

Meopham Parish Council

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Planning Department
Gravesham Borough Council
Sent by email

Dear Avril

Re: Application 20260624

Land West of Steeles Wood, Wrotham Road, South Street, Meopham Kent
Conversion of existing barn into 5 x4-bed residential units, together with provision of associated parking

We do not object to the conversion of this barn. Permission for residential conversion of this building was granted in September 2024 under 20240604 and is extant until September 2027. The Council accepted then that the barn is of permanent and substantial construction, that its re-use falls within paragraph 155(d) of the Framework, and that the location is sustainable.

The applicants making fuller use of the roof void is acceptable. If they can get more floorspace out of the building without changing its envelope, that is a sensible use of an existing structure.

Our objection is to what they are doing with that gain. Rather than better houses, the extra roof space is being used to take the scheme from three units to five. Everything that follows from those two extra units happens outside the barn, on open Green Belt land, and it breaches the Council's own published standards in at least two places.

- What has actually changed - The permission granted in 2024 was for three dwellings of 183.14 sqm each, made up of 132 sqm on the ground floor and 49 sqm in a partial roof conversion. About 549 sqm of dwelling in total. This application is for five units of 145.0, 142.7, 142.7, 142.7 and 145.0 sqm. About 718 sqm in total. The ground floor is essentially unchanged at 384 sqm. The first floor goes from 147 sqm to 334 sqm. So the roof void is being converted much more fully, which is fine, and the number of households on the site rises by two thirds, which is not the same thing at all. The supporting statement describes this as a revised internal arrangement wholly contained within the established building envelope. The floorspace is. The consequences are not.
- GBC's own standards on amenity space - When GBC assessed the three-unit scheme in 2024 its officer recorded that each plot would have 103.8 sqm of garden, that this exceeded the 100 sqm minimum in the Gravesham Residential Layout Guidelines, and that the depths met the 10m minimum.

Three units cleared the Council's own threshold by under four square metres. This application puts five gardens into the same rear strip. The supporting statement sets out a room by room internal schedule down to the 3.1 sqm ground floor WC, and says nothing at all about external amenity space. No garden areas are given on the drawings either. That omission is the single most important thing in this application. On the Council's own 2024 figures, five gardens in that space cannot meet the guideline. GBC should require the garden area and depth for each unit to be stated on the plans, and to assess them against the Residential Layout Guidelines before determining the application.

- **Parking and hardstanding** - The 2024 permission provided two spaces per dwelling, six in total, which met the minimum in the adopted parking standards. This application shows three spaces per unit, fifteen in total, together with five EV charging points and five cycle stores. That is nine additional car spaces, all of them outside the building, all of them on open land within the Green Belt. The applicants' case on openness rests on the removal of ancillary structures amounting to 108.65 sqm of built form. On any reasonable calculation, nine new parking spaces will lay down a similar area of new hard surface. The benefit they are asking the Council to weigh is cancelled out by development they have not weighed at all. GBC should quantify the total area of new hardstanding and to re-run the openness assessment with it included, rather than accepting the 108.65 sqm figure in isolation. We note that Kent Highways raised no objection in 2024 on the basis that the traffic generated by three dwellings would not be significant. Five dwellings with fifteen spaces is a different proposition and Highways should be consulted again on the scheme as it now stands.
- **Character** - The 2024 officer accepted the appearance of the scheme partly because the boundary treatment was kept light. The report records 1.2m post and rail fencing with 1.8m timber fencing next to the patio areas only, leaving what the officer described as an open visual aspect. Five plots require four internal divisions rather than two, and the submitted site plan labels 1.8m timber garden fencing between each pair of dwellings. That is a greater extent of close boarded fencing than was approved, and it moves the site further towards a suburban terrace and away from the agricultural character the Council relied on in accepting the earlier scheme. The site sits in the Meopham Downs Landscape Character Area, where the guideline is to conserve and reinforce. The proposed boundary treatments need to be compared directly with those approved in 2024, and for the extent of 1.8m fencing to be reduced to what was previously found acceptable.
- **Nature** - The site adjoins Steeles Wood and the Happy Valley Local Wildlife Site, with ancient woodland in the surrounding landscape. Gravesham took that seriously in 2024. It imposed a pre-commencement Construction Environmental Management Plan requiring protection of the Local Wildlife Site and ancient woodland from light, noise and dust, and a lighting condition requiring any external lighting to comply with the Bat Conservation Trust and Institute of Lighting Professionals guidance, including a light spill plan. Five

households with fifteen cars will generate more vehicle movement, more lighting and more disturbance next to that boundary than three households with six. The biodiversity net gain documents were only added to the file on 23 July and have had no scrutiny. We ask that the ecological and lighting conditions from 20240604 are carried forward in full, and that KCC Biodiversity is re-consulted on the scheme as amended rather than relying on the 2024 appraisal.

- GBC's own conditions - Two of the conditions Gravesham attached in 2024 are worth putting back in front of it. Condition 7 removed permitted development rights for any new window, door or opening, expressly to protect the amenity and privacy of neighbouring occupants. A first floor of 334 sqm rather than 147 sqm will need considerably more light than the approved scheme. Condition 8 removed permitted development rights for extensions and outbuildings, expressly to ensure adequate private amenity space is maintained. Smaller gardens make that condition more necessary and harder to live with, and it should be imposed again if permission is granted.

In Conclusion – we object to the scheme as submitted, because the increase from three units to five cannot be accommodated on this plot without falling below the Council's own minimum standards for private amenity space, and without a significant increase in hard surfacing and parking on open Green Belt land which has not been quantified or weighed.

We request for four things before determination: garden areas and depths stated on the plans and assessed against the Residential Layout Guidelines; the total new hardstanding quantified and included in the openness balance; Kent Highways and KCC Biodiversity re-consulted on five units rather than three; and the boundary treatments brought back into line with what was approved in 2024.

Yours Sincerely



Lisa Winter
Clerk