

Overview

The property comprises Holy Vale Farmhouse, four cottages/flats, and three redundant outbuildings. They were purchased by our client from the Duchy of Cornwall in 2011, at which time they had been unoccupied for over a year. They were generally in a poor state of repair, and in need of refurbishment.

The four cottages/flats were put back into serviceable order, and have been let to local residents for the past five years. The farmhouse was comprehensively refurbished, re-structured and extended during 2011/12, and for five seasons has now provided high quality holiday accommodation for our seasonal visitors. Its Five Star Gold Award grading by Visit Britain reflects the standard of the accommodation, and the excellent occupancy rates prove the demand for high quality holiday accommodation.

It is our client's intention to continue with a rolling program of refurbishment, until the entire holding is brought up to a high standard worthy of this exceptional location. These plans include re-structuring of the existing cottages/flats, to reduce the number of bedspaces but improve the quality of the accommodation, and to bring the redundant outbuildings back into beneficial residential use. Our client envisages a mixed community of both permanent and seasonal holiday accommodation, with the majority of the accommodation providing full-time homes.

To summarise, the current proposals show the following:

Existing Farmhouse, cottages and flats

Holy Vale Farmhouse:	Minor internal restructuring only.
Camelia Cottage:	Restructuring and refurbishment. Retention of two bedrooms.
Magnolia Cottage:	Restructuring and refurbishment. Reduction from two bedrooms to one bedroom.
Honeysuckle Flat:	Internal refurbishment. Retention of two bedrooms.
The Old Dairy:	Internal refurbishment. Reduction from two bedrooms to one bedroom.

Within the existing residential accommodation there has therefore been the loss of two bedrooms (four bed spaces), in order to improve the quality of the accommodation.

Outbuildings

Packing Shed:	Conversion to one bedroom holiday cottage.
Granite Barn (East):	Conversion to two-bedroom house and one-bedroom manager's cottage.
Granite Barn (West):	Conversion to two bedroom house.

Within the outbuildings there has therefore been the addition of four units of accommodation, totalling six bedrooms (twelve bed spaces).

The proposed development therefore shows a net gain of eight bed spaces.

Rationale for Development

The outbuildings are traditional farm buildings, sadly now poorly suited to the demands and needs of modern farming. They were separated from the farm some years ago, much of which is now used as Holy Vale Vineyard, which has its own modern buildings. Because of their limited heights internally, and small openings, they are unsuitable for agricultural use, and indeed for other commercial uses; our client has been unsuccessful in securing tenants for storage and / or workshop use, despite looking for occupiers over a period of years. This is presumably due to the availability of modern accommodation in more central locations such as Porthmellon Industrial Estate and Moorwell Lane.

The National Planning Policy Framework supports such conversion of commercial buildings to residential use stating:

“Local planning authorities should identify and bring back into residential use empty housing and buildings..... They should normally approve planning applications for change to residential use and any associated development from commercial buildings.....where there is an identified need for additional housing in that area.....”

The outbuildings lend themselves well to conversion to residential accommodation, a use which harmonises well with other uses in the locality. Holy Vale is in itself a small residential community of both permanent and holiday accommodation, in addition to the Vineyard and remaining farm.

Design

The alterations to the existing cottages and flats are internal only. They will create better proportioned, and more useable, accommodation, albeit with the loss of two bedrooms. Camelia Cottage and Magnolia Cottage in particular will be divided purely vertically, rather than the current vertical/horizontal division, and will therefore re-create two traditional cottages.

The over-riding principle of the outbuildings design is to interfere as little as possible with the existing fabric of the buildings, particularly the prominent Easterly facing gables, whilst creating high-quality residential accommodation with good natural light levels.

The appearance of the eastern elevation will be largely unchanged. The granite walls (in all areas of the outbuildings) will be re-pointed with traditional lime mortar, and the existing sliding doors and cast iron tracks/rollers will be overhauled and reinstated, with new timber glazed doors installed behind.

The existing double-roman clay tiles will be removed from the roofs of the barns, and reinstated on the completed scheme. Light will be introduced into the units of accommodation through conservation-style roof windows; the majority of these will be on the north-facing roof slopes, where they can only be viewed from the gardens, or hidden on the south-facing slopes, again invisible from the public highway.

Existing windows and doors will be replaced with new, bespoke timber units, of a simple complementary design to the originals, having a painted finish with a colour to be agreed.

Each of the new units (except the manager's cottage) will be allocated its own area of private, outside garden space, including off-street car parking.

Benefits of the Proposed Scheme

We consider the proposals have numerous merits, including but not restricted to:

1. Bringing into beneficial use redundant farm buildings that would otherwise fall into disrepair.
2. Preservation of the character of the rural environment.
3. Supporting a prosperous rural economy, through the provision of high quality holiday accommodation and the employment it supports.
4. The provision of new units of accommodation to meet the housing needs of the islands, without the need to build on green-field land and within the curtilage of an existing rural hamlet. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) specifically encourages "*the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land)*".

Imposition of Occupancy Restrictions

Because of the high costs of conversion, refurbishment of the outbuildings will not be economically viable if the Local Planning Authority should seek to impose occupancy restrictions on all of the completed units, either by way of planning condition or legal agreement. A heavily restricted scheme would not justify the significant capital investment, nor permit access to loan finance, and the buildings will therefore continue to deteriorate and fall into disrepair.

