

Rowden House Farm

Fenn Lanes, Lindley, near Fenny Drayton, Nuneaton CV13 6BP



Design & Access / Planning Statement: Proposed Conversion of Stable Block to Single-Storey Dwelling

Mark Singlehurst, BA (Hons), DipTP



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1.0 Introduction: Site Location, Description, Context, History and Planning History

1.1 Rowden House Farm is located at Lindley, near Fenny Drayton, between Fenn Lanes and the A5 Watling Street, a short distance north of Nuneaton. It was formerly one of eight farms on the Lindley Hall Estate and lies adjacent to the former Lindley Park and site of Lindley Hall, which were situated to the west of the farm. Its modern near neighbour is the MIRA Technology Park, which occupies the site of the former RAF Lindley airfield and barracks (1943-1946). MIRA took over the site as a proving ground in the autumn of 1948.

1.2 The Rowden House farmhouse is not a statutory listed building, although it is clearly of some antiquity, as it still contains vestiges of timber framing. Its early history is obscure, but the farm can be traced back in newspaper archives under this name to the beginning of 1818, when it was part of the Lindley Hall Estate and tenanted by William Morewood. Samuel Bracebridge had purchased the manors of Higham-on-the-Hill, Lindley, Rowden and Fenny Drayton in 1739, but he had rebuilt the older Lindley Hall around 1705. Captain Vincent Eyre and his wife had taken over the Hall by the mid-1870s. William Morewood sold his livestock and implements in January 1845, which included 20 dairy cows, 170 sheep and some draught horses. By 1865, the tenant at Rowden House was George Sydney, son of the late T. Smith of Blore Hall in Staffordshire. A Mr. F. R. Browning was resident by November 1871, but was preparing to leave by September 1873, the farm being then described as a “capital dairy or feeding farm” of 284 acres, 160 of which were under grass, including 50 acres of Lindley Park.

1.3 A Mr. W. Morkill relinquished farming at Rowden House in March 1877, selling by auction some 100 grand Shropshire ewes and tegs, 25 head of cattle and 13 nag and cart horses, besides much modern agricultural implements, some of prize-winning quality. When the Rowden House Dairy Farm was up for let again, in 1878, it was still 284 acres, described as comprising 158 acres of old meadow and pastureland, 51 acres of new turf and 74 acres of arable land. John Robinson was the farmer in September 1889, when he was preparing to leave and selling off stocks of hay and clover. At the close of 1890, Alastair Riley, agent to Captain Eyre, was living at Rowden House. In March 1894, Mrs. Eyre was “resigning occupation” of Rowden House and Fenn Lane Farms, selling the whole of the live and dead farming stock and many modern agricultural implements and items of machinery. The former included 73 Angus and Shorthorn cows, 126 Shropshire sheep, 17 cart horses and colts and 35 Berkshire and cross-bred pigs.

1.4 By February 1914, Captain V. T. Eyre was selling livestock by auction again, the farm having been re-let. This included 110 cattle, 131 sheep, 5 cart geldings, 10 polo and nag horses, 11 pigs, plus poultry, implements, etc. James Buchanan was the farmer in April 1919, but a year later the whole Lindley Hall Estate was up for sale, together with the lordships of the manors, totalling 1,810 acres, including the mansion and its parkland, 263 acres at Rowden House Farm, seven other farms, plus cottages and so on. In the event, Rowden House Farm was not offered as the adjoining Hall and Park did not sell, so these remained in Eyre ownership for the time being and Mr Buchanan remained the tenant farmer at Rowden House. He featured in the *International Directory of Pedigree Stock Breeders* in 1926.

1.5 Finally, in July 1930, the *Midland Counties Tribune* announced that Alderman T. Slack of Witherley had bought most of the remainder of the Lindley Hall Estate, including Lindley Park and the site of the now demolished Hall, and the adjoining Rowden House Farm. This left only one of

the original eight farms in the hands of the Eyre family, Despite the sale, James Buchanan remained the farmer at Rowden House, seemingly until his premature death at the age of 60, in June 1933. His executors auctioned off 7 horses, 51 head of cattle, 154 sheep, 3 pigs plus implements and barn machinery in February 1934. A Mr. E. Bates was then briefly the farmer, leaving in February 1936. During and after the war, a Mr and Mrs A. Taylor were living at Rowden House, followed by a Mr. G. Towers until September 1951, when 172 acres were again up for auction.

