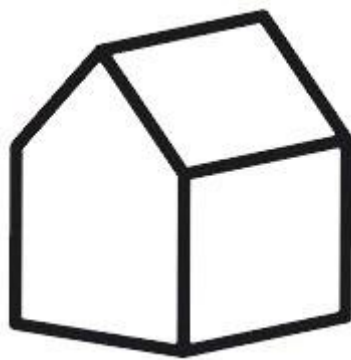




Building Drawings

STEELES WOOD STABLES
Supporting Statement

Conversion of Barn into 5x 4-bed Dwellings
April 2026

In respect of

Steeles Wood Stables

Wrotham Road

Meopham

KENT

DA13 0QJ

Client

Mr T Searles

Job Reference

26015TS

1. Introduction

This Planning Statement has been prepared in support of a full planning application seeking permission for the conversion of the existing barn at Steeles Wood Stables, South Street, Meopham, into five residential dwellings together with associated parking, landscaping, private amenity space and biodiversity enhancements.

The application site forms part of an established equestrian complex situated on the eastern side of South Street (A227) within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The wider site contains a collection of equestrian buildings, hardstanding, storage areas and associated infrastructure which together form a well-established developed rural site. The principal building subject to this application is a substantial steel portal framed barn with concrete floor slab and blockwork walls which occupies a prominent position within the complex.

Importantly, planning permission has already been granted for the conversion of this building into three residential units under planning reference **20240604**. The current proposal therefore does not seek to establish the principle of residential conversion at the site, as this has already been accepted by the Local Planning Authority. Rather, the current proposal seeks to optimise the approved form of development through a revised internal arrangement allowing for five residential units within the same building envelope.

The proposed development would continue to utilise the existing barn structure and would not involve substantial rebuilding or material enlargement of the building. The proposal instead represents the efficient and sustainable re-use of an existing permanent structure in accordance with national and local planning policy objectives.

2. Site Context and Surroundings

The site itself extends to approximately 0.27 hectares and lies within a rural setting characterised by woodland, paddocks and equestrian land uses. Steeles Wood and the wider Happy Valley Local Wildlife Site lie to the east of the site and a Public Right of Way crosses land to the south of the main yard area.

The nearest listed building, Leylands Farm Cottage, is located approximately 165 metres from the site on the opposite side of South Street. The surrounding area is characterised by mature vegetation and an established parkland character which assists in containing views of the site from the wider countryside.

The site benefits from an established vehicular access onto South Street and is located within Flood Zone 1, indicating a low probability of flooding.

The existing complex accommodates a range of equestrian-related uses including stabling, storage and associated hardstanding. The application building itself is a substantial and permanent structure which forms part of the established developed character of the site.

3. Planning History

The planning history of the site is an important material consideration. In addition to the previous permission for residential conversion, the site has historically accommodated equestrian and storage uses, including B8 storage and livery-related activity.

Most significantly, planning permission was previously granted under reference **20240604** for the:

Conversion of existing barn to three residential units together with provision of associated parking and private amenity space and removal of rear canopy to barn and existing WC, office and stables.

That permission is highly material to the determination of the current application as it confirms the Local Planning Authority's acceptance that:

- Residential conversion of the building is acceptable in principle;
- The building is capable of residential conversion;
- The proposal represents acceptable development within the Green Belt;
- The site can safely accommodate residential occupation.

The current proposal therefore does not seek to establish a new planning principle. Instead, it seeks to revise and optimise an already approved form of development through a more efficient internal layout arrangement.

4. Description of Development

The proposal seeks permission for the conversion of the existing barn into five residential units. The revised scheme remains wholly contained within the established building envelope and avoids any significant increase in the scale or footprint of development on the site.

The proposal includes the retention of the principal structural frame together with removal of the existing rear canopy and associated ancillary structures adjoining the barn. This remains an important component of the proposal because it reduces the overall amount of built form currently present on the site.

The previously submitted planning statement identified that approximately 108.65sqm of ancillary built form would be removed as part of the redevelopment proposals. That reduction remains highly material in Green Belt terms as it results in both a spatial and visual improvement to openness.

