

WALFORD HALL FARM**POSITION STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF SWAYFIELDS LIMITED**

1. This Position Statement responds to a request from the Inspector dated 21st January 2008 for the preparation of Position Statements by the principal parties in respect of PPG15 issues related to Walford Hall Farmhouse.
2. The Secretary of State defined the issues relevant to this inquiry in the letter from the GOWM of 6th September 2005. In relation to PPG15, the Secretary of State's letter identifies the wish to be informed of the following:-

"ix. The extent to which the revised proposals for Walford Hall Farmhouse and its outbuildings as set out in the new Deed of Planning Obligation by Undertaking dated 27 August 2004 and entered into by the new developer, Roadchef CdB Limited, and the owners of the land and off-site land, are consistent with advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment."

3. For the reasons set out below, and taking account of the evidence submitted by other parties, the issue raised by the Secretary of State does not appear to be a matter of controversy and the appellants consider that no separate inquiry session is necessary.

a) **Relevant Background**

4. Substantial background information about Walford Hall Farmhouse is already available as a result of the original 1999-2000 inquiry. In particular, the Inspector's report from para 6.91 contains a detailed description of the farmhouse and refers to inquiry documents 1.4.1, 1.2.4, 1.4.5 and 1.4.8 which provide information about its condition, layout and history.
5. The Inspector's conclusions from para 19.71 include:-

"19.72 Walford Hall Farmhouse, of 15th Century origins, is without question an architecturally and historically valuable building. Listed at Grade II*, it is a particularly significant example of the local area's and indeed the nation's built heritage. The farmhouse's particular form, siting, materials and method of construction contribute significantly to the sense of local distinctiveness which is so important an aspect of the character and appearance of the countryside around Solihull. The Grade II* listing, which puts the farmhouse among the 6% of the country's most important buildings, is a material consideration in assessing the proposals."

2.

6. The evidence confirms that the building is in a very poor state of repair and the farmhouse has been unoccupied and neglected for nearly 20 years. The buildings have been subject to vandalism and emergency repairs and are currently incapable of habitation. The building was on the English Heritage Register of Buildings at Risk until repair works were carried out in the mid-1990s with the approval of the Council's conservation architect. The repairs were described as "clumsy" but the Inspector was satisfied that they did not in essence detract from the building's special interest and that their shortcomings could be easily remedied (IR para 19.73).

7. There are a number of outbuildings and those most closely related to the farmhouse to its north-west are regarded as curtilage buildings which contribute to its setting. Other more recent farm buildings, however, detract from the setting. The pond to the immediate south of the farmhouse serves some function as part of the farming operation and is also protected by the listing.

b) 1999-2000 Inquiry

8. The proposals for the Catherine de Barnes MSA promoted at the 1999 inquiry included a proposal that the listed building should be brought back into use as a training facility, ancillary to the MSA. The appellants argued that minimum disruption to the historic fabric of the building was likely and that listed building consent may not be required.

9. These proposals were of concern, however, to the Inspector who considered that alterations would need to be made to the building, which may well require consent (IR para 19.71). The Inspector was also concerned that insufficient consideration had been given to the extent of internal operations that would be necessary to render the building capable of commercial use (IR para 19.79). The Inspector was concerned that such alterations could be harmful and that the uncertain nature of the works could not be left to be dealt with through planning conditions. The Inspector concluded:-

"19.80 I accept that the training use itself, even if not full time would be sufficient to keep the building in active use and thus secure its removal. However, the alterations necessary for that change of use would have a detrimental impact on the character of the listed building."

10. The Secretary of State agreed that the alterations for the change of use would have a detrimental effect on the character of the listed building (DL para 25) and was, therefore, minded to exclude the proposals for the use of Walford Hall farmhouse as a training centre from any planning permission granted.

11. In a letter to the Secretary of State dated 26th March 2001, English Heritage confirmed that reinstatement to domestic use would be the best option for the house and was worthy of more serious exploration. English Heritage did not object to the exclusion of the training centre use from the "interim planning permission" but did express serious concern that provision for the suitable future use and upkeep of the listed building should be incorporated in any planning permission granted. The letter also expressed concern that any proposal to restore the farmhouse should embrace the brick outbuildings which are themselves part of the historic setting of the farmhouse.

3.

c) **Progress Since 2001**

12. Progress with proposals for the restoration and re-use of Walford Hall farmhouse since 2001 are detailed in the appellants proof of evidence SWA4/1 (Section 5). Detailed planning and listed building consent applications for both the farmhouse and the important outbuildings were prepared in consultation with all principal stakeholders, including English Heritage, and have been universally welcomed. The relevant permissions have been granted by Solihull Borough Council for the restoration of both the farmhouse and the principal outbuildings (details are contained in CD601 and CD602).
13. It is intended that the Deed of Planning Obligation referred to in the GOWM letter of 6 September 2005 should be replaced by a Planning Obligation requiring the works to Walford Hall Farm and its outbuildings approved by the Council to be carried out before the MSA is brought into use. A draft of this Agreement has been submitted to the parties to the inquiry.
14. The MSA proposals themselves have been amended to exclude the physical link originally proposed between the farmhouse and the MSA and the restored farmhouse would benefit from its own exclusive access from the B4102 Solihull Road/Hampton Lane. The appellants Proof of Evidence reference SWA2/1 (para 3.32) confirms that land modelling and planting proposals have been altered in the immediate vicinity of the listed building to extend the protective mounding between the MSA and Walford Hall.
15. Proof of evidence SWA4/1 explains that the latest cost estimate for the restoration of the listed building is in the region of at least £550,000/£600,000, which has been arrived at with the benefit of the detailed specification of works approved in the listed building and planning consents. Advice from local agents is to the effect that the cost of the restoration work exceeds the value of the refurbished buildings, so that Walford Hall Farmhouse is only likely to be brought back into residential use if planning permission is granted for the MSA. The balance of advantage for Walford Hall Farmhouse lies in favour of the grant of planning permission.

d) **Conformity with PPG15**

16. The restoration of the farmhouse to facilitate residential use accords directly with paragraph 3.10 of PPG15, i.e. reinstatement for the use for which the building was originally designed. No party contends that the proposals for this listed building are in conflict with PPG15. The Section 106 Obligation dated 27 August 2004 and the proposed Section 106 Obligation are consistent with advice in PPG15. Indeed, the commitment to sympathetic restoration and re-use of the listed buildings are a substantial benefit of the development.
17. The appellants wish to reserve the right to comment upon the Position Statements of other parties, if new issues are raised.