1.6 Thomas Edward Brittain came to Rowden House as bailiff to Vincent Eyre at some point before his death in March 1954, but his newspaper obituary indicates he had been a farmer at Fenny Drayton for some time after that, so his period at Rowden is not specified, though it was presumably prior to 1930. By 1956, Henry (Harry) Frederick Williams was the farmer, but he was tragically found dead in a ditch one night in November 1957, aged only 41. Although the farm was put up for sale again, it remained in the hands of the Williams family until at least the early 1970s. By the time it was up for sale again, in January 1983, the attached farmland had shrunk to just 40 acres. It sold that March for £98,000. A Mr D. Wilkinson was living at Rowden House in June 1989 and ten years later it was the base for his building and civil engineering business. The most recent sale included just 6.5 acres of grounds and the house's internal space was said to be 542 square metres. It was no longer operating as a commercial farm although a stable block and paddock was included in the grounds.

1.7 There is an extensive planning history which shows agricultural usage ceasing during the 1980s. There were various planning permissions thereafter to convert agricultural buildings into separate dwellings or ancillary living accommodation:

- 89/00608/4: convert existing barns to 2 dwellings (renewed in 1994 by 94/00828/COU)
- 96/00674/COU: amended scheme for the above
- 99/00806/COU: conversion of agricultural building to ancillary living accommodation
- 03/01023/COU: conversion of agricultural building to ancillary living accommodation
- 04/00258/FUL: conversion of agricultural building to single dwelling
- 22/00126/HOU: two storey extension to form attached residential annexe.

1.8 There were also several permissions for changes of use to commercial, B1 industrial and B8 storage and distribution uses:

- 97/00513/CLU: certificate of existing lawful use for commercial fishing
- 98/00896/CLU: certificate of existing lawful use for storage of plant, equipment, lorries and building materials; and repair and maintenance of equipment
- 02/01276/FUL: extension to existing storage building change of use of redundant agricultural building to class B1 use and extension to existing vehicle parking area
- 20/00604/FUL: change of use to B8 storage and distribution of goods.

1.9 A few other permissions have been granted:

- 90/01037/4: erection of noise bund
- 21/00890/HOU: three-bay garage
- 21/01202/FUL: erection of new barn.

1.10 Finally, there has been one recent refusal and one pre-application advice document advising that a similar new-build proposal would be unlikely to be granted permission:

- 24/01020/FUL: erection of a self-build bungalow and garage
- 25/10044/PREHMO: erection of a detached (self-build) dwelling

1.11 The basic reasons for the negative outcome to these two proposals was that *“The proposal represents new and unjustified residential development beyond any identified settlement boundary in an isolated location that suffers from poor transport sustainability whereby the future occupants of the scheme are dependent on private motorised transport to meet their day-to-day needs. This results in significant harm to the environment and the character of the surrounding area, and the intrinsic value, beauty, open character, and landscape character of the countryside.”*

2.0 The Proposals

2.1 The current proposal is to convert an existing small stable block (with four stalls) and a fenced, hard-surfaced exercise yard immediately to the north-west, together with part of an associated paddock to the south-west and south-east, all of which have previously been used for the private recreation of residents of Rowden House Farm, into a single-storey bungalow dwelling with two bedrooms and an associated garden/amenity area.

2.2 Externally, the existing structure would be kept, with the existing deteriorated corrugated metal roof covering replaced to a similar profile and material, the existing horizontal timber boarding and uprights retained and redecorated, or augmented where necessary for infilling or repositioning redundant openings and bringing forward the existing recessed walls beneath the canopy overhangs at the front elevations of the ‘L’ shaped stable block. Three windows would be added to the existing blank rear (north-east) elevation and one to the existing blank side (north-west) elevation. A door would be added to the recessed part of the south-east elevation, on the site of one of the two existing doors, and a small window would be removed. On the front (south-west) elevation, two sets of four-part, glazed folding doors and one smaller window would replace the existing three stable doors and two small windows.

2.3 Internally, some subdividing walls would be retained. The remaining front walls under the overhang would be brought forward to the eaves and other internal subdivisions modified to achieve a satisfactory living environment. The existing four stalls would be replaced by a combined living and dining room, kitchen area, bathroom, two bedrooms and a hall passage.

2.4 The footprint of the building would remain as existing, with the outer dimensions being 11.9 by 8.1 metres, and the elevations beneath the overhang being 3.4 metres and 7.2 metres. The heights would also remain the same: 2.2 metres to the eaves and 3.4 metres to the roof ridge or apex. The total floor area of the ‘L’ shaped building would therefore be 71.91 square metres. New doors and window-frames would be of wood and glass with uPVC rainwater goods (gutters and downpipes), the stormwater draining to a soakaway with a sustainable drainage system. Foul sewage would go to a BioKube or biodigester.

2.5 Part of the existing paddock area would become the garden to the residential conversion, enclosed by a timber post-and-rail fence to match others in the immediate vicinity. The existing hard-surfaced and fenced exercise yard to the north-west of the stables would be replaced by a grassed, open area as part of the garden to the proposed residential conversion. At the request of the planning officer, the original enclosed (grassed) garden area has been reduced from the original 1,162 square metres down to 800 square metres (or 728.09 square metres excluding the building); the hard-surfaced (gravelled) access, turning area and four parking bays would cover 159 square metres; and the paved patio and bin storage areas adjacent to the building 16 and 29 square metres respectively (45 square metres overall). The parking bays have been enlarged to 2.5 by 5.5 metres.