The development would provide associated parking, EV charging infrastructure, landscaping and private amenity space. The overall design approach has deliberately sought to retain the agricultural character and appearance of the existing building through the use of restrained and sympathetic external alterations.

5. Planning Policy Context

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan for the area comprises the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) together with saved policies of the Gravesham Local Plan First Review.

The National Planning Policy Framework ("NPPF") is also a significant material consideration.

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF establishes the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 60 confirms the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, whilst paragraph 70 recognises the important contribution that small and medium sized sites can make towards housing delivery.

Paragraphs 124 to 127 support the effective use of land and encourage the re-use of underutilised land and buildings where this contributes towards meeting development needs.

Given the site's location within the Metropolitan Green Belt, Section 13 of the NPPF is particularly relevant. Paragraph 155(d) confirms that the re-use of buildings is not inappropriate development within the Green Belt provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction and provided openness is preserved.

Relevant local policies include:

- Policy CS01 – Sustainable Development;
- Policy CS02 – Scale and Distribution of Development;
- Policy CS11 – Transport;
- Policy CS12 – Green Infrastructure and Landscape;
- Policy CS14 – Housing Type and Size;
- Policy CS18 – Heritage;
- Policy CS19 – Development and Design Principles;
- Saved Policy C11 – Change of Use of Redundant Buildings in the Countryside.

The proposal has been prepared having regard to all relevant local and national planning policy considerations.

6. Principle of Development

The principle of residential conversion at the site has already been accepted through the previously approved three-unit scheme. The current application therefore principally concerns whether the revised arrangement of five units remains acceptable in planning terms.

The proposal continues to involve the re-use of the same substantial existing building and does not fundamentally alter the nature of the development previously considered acceptable by the Local Planning Authority.

The proposal accords with broader national policy objectives seeking:

- Sustainable re-use of existing rural buildings;
- Efficient use of land and buildings;
- Delivery of housing on small sites;
- Re-use of previously developed land;
- Sustainable rural regeneration.

The proposal therefore accords with both the Development Plan and the overarching objectives of the NPPF.

7. Green Belt Assessment

The site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt and the proposal has therefore been carefully assessed against the requirements of Section 13 of the NPPF.

Paragraph 155(d) of the Framework confirms that the re-use of buildings is not inappropriate development within the Green Belt provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction and provided that openness is preserved.

The accompanying Structural Assessment prepared by TSC Consulting Engineers confirms unequivocally that the building is structurally sound and capable of conversion without substantial reconstruction. The report confirms that the steel portal frame, foundations and floor slab are structurally adequate and specifically concludes that the proposal represents:

“a logical and sympathetic use of a redundant farm building without involving any major or substantial construction works.”

The report further confirms that the primary structure can remain standing throughout the construction process and that the building can be converted without structural upgrading.

The proposal therefore clearly satisfies the requirements of paragraph 155(d) of the NPPF.

In Green Belt terms, openness must be assessed in both spatial and visual terms. Spatially, the proposal would not materially increase the volume or footprint of development at the site. Importantly, the proposal includes removal of ancillary structures and rear canopy elements amounting to approximately 108.65sqm of built form.

As a result, the proposal would preserve — and in visual terms improve — the openness of the Green Belt.

The proposal would also not conflict with the five purposes of including land within the Green Belt. The development would not result in unrestricted sprawl, would not contribute towards settlement coalescence and would not encroach into undeveloped countryside given that the proposal relates entirely to the re-use of an existing developed site and structure.

The proposal therefore constitutes appropriate development within the Green Belt.

8. Design and Visual Impact

The proposal has been designed to respect the agricultural and rural character of the existing building and surrounding area.

The revised scheme avoids excessive domestication and instead adopts a restrained and sympathetic approach to external alterations. The proposal would retain the established form and visual identity of the barn whilst allowing for its viable long-term residential re-use.

The removal of ancillary structures and rationalisation of the site layout would improve the overall appearance of the site when viewed from surrounding land and from the nearby Public Right of Way.

Additional landscaping and biodiversity enhancements would further soften and integrate the development into its rural setting.

The proposal therefore accords with the design objectives of the NPPF together with Core Strategy Policy CS19.

