Planning Statement

Use of land for a wellness centre, formation of access road and siting of associated structures including sauna, water baths and drinks trailer.

Land at Town House Farm, Townhouse Road, Littleborough, OL15 9JX

Date: September 2026
Reference: 26042
Revision: C

Section 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Plande has been appointed to submit a supporting statement for a wellness centre, formation of access road and siting of associated structures including sauna, water baths and drinks trailer at land at Town House Farm, Townhouse Road, Littleborough, OL15 9JX.



Figure 1: Location Plan

1.2 This statement, which should be read alongside the supporting information submitted with the planning application, aims to evaluate the planning issues and merits in the context of relevant policies and guidance.

1.3 This Planning Statement provides an overview of the site and its surroundings, summarises the relevant planning history, and explains the justification for the proposed development in the context of the local area and the Development Plan. The report is structured in the following format:

- Section 2: Site & Surroundings
- Section 3: Planning History
- Section 4: The Proposal
- Section 5: Planning Policy Framework
- Section 6: Scheme Assessment
- Section 7: Conclusion

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Section 2

SITE & SURROUNDINGS

2.1 The application site comprises land at Town House Farm, Townhouse Road, Littleborough, OL15 9JX. The site lies to the west of Townhouse Cottage and is bounded by Carriage Drive to the south of the land, beyond which is Littleborough Sports Centre. To the west of the site is an area of hardstanding used for car parking, beyond which are residential dwellings accessed from Ballard Close. To the north of the plot is open countryside.

2.2 The existing site benefits from a shipping container located along the eastern boundary of the plot. Access to the plot is from Carriage Drive, via the area of hardstanding to the west of the site.

2.3 Existing development at Town House Farm includes agricultural and domestic buildings, with the application site comprising agricultural land associated with the wider holding.

2.4 In the wider surroundings, the site sits within a mixed edge-of-settlement context. Residential properties are focused along Calderbrook Road to the west of the plot, with open land, playing fields and agricultural fields to the north and south-east.

2.5 Littleborough town centre lies approximately 1.1km to the south-east and contains retail, service, community and transport functions concentrated around the main road and railway corridor. Rochdale town centre lies approximately 7.0km to the south-west and accommodates a wider range of employment, retail, civic and transport functions.



Figure 2: Photograph of the existing shipping container on site

2.6 The site is located within the Green Belt.

2.7 The flood map illustrates that the application site is in Zone 1, an area with a low probability of flooding.

2.8 The site is not within a Conservation Area; however the site borders the Townhouse Conservation Area, and is adjacent to Town House Mill (Grade II listed building) and in close proximity to Town House (Grade II listed building).

2.9 The site has no specific local plan designation.

Section 3

PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 A planning history search illustrates no relevant planning applications for the site.

3.2 The following planning application at Lower Town House Barn has recently been determined:

- 24/01086/FUL
  Lower Town House Barn, Townhouse Road, Littleborough
  OL15 9JX
  Change of use from existing barn to 2no residential dwellings and ancillary external alterations and landscaping
  Status: Approved 15 July 2026

Section 4

THE PROPOSAL

4.1 This planning application seeks permission for the use of land for a wellness centre, formation of access road and siting of associated structures including sauna, water baths and drinks trailer.

ABOUT THE APPLICANT

4.2 Happy Hideaway is a small, wellness-focused sauna business operated by the Applicant. The facility provides one-hour, wood-fired sauna sessions in conjunction with cold plunge baths. The services are designed to promote general health, wellbeing and relaxation within a calm outdoor setting.

SITING & DEVELOPMENT

4.3 The development consists of the creation of an area of hardstanding where the following elements are located:

4.3.1 Wood-fired sauna – A traditional outdoor sauna accommodating up to six users per session. (see figure 3)

4.3.2 Cold Plunge facilities – Two ice baths, and two cold water immersion tubs to be used in conjunction with sauna sessions. (see figure 3)

4.3.3 Wood-fired hot tub – accommodating up to four users per session. (see figure 4)

4.3.4 Seating and relaxation area for short rest periods between sauna and cold immersion cycles. (see figure 4)

4.3.5 Welfare unit and toilet facilities (see figure 5)

4.3.6 Drinks trailer – small converted mobile horse box serving hot and cold drinks to people booked on sessions. (see figure 6)

4.3.7 In addition, the existing shipping container located on site has been overclad, as shown in figure 2, and is to be used as a staff office and storage space.