2.6 The whole domestic site area (within the post-and-rail fence) would therefore now amount to 1,371 square metres, but to this is added 5,000 square metres (0.5 hectares) of 'biodiversity net gain' land, as a meandering strip of land south-west of the main application site and surrounding the main farmhouse to the north and east. A separation gap of 31 metres has been left between the south-western perimeter of the formal garden/amenity area and the start of the biodiversity strip. This brings the total land involved to 6,371 square metres, but if the whole length of the access track from Fenn Lanes is included within the red line application area (2,781 square metres) this brings the total to approximately 9,152 square metres.



Above and below: the existing stable block and fenced exercise yard



3.0 Relevant National and Local Planning Policies

3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework of December 2024 (as amended in February 2025) contains the following:

“84. Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply:

... c) the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting”.

3.2 This exception applies in this case, as the stables are now surplus to the site owner’s requirements, since the remaining horse kept on the site belongs to the applicants’ daughter, who will shortly be moving out of the area and thereafter keeping her horse in livery not far from her new place of residence. The conversion to a dwelling would certainly enhance the appearance of the building itself, the roof of which (in particular) has become quite shabby, and the majority of that part of the paddock that would be assigned to the converted building as garden land/residential curtilage would remain under grass.

3.3 The Hinckley and Bosworth Local Development Scheme does not include a settlement hierarchy policy as such, although the Core Strategy (2009) does refer to a distinction between Key Rural Centres, Rural Villages and Rural Hamlets. The nearest equivalent, in terms of guiding development away from open countryside, is the Policy DM4 in the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies document (SA&DMP) adopted in 2016. The Local Plan policy reflects the stance taken in the NPPF (paragraph 84) and is similarly worded:

“Development in the countryside will be considered sustainable where: ...

b) The proposal involves the change of use, re-use or extension of existing buildings which lead to the enhancement of the immediate setting; ...”

3.4 Paragraph 14.60 of the SA&DMP adds further detail in respect of this policy:

“The re-use of existing rural buildings will be particularly supported where they are located close to settlements, as identified in the Core Strategy. Where buildings are isolated, or where the existing access via sustainable modes of transport is poor, proposals for their re-use which lead to a significant intensification of activities are unlikely to be supported.”

3.5 The current proposal is to convert the existing four-stall stable block into a two-bedroomed, single-storey dwelling. This is unlikely to result in a “significant intensification” of vehicular movements or activity, given that the keeping of horses involves the transportation of feedstuffs, bedding, tackle, vets and grooms and/or stable hands, and so on. Several previous applications to convert existing agricultural buildings on the site into dwellings have been deemed acceptable in this respect (see paragraph 1.7 above).

3.6 A previous planning application by others for a bungalow on the Rowden House Farm site (24/01020/FUL) was refused on 17/01/2025 in part because *“The proposal represents new and unjustified residential development beyond any identified settlement boundary in an isolated*

location that suffers from poor transport sustainability whereby the future occupants of the scheme are dependent on private motorised transport to meet their day-to-day needs.”

Isolation and Sustainability Issues

3.7 In view of this and paragraph 14.60 of the SA&DMP, we address this issue of ‘isolation’ and consider how that term ought properly to be understood. Several policies in the Local Plan deal with sustainability and the isolation issue, which has often been raised before. It is common for local planning authorities to interpret ‘isolation’ in the fairly narrow sense of a proposed dwelling being isolated from easy access to shops and local services either within the immediate locality, or within easy walking distance, or a short bicycle ride, or by public transport where a bus stop can be easily reached.

3.8 In this regard, the ‘isolation’ issue has again been resolved by the Court of Appeal. The key judgment here is [2018] EWCA Civ. 610 in the Court of Appeal, Braintree District Council vs. (1) Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, (2) Greyread Ltd. and (3) Granville Developments. The Council had appealed against the order, dismissing its challenge to the decision of an inspector who allowed appeals by Greyread Ltd. and Granville Developments, respectively under sections 174 and of the 1990 Planning Act. Granville’s section 78 appeal was against the council’s refusal, on 13 April 2016, of an application to erect two detached single-storey dwellings on the sites of two agricultural buildings on land to the east of Lower Green Road, Blackmore End, Wethersfield, Essex.