9. Residential Amenity and Accommodation Standards

The proposed dwellings would provide a high standard of accommodation with appropriate levels of natural light, outlook and private amenity space.

Importantly, despite the increase in unit numbers from the previously approved scheme, the proposed dwellings remain generously proportioned family units with functional internal layouts and appropriately sized habitable accommodation. Each dwelling has been designed as a four-bedroom family home capable of providing a good standard of living accommodation consistent with the objectives of the Nationally Described Space Standards and the wider design principles contained within the NPPF.

The proposed accommodation schedule for each dwelling is set out below:

Room	Proposed Size	Relevant Standard / Guidance
Kitchen / Dining Room	35.0m ²	Exceeds typical family kitchen/diner guidance
Snug / Living Room	9.9m ²	Appropriate secondary living accommodation
Office	7.9m ²	Suitable home working/study space
Utility Room	6.3m ²	No prescribed minimum requirement
Ground Floor WC	3.1m ²	Exceeds functional minimum requirement
Bedroom 1	14.0m ²	Exceeds NDSS minimum double bedroom size of 11.5m ²
Bedroom 2	12.8m ²	Exceeds NDSS minimum double bedroom size of 11.5m ²
Bedroom 3	12.0m ²	Exceeds NDSS minimum double bedroom size of 11.5m ²
Bedroom 4	12.0m ²	Exceeds NDSS minimum double bedroom size of 11.5m ²
Bathroom	5.6m ²	Appropriate family bathroom provision

The overall Gross Internal Area of each dwelling comfortably exceeds the Nationally Described Space Standards requirement for a four-bedroom, eight-person dwellinghouse.

The relationship between the proposed residential units and surrounding equestrian uses is characteristic of rural Kent locations and would not give rise to unacceptable living conditions.

The nearest neighbouring dwellings remain well separated from the site and there would be no unacceptable overlooking, overshadowing or loss of privacy arising from the proposal.

The proposal therefore provides an appropriate standard of residential amenity for both future occupiers and neighbouring residents.

10. Highways and Accessibility

The site benefits from an established vehicular access onto South Street and no objection in principle was raised to the access arrangements under the previously approved scheme.

Appropriate parking provision together with EV charging infrastructure would be provided in accordance with adopted standards.

The previous planning statement identified that there have been no recorded injury accidents in the immediate vicinity of the site access during the relevant assessment period. The site is also located within reasonable proximity to existing bus services operating between Gravesend, Vigo and Sevenoaks.

Whilst the site is situated within a rural location where future occupiers are likely to rely to some extent upon private vehicles, paragraph 109 of the NPPF recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas.

The proposal would not result in severe residual cumulative impacts upon the highway network and therefore accords with the requirements of the NPPF.

11. Ecology and Biodiversity

The application has been informed by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal prepared by KB Ecology Ltd (June 2024).

The site lies adjacent to Steeles Wood and the wider Happy Valley Local Wildlife Site, with areas of ancient woodland present within the surrounding landscape. However, the proposed development relates principally to the conversion and re-use of an existing building within an established developed equestrian complex and would not result in direct impacts upon designated ecological sites or ancient woodland habitats.

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal identifies that the site comprises predominantly managed grassland, hardstanding and existing developed areas associated with the lawful equestrian use. The report concludes that the proposed development can proceed subject to the implementation of appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures.

The development has been designed to minimise ecological impacts whilst providing opportunities for biodiversity enhancement in accordance with the objectives of the NPPF, the Environment Act 2021 and Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

The ecological report identifies the opportunity to incorporate a range of enhancement measures within the development including:

- Native tree and shrub planting;
- Wildflower and pollinator-friendly planting;
- Integrated bat and bird boxes;

- Swift bricks within the converted buildings;
- Hedgehog permeability gaps within fencing;
- Habitat improvements within landscaped areas.

The report also identifies standard precautionary measures during construction including appropriate protection of any sheltering mammals, sensitive vegetation clearance practices and safeguards relating to lighting and ecological connectivity.

Importantly, the proposal would retain the wider vegetated character of the site and would not result in unacceptable fragmentation of habitat corridors.