We would therefore ask the Isles of Scilly Council Planning Committee to consider the planning application on the basis of national, rather than exclusively local planning policies, and in support of this request make the following observations:

1. Our client currently owns five units of accommodation at Holy Vale, none of which are subject to any planning restrictions. One of these units, only Holy Vale Farmhouse is used for holiday letting accommodation, with the remaining four units (80% of the whole) being used for housing local people. Surely this demonstrates clearly that it is not necessary to impose planning restrictions to create housing for local people.
2. The existing Local Plan is out of date. Adopted in November 2005, and based on information pre-dating the plan by several years, it is arguably a time-expired document. Since its adoption, the islands have been through massive changes, not least the worst recession in post-war history, a sizeable reduction in the value of the tourist industry, the loss of our helicopter service and structural changes in the size of households. The islands are a different place today than they were in 2005, and we would argue that existing planning policy, as detailed in the Local Plan, is now largely obsolete.
3. The existing Local Plan has, arguably, failed to deliver an adequate stock of local housing. The total number of houses built by the private sector since the plan's implementation is limited, and many of those consents passed by committee, subject to S106 Legal Agreements, were built without the agreements being signed or their conditions enforced. As such, by the passage of time, open market housing has been created by the very Local

Plan that sought to restrict it. A significant number of other “Local Needs” houses are now used for commercial purposes, including guest houses, holiday flats, HMOs and others.

4. The NPPF states that *“the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development”*, and lists three dimensions to sustainable development: *economic, social and environmental*”. It goes on to state:

“Pursuing sustainable development involves seeking positive improvements in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment, as well as in people’s quality of life, including (but not limited to):

- *making it easier for jobs to be created in cities, towns and villages;*
- *moving from a net loss of bio-diversity to achieving net gains for nature;⁶*
- *replacing poor design with better design;*
- *improving the conditions in which people live, work, travel and take leisure; and*
- *widening the choice of high quality homes”.*

We would argue that the conversion of the outbuildings at Holy Vale enhances the creation of employment, replaces poor (redundant) design with better design, will improve the conditions in which people live, and will widen the choice of high quality homes.

5. At the heart of the NPPF is *“a **presumption in favour of sustainable development**”*, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.

For **decision-taking** this means:

- *approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and*
- ***where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission unless:***
 - *any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or*
 - *specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted”.*

We would strongly argue that the policies in the Isles of Scilly Local Plan, adopted 2005, are out of date, and that this application should therefore be considered primarily in the light of national policies.

6. The NPPF imposes an obligation on the planning system to support a prosperous rural economy, and states:

“Planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. To promote a strong rural economy, local and neighbourhood plans should:

- **support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings;**
- **support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside.** This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres.....”

The inclusion of holiday accommodation within the overall scheme at Holy Vale does, in our opinion, meet national planning policy, as the high occupancy rates and excellent visitor feedback from Holy Vale Farmhouse confirms the demand for quality accommodation in such a rural setting.

7. The NPPF requires the delivery of **“a wide choice of high quality homes”**. It states:

“To boost significantly the supply of housing, local planning authorities should:

- *use their evidence base to ensure that their Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, as far as is consistent with the policies set out in this Framework, including identifying key sites which are critical to the delivery of the housing strategy over the plan period;*
- *identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years worth of housing against their housing requirements.....to provide a realistic prospect of achieving the planned supply and to ensure choice and competition in the market for land;*
- *identify a supply of specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth, for years 6-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15;*
- *for market and affordable housing, illustrate the expected rate of housing delivery through a housing trajectory for the plan period and set out a housing implementation strategy for the full range of housing describing how they will maintain delivery of a five-year supply of housing land to meet their housing target; and*
- *set out their own approach to housing density to reflect local circumstances”.*

It goes on to state **“Housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up-to-date if the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites”**, and that:

“to deliver a wide choice of high quality homes, widen opportunities for home ownership and create sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities, local planning authorities should:

- **plan for a mix of housing based on current and future demographic trends, market trends and the needs of different groups in the community (such as, but not limited to, families with children, older people, people with disabilities, service families and people wishing to build their own homes);**

- *identify the size, type, tenure and range of housing that is required in particular locations, reflecting local demand; and*
- *where they have identified that affordable housing is needed, set policies for meeting this need on site, unless off-site provision or a financial contribution of broadly equivalent value can be robustly justified (for example to improve or make more effective use of the existing housing stock) and the agreed approach contributes to the objective of creating mixed and balanced communities. Such policies should be sufficiently flexible to take account of changing market conditions over time”.*

The message is clear; it refers to “a wide choice of quality homes”, not just those restricted by way of condition or legal agreement, and must therefore include open market housing.

In the absence of a current five-year Housing Needs Plan, we would therefore argue that this planning application should be considered in the light of national planning policy.

Summary

We believe the proposed redevelopment of the properties are in accordance with national planning policy, and will enhance both the housing stock and economy of the islands.

We thank the Planning Committee of the Council of the Isles of Scilly for giving this planning application due consideration.