3.9 In this case, the question to be decided was: did an inspector determining a planning appeal misinterpret and misapply government policy in paragraph 55 of the National Planning Policy Framework (“the NPPF”) to the effect that local planning authorities “should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances ...”? This was a lengthy judgment, and in the present case no new-build homes are involved, but we consider the following extracts to be of particular relevance to the general question of ‘isolation’:

1. Paragraph 14: The word “isolated” in paragraph 55 is not defined in the NPPF but should be given its “ordinary objective meaning of “far away from other places, buildings or people; remote” ...” The council’s “analysis of the policy context [was] far too narrow in scope” since the policy in favour of locating housing “where it will “enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities”” was “**not limited to economic benefits**”. The word “vitality” was “broad in scope and includes the social role of sustainable development ...”. The council’s restriction of “isolated” homes to those that were “isolated from services and facilities” would “deny policy support to **a rural home that could contribute to social sustainability because of its proximity to other homes**”. Paragraph 55 of the NPPF “cannot be read as a policy against development in settlements without facilities and services since it expressly recognises that development in a small village may enhance and maintain services in a neighbouring village, as people travel to use them”. Whilst Lindley is clearly not a village or a settlement in the nucleated sense, it is a scattered rural grouping of homes, and therefore an additional home created within an existing building could assist in making the existing scattered community more socially sustainable without increasing the amount of built development in this rural setting.

2. Paragraph 18: "...the relevant definition of previously developed land took as its starting point that the proposed development would be within the curtilage of an existing permanent structure, and it followed, therefore, that "a new dwelling within that curtilage will not be an 'isolated' home" for the purposes of the policy in paragraph 55." The existing stable block is used only by the residents of Rowden House Farm and its ancillary dwellings and is therefore clearly part of the same curtilage.
3. Paragraph 27: "Planning policies, whether in the development plan or in the NPPF, ought never to be over-interpreted. As this case shows, over-interpretation of a policy can distort its true meaning – which is misinterpretation."
4. Paragraph 32: "What constitutes a settlement for these purposes is also left undefined in the NPPF. The NPPF contains no definitions of a "community", a "settlement", or a "village". There is no specified minimum number of dwellings, or population. It is not said that a settlement or development boundary must have been fixed in an adopted or emerging local plan, or that only the land and buildings within that settlement or development boundary will constitute the settlement. In my view a settlement would not necessarily exclude a hamlet or a cluster of dwellings, without, for example, a shop or post office of its own, or a school or community hall or a public house nearby, or public transport within easy reach. ... In the second sentence of paragraph 55 the policy acknowledges that development in one village may "support services" in another. It does not stipulate that, to be a "village", a settlement must have any "services" of its own, let alone "services" of any specified kind.
5. Paragraph 39: "I do not accept Dr Bowes' argument that the word "isolated" in paragraph 55 must be understood as meaning either (a) "physically isolated" or (b) "functionally isolated" or "isolated from services and facilities"; ... and that if the proposed development would be either separate or remote from other dwellings or separate or remote from services and facilities, it offends the policy. This would be a strained and unnatural reading of the policy."
6. Paragraph 41: "A policy directed to enhancing and maintaining the "vitality" of rural communities is a policy that embraces the "social" dimension of sustainable development. ...To restrict the concept of an "isolated home" to one that is "isolated from services and facilities" would be to deny the policy's support [for] – indeed, would turn it against – proposed dwellings that "could contribute to social sustainability because of [their] proximity to other homes". This would seem contrary to the aim of the policy to maintain and enhance "the vitality of rural communities" and would diminish the acknowledged benefit of development in one settlement supporting "services" in another."

3.10 Thus 'isolation' means just that, in the normally understood senses of the word. The application site is not isolated. It is close to a number of other residential properties and also to a large technology park site, within walking distance (via Mira Drive) of a bus route providing access to numerous facilities, along with cycling opportunities. Nowadays, food and other essentials, as well as many other services, can be ordered via the Internet or telephone and delivered to the home. There are, in addition to the facilities that can be reached by car or bus or taxi, many mobile services in the district that can be booked in these ways, and orders for home deliveries of food and other supplies can be made from supermarkets in the nearby towns. Moreover, services like Uber provide a more flexible and less expensive alternative to traditional taxis, so there is no true isolation.

3.11 It is true that Fenny Drayton and Higham on the Hill, as the nearest villages of any size, have few facilities of their own. The Fenny Drayton village website refers to a primary school, a village hall, post office and public house (Blue Lion), with a Co-op store 2 miles away and a Spar 2.9 miles away. It is Higham on the Hill parish that covers the Lindley district. There used to be a corner newsagent and convenience store, ‘Sehmbi Stores’, at 44 Main Street, but that closed in 2021. The Fox Inn closed in 2012 and the last pub, the Oddfellows Arms, in 2018 – so there are no longer any local shops or services, except the parish church, Methodist Church, Community Centre and primary school. There is a small industrial estate at Station Yard, Station Road, and Spinney Bank Farm Shop is also located 0.87 miles to the north-east of Higham’s Main Street. Wide View Farm on Fenn Lanes, near to both Fenny Drayton and Lindley, advertises the Atherstone Farmers’ Market on Saturdays and also offers fresh eggs for sale.