The proposal therefore accords with the ecological objectives of the NPPF together with Core Strategy Policy CS12. Subject to the implementation of the recommended mitigation and enhancement measures, the development would not result in unacceptable ecological impacts and provides opportunities for measurable biodiversity enhancement.

12. Heritage Impact

The nearest listed building is Leylands Farm Cottage located approximately 165 metres from the site.

Given the separation distance, existing landscape screening and limited nature of the proposed external alterations, the development would preserve the setting and significance of nearby heritage assets.

The proposal therefore accords with Section 16 of the NPPF together with Core Strategy Policy CS18.

13. Housing Delivery and Planning Balance

The proposal would provide five family dwellings within a Borough which continues to experience significant housing delivery pressures.

The previous planning statement correctly identified that Gravesham Borough Council has consistently struggled to demonstrate a robust five-year housing land supply and has underperformed against the Housing Delivery Test. These matters remain material considerations carrying substantial weight in favour of sustainable residential development proposals.

The proposal also represents an efficient use of an existing building and previously developed site in accordance with national planning policy objectives.

Taken as a whole, the proposal would deliver a range of significant public benefits including:

- Delivery of five family homes;
- Re-use of an existing permanent building;

- Reduction in built form through removal of ancillary structures;
- Visual enhancement of the site;
- Biodiversity improvements;
- Sustainable re-use of previously developed land;
- Economic benefits associated with construction and occupation.

14. Conclusion

The application seeks permission for the conversion of an existing barn into five residential units together with associated parking, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.

The principle of residential conversion has already been accepted by the Local Planning Authority through the previously approved three-unit scheme under planning reference 20240604. The current proposal simply represents a more efficient iteration of that accepted development concept.

The proposal involves the sustainable re-use of an existing permanent and substantial building and accords fully with paragraph 155(d) of the NPPF.

The accompanying Structural Assessment confirms that the building is structurally sound and capable of conversion without substantial rebuilding. The proposal would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and would not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

The proposal has additionally been informed by ecological assessment work and incorporates biodiversity enhancement measures consistent with the objectives of the Environment Act 2021 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

The development would deliver meaningful housing, environmental and visual benefits whilst avoiding unacceptable impacts in relation to highways, ecology, residential amenity or heritage assets.

Taken as a whole, the proposal represents sustainable development in accordance with both the Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework and planning permission should therefore be granted without delay.

15. Re-Use of Previously Submitted Technical Reports

The current application has been informed by, and relies upon, a number of technical assessments previously prepared and submitted in support of planning permission reference **20240604**.

In particular, the following reports remain directly relevant to the current proposal:

- Structural Assessment prepared by TSC Consulting Engineers;
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal prepared by KB Ecology Ltd.

The current proposal represents a revision to the internal arrangement of the previously approved residential conversion scheme, increasing the number of units from three to five. Importantly, however, the proposal does not involve any material alteration to the established building footprint, overall scale, siting or principal built form of the development.

The existing barn structure remains unchanged in its fundamental form and the development continues to comprise the conversion and re-use of the same substantial existing building previously assessed and accepted by the Local Planning Authority.

Accordingly, the findings and conclusions of the Structural Assessment remain wholly applicable to the current proposal. The report confirmed that the building is structurally sound, capable of conversion and suitable for re-use without substantial reconstruction or significant structural intervention. The revised internal arrangement does not alter those conclusions.

Similarly, the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal remains relevant and applicable given that the extent of physical development, land take and ecological interface with surrounding habitats remains materially unchanged from the previously approved scheme.

The current proposal continues to:

- Utilise the same existing building footprint;
- Avoid encroachment into adjacent vegetated areas;
- Retain the established developed character of the site;
- Avoid direct impacts upon nearby ancient woodland and the Local Wildlife Site.

The ecological mitigation and enhancement measures identified within the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal remain capable of implementation as part of the revised scheme and continue to provide an appropriate framework for ecological protection and biodiversity enhancement.

Given the limited nature of the changes proposed when compared to the previously approved scheme, it is considered entirely reasonable and proportionate for the existing technical assessments to be relied upon in support of the current application.