Figure 3: Sauna and cold-water baths



Figure 4: Hot Tub and seating area



Figure 5: WC block



Figure 6: Drinks trailer

PROPOSED OPERATION AND USE

4.4 The facility currently operates on Fridays between 11:15 and 20:00, Saturdays and Sundays between 11:15 and 18:30, Monday between 15:30 and 19:30 and Wednesdays between 13:30 and 16:30. The business remains closed on Tuesdays and Thursdays. All visits are pre-booked online and operating periods may vary slightly depending on customer demand.

4.5 The wood-fired hot tub is only available for weekend use, and strictly by pre-booking online. The hot tub sessions have a maximum of four users per session.

4.6 Sessions are intentionally limited to small groups, with a maximum of six visitors per session, in order to maintain a high-quality, controlled and tranquil experience. A staggered booking system ensures low footfall and avoids crowding. Bookings are typically small groups of friends, couples and families.

4.7 Happy Hideaway is owner-operated by its two directors who are present on site during operational hours to manage and supervise the business. No full-time or part-time staff are employed at the site.

PARKING & SERVICING

4.8 The site can accommodate parking spaces for six vehicles. Parking arrangements have operated satisfactorily to date, with no recorded issues.

4.9 Kiln-dried, seasoned logs are delivered to the site approximately once every two to three weeks.

4.10 Toilet facilities are serviced by an external contractor on a fortnightly basis for cleaning and waste removal.

4.11 All other supplies, such as cleaning materials, are transported to the site by the Applicant as required.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND FIRE MANAGEMENT

4.12 Public safety is a key operational priority for the Applicant, particularly in relation to the use of fire-based facilities. All wood-fired sauna and hot tub stoves are professionally installed and operated strictly in accordance with manufacturer specifications. These facilities are supervised during use to ensure safe operation at all times.

4.13 A range of fire safety measures have been implemented, including the provision of designated safe zones around all heat sources, the availability of fire extinguishers and water supplies, and the controlled storage of fuel, limited to dry wood only. Staff are fully trained in safe lighting procedures, operational controls and emergency extinguishing measures.

4.14 The site layout has been carefully considered to support safe operation and emergency response. This includes clear and unobstructed access routes for emergency services, clearly defined entry and exit points, and appropriate spacing between structures to minimise risk.

4.15 Users will be provided with suitable guidance to ensure safe use of the facilities. This will include safety briefings where necessary, together with clear and visible signage outlining the correct and safe use of the sauna, hot tub and cold plunge facilities.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND AMENITY CONSIDERATIONS

4.16 Noise levels associated with the use of the site will remain low, with no amplified sound permitted. Activities will be limited to small group sizes in order to minimise disturbance, and the operation will be restricted to limited days and hours, with no late evening or night-time use proposed.

4.17 The development will involve minimal physical infrastructure and will be temporary and fully reversible in nature, ensuring that any impact on the character of the site and surrounding area remains limited and proportionate.

Section 5

PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

5.1 In accordance with S.38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, this planning application should be determined in accordance with the relevant Development Plan policies unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For the purposes of this determination, the Development Plan comprises:

- Places for Everyone (adopted 21 March 2024)
- Rochdale Core Strategy (adopted 19 October 2016)

5.2 This section provides the background to the development plan and identifies the relevant policies below.

PLACES FOR EVERYONE

5.3 Places for Everyone is the joint development plan for nine Greater Manchester districts. It outlines strategies for jobs, new homes, and sustainable growth, focusing on utilising brownfield and urban spaces while protecting Green Belt land. The plan ensures that new developments are integrated into the region's transport network or supported by new infrastructure.

5.4 **Policy JP-S1: Sustainable Development** states that development should aim to maximise its economic, social and environmental benefits simultaneously, minimise adverse impacts, utilise sustainable construction techniques and actively seek opportunities to secure net gains across each of the different objectives. The policy encourages the use of previously-developed land and vacant buildings, and requires appropriate mitigation and remediation to enable sites to be brought back into use.