3.12 Moreover, it is only a four-minute drive or bus ride to Stoke Golding, where a good range of shops and services may be found: another ‘Sehmbi Stores’ convenience store, three pubs and a club, the Baxter Community Hall, two primary schools, three churches, four farms/farm produce outlets (including Tomlinson’s Farm Shop), three halls for hire, a medical centre/surgery, hairdresser, car repairs and servicing (Eskdale Motors) and various building services (painter/decorator, windows and carpentry service, domestic plumber).

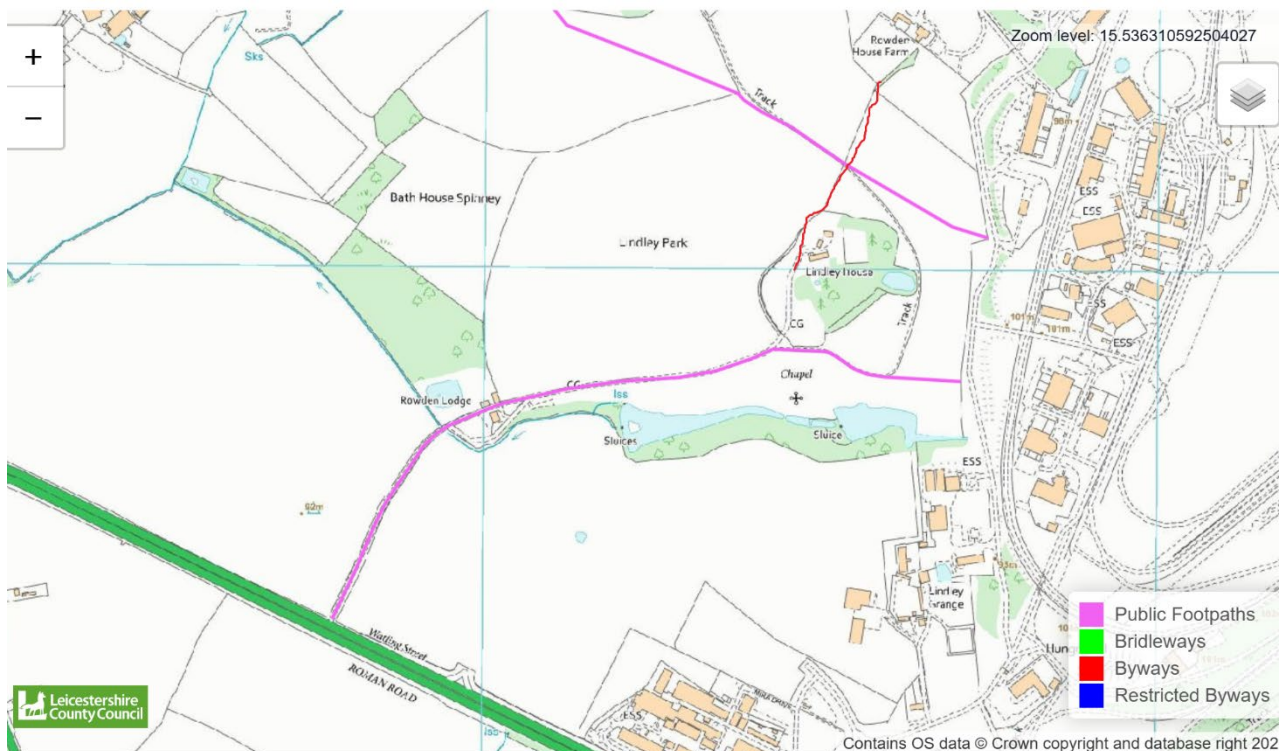
3.13 There is also a bus service between Hinckley and Nuneaton, route 66, which serves Stoke Golding, Higham on the Hill and the MIRA Technology Park. It runs hourly between 07:00 and 19:00. According to the MIRA Technology Park’s ‘Welcome Information’ booklet, bus services 65, 6/6A, 7 and 158 also call at the Technology Park, which, of course, is very close to Rowden House Farm. Thus, there are bus services serving the MIRA site from Tamworth, Atherstone and Hinckley, the Morris events centre and a number of other businesses, along with the government office VCA Midlands, so there is a wide opportunity for access to work. In combination, the bus services runs approximately every 30 minutes during normal operational hours.

3.14 The pre-application advice for the 25/10044/PREHMO application suggested that the site for the (then) proposed new-build dwelling was indeed isolated because of the need to traverse a 1.3km unlit private track to reach Fenn Lanes and a further substantial distance to access a bus route. Including this distance, the application site lies some 2.5 km (1.5 miles) from Fenny Drayton to the east and 6.3 km (3.9 miles) from Higham on the Hill to the south, both villages having few facilities of their own. Furthermore, the closest Key Rural Centre is Stoke Golding, which is 6.4 km (3.98 miles) to the east. Whilst the boundaries of MIRA Technology Park are adjacent to the application site, the access to the Technology Park by foot or by car is 5 km (3.1 miles) from the site, following the westward route towards Fenn Lanes. The LPA suggests that these areas can only be accessed via Fenn Lanes, which is an unlit classified ‘C’ road subject to a 50-mph speed limit.

