted by the end of 2024. The project would build on Chris and Bill Butcher's many years of experience in building Passivhaus and developing a suitable supply chain. With the practical and theoretical background we would be ideally placed to project manage as a self-build project.
- Net-zero houses including onsite renewables. We are committed to demonstrating that the most effective route to net-zero is through first minimising demand while providing excellent levels of comfort by constructing to the Passivhaus standard. Our experience in the UK and internationally has led us to believe that this is the only approach which can meet occupant and climate needs, and the only approach which is robust for the future of the housing. We are optimising the pitch of the front roof for photovoltaic panels.
- Lowest possible embodied carbon, at least compliant with Royal Institute of British Architects 2030 Climate Challenge. Once operational energy/carbon is addressed then embodied carbon becomes significant component of total impact. We would assess the total impact of materials selected through the use of proprietary PHRibbon software, and aim to minimise as far as possible. In particular we would minimise the use of concrete as far as practicable.
- Use as far as possible use of biologically based materials in construction. There is now an increasing realisation that the construction supply chain is not sustainable, and that an

approach based as far as possible on biologically derived materials will have the least impact. We would plan to use timber, naturally based insulation such as straw, hemp or woodfibre, biologically based board materials, plant-based paints and finishes again to demonstrate and inspire on what can be achieved by this approach.

- Increased biodiversity in the immediate environment and within the wider growing project

We believe we need houses in the UK but in the context of the climate and biodiversity challenge, we need exemplars of how the environmental impact can be limited or mitigated. These houses would set a benchmark for best practice, building particularly on the expertise of Chris and Bill Butcher. This would be a unique opportunity for exemplary self-build in the Colne Valley or indeed Kirklees led by two of the UK's leading exponents.

About the design brief



Our architect's brief was for a simple terrace comprising two modest 3 bed homes and a middle two storey maisonette. This would stay with the current form comprising the same line of frontage and form with first floor being 'room in roof'. The existing stables are single storey, but the roofslope currently has seven rooflights and our intention would be to retain this appearance, while including ground floor windows.

Our preferred build method would be timber frame construction with thermally treated UK-sourced timber cladding. This would enable the lowest environmental footprint as well as strongly referencing the current stable block.

PROJECT LINKAGE

It is important that we should make clear that the use of the land for the nature and growing based projects will be developed, whether or not planning permission is obtained for the housing project. While linked they are not dependent on each other.

However, the new access for the nature and growing based projects is dependent on the planning permission and approaches to this will need to be rethought should the permission not be obtained as well of course as suitable uses for the existing buildings.

At heart, we want this site to give inspiration and to add something to the Marsden community. While we do want to develop the houses for personal as well as exemplary reasons, there is nevertheless strong synergy between the housing and the associated use of the land itself.

Vandalism in community gardens

Inevitably in areas of allotments or other community horticultural activity there is always the risk of vandalism. This has been our increasing experience in the Growing Communities project in Golcar, and while the intentional vandalism may be intermittent, these are attractive places for young people to gather and inevitably there is damage. In Golcar we have had damage to polytunnels, fires lit and outside installations carelessly damaged and so on. Co-locating housing and a community project like this will help us ensure this is minimised and that any young people can be engaged with and maybe involved in some way.

LINKS TO OTHER PROJECTS

Immediately adjacent to our site are three fields comprising approximately 3 acres owned by a neighbouring householder. These were planted with mixed woodland by Colne Valley Tree Society 4 years ago. Our neighbour's aspiration is to establish a nature reserve, providing the local schools and other groups with a resource for developing their environmental education. However, access is currently only from the top of the fields and is very difficult. We have agreed to offer a permissive footpath at the bottom of our lower plot to allow good access to these fields for the purpose of developing this facility. This would naturally complement the uses we want to implement on our own site.