5.5 **Policy JP-S4: Flood Risk and the Water Environment** sets out a range of measures aimed at protecting the quantity and quality of water bodies, and managing flood risk.

5.6 **Policy JP-J1: Supporting Long-Term Economic Growth** supports a thriving, inclusive and productive economy by maintaining economic diversity and facilitating growth in key sectors, including health innovation. It seeks to capitalise on strategic assets and transport infrastructure, support the transition to a low carbon economy, and promote high-quality sustainable living environments that attract and retain skilled workers, including through local labour and training agreements where appropriate.

5.7 **Policy JP-G9: The Green Belt**, safeguards the Green Belt as defined in the Policies Map, ensuring it continues to serve its five purposes under national policy, including preventing urban sprawl, protecting the countryside, and promoting urban regeneration. Enhancements to the Green Belt's beneficial uses, such as improved public access and habitat restoration, are encouraged where they do not compromise its openness or purposes. This approach aims to deliver environmental and social benefits while supporting economic growth through high-quality green spaces.

5.8 **Policy JP-P1: Sustainable Places** outlines that development should create sustainable places that are distinctive, visually stimulating, inclusive, resilient and resource-efficient. It requires proposals to conserve and enhance the natural and historic environment, respect local character through design, siting, scale and materials, and ensure places are safe, functional, legible, well-connected and comfortable, supported by appropriate infrastructure, landscaping and green infrastructure.

5.9 **Policy JP-P2: Heritage** outlines a proactive approach to conserving, sustaining and enhancing heritage assets and their settings, embedding heritage in place-making and seeking wider public benefits. It requires proposals to be informed by an appropriate understanding of significance, to integrate conservation with creative contextual design responses, and to have regard to national planning policy where designated and non-designated heritage assets and their settings may be affected.

5.10 **Policy JP-P6: Health** requires development, where practicable, to maximise positive health and wellbeing outcomes and avoid negative impacts, including through active design principles. It supports improved health facilities and greater integration of health and social care, including the provision of integrated wellness hubs through co-location of health, community and wellness services, with Health Impact Assessment expectations for proposals likely to have notable effects.

5.11 **Policy JP-P7: Sport and Recreation** supports the protection and enhancement of high quality and accessible sport and recreation facilities and the public rights of way network. It requires recreation facilities to be located and designed to be accessible while minimising potential complaints from disturbance to residential amenity, and encourages improved green infrastructure connections and opportunities for walking and cycling as part of an active and inclusive environment.

5.12 **Policy JP-C8: Transport Requirements of New Development**, outlines the transport requirements for new developments, emphasising designs that encourage walking, cycling, and public transport use to reduce car dependency and promote sustainable, liveable environments. Developments must prioritise safe, direct, and accessible routes, integrate with the surrounding infrastructure, and minimise the need for travel by including nearby facilities. The policy requires transport improvements, adequate parking and cycling facilities, construction management plans, and transport assessments to ensure sustainable and efficient connectivity, with specific measures to mitigate environmental impacts in sensitive areas.

5.13 **Policy SO1 - To deliver a more prosperous economy** supports delivery of a more prosperous economy through identifying quality employment locations, developing rural and visitor economies, strengthening town centres, improving transport accessibility, supporting education and skills, and building on local assets to attract investment.

5.14 **Policy SO2 - To create successful and healthy communities** seeks to create successful and healthy communities through delivering sufficient housing, improving housing choice, securing well-designed places, focusing growth to support regeneration and economic objectives, ensuring supporting infrastructure and facilities, and improving health and quality of life through access to services, open space and community provision.

5.15 **Policy SO3 - To improve design, image and quality of place** outlines the objective of improving design quality and the overall image and quality of place. It prioritises raising design standards and sustainable development, improving key gateways and transport corridors, protecting and enhancing heritage and natural assets, and creating new identity and character where it is lacking.

5.16 **Policy E5 - Encouraging the visitor economy** supports the visitor economy through enhanced visitor attractions, improved recreational corridors and associated facilities, subject to ensuring development complements and relates well to heritage and environmental assets. The policy promotes tourism opportunities including in and around Littleborough and supports leisure, tourism and cultural facilities, including outside centres where accessible and where they do not cause harm to character and environmental interests.