3.15 Whilst this is true for residents accessing the site by private car, there is, in fact, a pedestrian route from Fenn Lanes and Rowden House Farm to Mira Lane, and beyond to the east, complete with pedestrian crossing over Mira Lane, which can be seen in the Google Earth image reproduced below (top of page 10). The pedestrian routes are indicated by the red lines superimposed on the aerial photograph. There is no official public footpath access from here down on to the A5, but there are public footpaths that cross the fields to the south of Rowden House Farm that could be used in clement weather for that purpose.



3.16 The client advises there is a short stretch of byway which runs from the Rowden House Farm property southwards to Lindley House (marked in red on the provided map extract reproduced below). From that point the path continues southwards as a private track (shown by the black hatched lines) across all of which the owners of Rowden House Farm have right of way. That path links to the public footpath which runs south-westwards to reach the A5 Watling Street. A short walk south-eastwards along Watling Street leads to the bus stop at the bottom end of Mira Drive. This is a much shorter route than following the track running north-westwards from Rowden House out to Fenn Lanes and then following Fenn Lanes south-westwards to join the A444 Atherstone Road, past Fenny Drayton to join the Watling Street much further west – which the local planning authority has previously suggested is the only available pedestrian route to reach the bus stop.



3.17 The site is not ‘socially’ isolated either, inasmuch as Lindley Hall Farm lies to the north-west of Rowden House Farm and there are other scattered residential properties in the vicinity: Rowden Cottage, Rowden Lodge, Lindley House, The King’s Lodge (YWAM, formerly Lindley Lodge), and two old cottages on Wood Lane. Then, of course, there are the nearby villages of Higham on the Hill, Dadlington, Fenny Drayton and Caldecote, together with the Nuneaton suburb of Weddington. The local churches provide some community services, such as coffee mornings, and the YWAM base occasionally puts on special events (such as their ‘Winter Wonderland’ event at Christmas) to which the local community are invited. The MIRA Technology Park, while not a residential development, nevertheless forms a hub of busy business activity which would make it difficult to regard Rowden House Farm as an isolated property at the present time. The Technology Park is home to around 40 companies and includes its own gym, food hub and coffee shop. Its presence has no doubt helped to encourage the local bus service providers to stop in this locality more frequently and for a greater number of routes.

3.18 In conclusion, the occupiers of the proposed new dwelling would not be fully reliant on a motor car for access to services and leisure facilities. On this point, the NPPF recognises that in rural areas, the lack of easy access to public transport is not something that should necessarily restrict development (paragraph 89). The access track or road to the west that is associated with the farm gives access, by walking or cycling, to MIRA Drive, which is the main access to the various businesses which operate from the Technology Park and Testing Ground site. Mira Drive itself leads southwards towards the A5 Watling Street.

3.19 The site is within a cycle ride to St Chad’s Church and the village hall at Caldecote. The ‘Red Gate’ public house sits alongside the A5 (Watling Street) and has its own designated cycle track in the required section to reach these facilities.

3.20 Perhaps the most directly relevant policy in the SA&DMP is DM15 (Redundant Rural Buildings), which sets out the following requirements:

“Proposed development outside the settlement boundary for the re-use and/or adaptation of redundant or disused rural buildings will be supported where:

- a) The applicant demonstrates the building is no longer viable in its current use;*
- b) The applicant has adequately demonstrated the building is in a structurally sound condition and is capable of conversion without significant rebuild or alteration; and*
- c) Any proposed extension(s) or alterations are proportionate to the size, scale, mass and footprint of the original building and situated within the original curtilage; and*
- d) The proposed development accords with Policy DM10: Development and Design and relevant design guidance, DM11: Protecting and Enhancing the Historic Environment and DM12: Heritage Assets.*

All development proposals for the re-use of redundant rural buildings should result in the enhancement of the immediate setting.”

3.21 The small stable block was erected for the applicants' daughter to be able to keep and exercise her horse at home; the daughter will soon be leaving home and moving out of the local area. She will take her horse with her and keep it at a livery stable near her new home – after which the domestic stable block and enclosed paddock will become redundant for their original purpose.

Structural Integrity and Suitability for Conversion

3.22 The existing stables building is of sound construction and capable of conversion without the need for major reconstruction or structural alteration, or any enlargement of its existing footprint and volume, or major changes in the building's materials, design or general appearance from a distance. It will, however, be necessary to replace the deteriorated existing roof covering with new sheeting of the same character and appearance. The building's structural integrity and capability for conversion to residential use is confirmed in the structural report accompanying this application, the findings and conclusions of which are summarised below.

3.23 The Structural Engineer's Report by B. K. Consultants of Coventry states that the stables are housed in an L-shaped timber structure with a concrete floor, supported on vertical timber studs 75 by 32 mm at 600 mm centres, the external timber cladding being 19 mm thick tongue and groove boards. The 'A' shaped symmetric roof is supported on timber purlins and internal stud partitions at 600 mm centres. The timber structure is assessed as being in good condition and should only need to be cleaned and treated with a proprietary wood preserver to make it suitable for renovation and conversion into a dwelling. However, the existing corrugated bituminous roofing sheets or panels have distorted and sagged over time, caused by long-term weathering (repeated heating and cooling of the material) and it is recommended that these sheets be replaced with lightweight steel roof sheets to a similar profile and colour coating.

Ecology and Biodiversity

3.24 Arbtech Consulting Limited of Chester has been commissioned by the applicant to carry out a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment on the affected land, which was completed earlier this month (January 2026). The results now presented as part of this application include the main report and also the Biodiversity Metric Calculations, presented as a multi-layered Excel worksheet. The baseline area habitat units were 0.55, comprising 0.19 units of good modified grassland west of the stables (that is, the enclosed paddock) and 0.36 units of poor modified grassland to the south. The retained, meandering strip of modified grassland to the south-west is to be planted with 20 small fruit-bearing trees, offsetting the loss of some of the modified grassland in the northern part of the application site and resulting in a net gain for biodiversity of 0.07 units, or a 12.97% increase in area habitat units. No additional units in any category will be needed to meet the required targets.

3.25 Since the Ecology consultee has asked for additional information since the original BNG Assessment was prepared, a revised version is now submitted which addresses the points raised:

- Confirmation that this will not be a self-build project and that therefore the biodiversity net gain condition is applicable;
- Completion of the start page of BNG Metric calculation worksheet;
- Provision of additional photographs from the internal inspection of the building to confirm
- negligible roosting potential.

- Further information on Great Crested Newt mitigation/district level licence since there are several ponds within 250 metres of the application site which have had GCN present.

3.26 The applicants have also commissioned a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Roost Assessment for this site. This was carried out during September 2025 and this, too, has been carried out by Arbtech Consulting Limited. It finds that the application site has no habitats of principal importance but that notable habitats are present beyond the site within a 2-km radius. The site consists of the timber and metal stable block, a concrete hardstanding surrounding it, an access track and yard area comprising loose artificial substrate, and a paddock consisting of modified grassland, horse-grazed and of a uniformly short sward. Nutrient enrichment is provided via common dock and other plant species present include perennial rye-grass, red fescue, hawkweed and dandelion. The grassland is classified as ‘poor’ (of low ecological value) because it fails two of the standard tests: varied sward height and the presence of 6 to 8 vascular plant species per square metre.

3.27 The superior habitats within the 2-kilometre radius include deciduous woodland 10 metres north and also 200 metres northwest; an open mosaic habitat 400 metres northwest, a traditional orchard 380 metres southwest and an area of wood pasture and parkland 1.5 kilometres southwest. The grassland on site provides good foraging and commuting opportunities for hedgehogs, with woodland habitat nearby. The report also suggests that a CEMP (Construction Environmental Management Plan) might be needed to avoid any potential pollution of the nearby ancient woodland, a low impact lighting strategy should be adopted to avoid disturbance to bats after dark, and precautionary working methods should be put in place (according to the guidelines provided) to protect any badgers, reptiles or great crested newts that might be present in the vicinity during the conversion works and disturbance to parts of the existing paddock grassland.

3.28 The site falls within the Impact Risk Zone for Kendall’s Meadow SSSI, which lies some 3 kilometres away to the northeast, but it is unlikely that any localised disturbance during the limited construction works needed to convert the stables to a dwelling and the paddock to a garden and paved yard would have any significant impact on a wildlife site this far away.

3.29 The modified grassland in the existing paddock may provide common invertebrates with opportunities to forage or take shelter, but the loss of a small proportion of this short sward grassland is likely to be inconsequential, especially given the presence of more extensive and less closely cropped grassland habitat nearby.

3.30 The Assessment goes on to examine the potential impact of the proposed conversion on a number of animal species but finds that the majority of these are unlikely to be adversely impacted. In most cases, no examples of these species were recorded on or close to the application site. For bats, none were observed inside or outside the stable building (page 6); the building would be unsuitable as a roost and there are no suitable trees for roosting either on or close to the site. As requested, additional photographs are now being supplied of the interior to demonstrate that it has negligible potential to accommodate roosting bats. The building could, however, be suitable for barn swallows to nest, though not for barn owls (page 8), although no evidence of any nesting birds was found during the survey work. There was no evidence of badger setts on the site or within a 30-metre radius of it, nor of foraging badgers (page 14), but the land could nevertheless be suitable for badger sett excavation or as foraging habitat – hence the need for precautionary working methods.

3.31 Suggested enhancements for biodiversity include incorporating a few bee bricks into the new building (although it is an existing timber building, so this seems unachievable), planting wildflowers or wildflower turf to provide foraging opportunities for invertebrates (page 6), incorporating bat boxes into the building for pipistrelles (page 8), providing two or more bird boxes on mature trees around the wider site boundaries (page 9), creating log piles or areas with native shrubs to provide sheltering opportunities for reptiles (page 10) and creating amphibian hibernacula using any construction rubble and logs (page 13).

Noise Impact Assessment

3.32 The Environmental Health consultee has asked for a consideration of the potential noise impact from the nearby MIRA facilities on the future occupants of the converted stable block at submission stage. In this respect it may be noted that a noise screening bund for this purpose received planning permission back in 1990 (see paragraph 1.9 above).

3.33 Moreover, although the nearest MIRA buildings are 95 to 100 metres away from the existing stable block, and the test track is only about 58 metres to the north, a woodland strip about 30 metres wide intervenes between the two. The type of businesses that are nearest to the application building include IDV Robotics, 'DriveRightData' (a software company) and Nio Performance Engineering Ltd (which carries out marketing and technology development for a global manufacturer of smart electric cars and other high-performance fully electric vehicles). These are not particularly noisy operators.

3.34 Nevertheless, the MIRA Technology Park as a whole does include several noisy, high-energy operations as part of its automotive testing and development facilities. Key activities include vehicle crash testing, powertrain/emissions testing, specialized noise-generating test tracks, and external noise measurement. In mitigation of this, it should be noted that while these operations exist, the technology park utilizes advanced infrastructure to control and study sound. For example,

- a) Anechoic Chambers: A specialized Vehicle Anechoic Chamber is used to isolate and test sound power and intensity in a controlled environment.
- b) Virtual Development: The Driving Simulator Centre allows companies to test 'Noise, Vibration and Harshness' (NVH) virtually, reducing the need for physical noisy tests.
- c) Regulatory Compliance: Operations are strictly regulated by specific conditions attached to planning permissions and generally by nationally accepted environmental standards. Recent expansions have been approved with conditions to ensure they do not "materially harm... the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers".

4.0 Conclusions

4.1 In general terms, national planning policy has long supported the re-use and conversion of existing agricultural and other rural buildings for appropriate or permitted uses, as this maintains the openness and distinctive special character of the countryside. The planned development does not cause any building encroachment on to the open, green land beyond the existing stable block,

although a modest portion of the existing paddock will need to be hard surfaced to provide vehicular access and parking spaces. There is no reason to suppose that this small new home, which would be housed within an existing single-storey, timber-clad structure, well distanced from the nearest neighbouring dwellings, will adversely affect the amenity of the few nearby homes and businesses.

4.2 There will be no negative visual impact, overshadowing or overlooking and should be few additional vehicle movements. Despite its relative isolation from the nearby villages of Fenny Drayton, Higham on the Hill and Stoke Golding, the site has easy access to local amenities and shops by bicycle or bus, and to many more by means of a short journey by car or taxi. In all but the most inclement weather, pedestrian access to the bus stops near the Watling Street/MIRA Drive junction is available for residents of Rowden House Farm and its associated dwellings via a network of private and public footpaths.

4.3 The conversion of the stable block and part of the paddock to a single residence and garden would result in a tidier, more attractive and better maintained building and surrounding environment than is currently the case with the underused and deteriorating stables. The building lies at some distance from the nearest public highways (Fenn Lanes and Watling Street) and all the existing intervening vegetation would be retained. As many other former outbuildings at Rowden House Farm itself and other nearby farmsteads have previously been converted to residential use, the present proposal is not out of keeping with the general land-use pattern in the locality and the other existing buildings and natural features of the wider Rowden House Farm site would all remain unchanged.

4.4 The commissioned Structural Engineer's Report shows that the existing stables can be converted for residential use with minimum change to the existing structure and the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal shows that no harm is likely to any protected species, whilst precautionary working methods are nonetheless recommended and described, as well as opportunities for enhancing biodiversity on and around the application site. The provision of 0.5 hectares of grassland planted with twenty fruit-bearing trees will result in an overall net gain for biodiversity of nearly 13% over the existing baseline scenario. For all these reasons, and others expressed in this document, we request planning permission for conversion of the existing single-storey stable block to a single, two-bedroom dwelling.

Mark Singlehurst, for Alder Mill Enterprise Ltd, Atherstone

8th October 2025; expanded 3rd & 11th December 2025 (Revision 2)

Revised to include Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment and Enhancements, 23rd January 2026 (Revision 3)

Revised to address consultation responses, 30th April & 21st May 2026 (Revision 4a)