5.17 **Policy E6 - Supporting and diversifying the rural economy** supports and diversifies the rural economy, including outside the urban area, where development accords with Green Belt policy and protects landscape character, biodiversity and cultural and historic attributes. It encourages tourism and recreation linkages, rural business activity including re-use of redundant buildings, and requires proposals to avoid fragmentation of farm units, pollution and unnecessary loss of higher quality agricultural land.

5.18 **Policy C6 - Improving health and well being** supports improved health and wellbeing by creating environments that promote healthy lifestyles, supporting accessible health facilities, and securing high quality design that is safe and adaptable. It emphasises mitigation of climate change impacts, reduction of flood risk, maintenance of biodiversity and green infrastructure, reduction of noise and air pollution, and encouragement of walking, cycling and public transport, with Health Impact Assessment sought for major proposals where appropriate.

5.19 **Policy C8 - Improving community, sport, leisure and cultural facilities** supports better community, sport, leisure and cultural facilities through a sequential approach, promoting centre-based locations where appropriate. It supports facilities outside centres where they are highly accessible, do not harm character or amenity, and where they support outdoor sport, community or cultural provision, or the visitor economy linked to local attractions.

5.20 **Policy P2 - Protecting and enhancing character, landscape and heritage** supports protecting and enhancing character, landscape and heritage by requiring development to integrate with key natural features, protect important views, and conserve and enhance townscape and cultural landscapes. It requires conservation and promotion of heritage assets, including their settings, prioritises heritage at risk, and supports the positive use of heritage to strengthen identity and support the visitor economy.

5.21 **Policy P3 - Improving design of new development** requires all new development to adhere to high standards of design, respecting context, scale, layout, landscape and materials, and ensuring safe and accessible environments. It expects development to minimise environmental impacts, respond to climate change including through sustainable drainage, and provide landscaping that reduces the visual impact of car parking, supported by appropriate design and access information.

5.22 **Policy G4 - Protecting Green Belt land** states that development within the Green Belt will be restricted to limited types of development deemed not to be inappropriate by national Green Belt policies unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. It supports beneficial uses and limited infilling and redevelopment where this maintains beneficial uses and does not harm the Green Belt.

5.23 **Policy G7 - Increasing the value of biodiversity and geodiversity** requires development to protect sites and features of biodiversity importance and supports opportunities to enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, with an expectation of net gain. It requires protection of habitats and species, appropriate mitigation, avoidance of fragmentation, and incorporation of habitat creation measures within development and landscaping, informed by relevant guidance.

5.24 **Policy T2 - Improving accessibility** supports improving accessibility by locating development where there is good access to public transport or where it can be provided, and by reducing the need to travel by car. It sets an accessibility hierarchy prioritising pedestrians and those with impaired mobility, then cyclists and public transport, and requires appropriate assessment and mitigation where development may have transport impacts, including adequate parking and contributions to improvements where necessary.

5.25 **Policy DM1 - General development requirements** outlines general development requirements, including high quality design,

compatibility with surrounding uses, protection of residential amenity, and mitigation of noise, air, dust, light, odour and traffic impacts. It requires satisfactory and safe access, adequate parking and servicing, consideration of ground conditions and stability including where mining risks exist, and incorporation of high quality landscaping where appropriate.

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

5.26 The National Planning Policy Framework ("NPPF") was originally published in 2012 and has subsequently been revised, most recently in August 2026. The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission are determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Framework distinguishes between policies for plan-making and national decision-making policies, and confirms that the Development Plan and national decision-making policies should be read alongside one another when determining planning applications.

5.27 The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development by managing the use and development of land in the long-term public interest. The Framework confirms that sustainable development has three interdependent objectives:

5.27.1 a) An economic objective: to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy through supporting growth, innovation, productivity and investment, while ensuring sufficient land and infrastructure are available in the right places at the right time.

5.27.2 b) A social objective: to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities by providing homes, supporting community facilities and public services, and creating safe, attractive and inclusive places.

5.27.3 c) An environmental objective: to support climate change mitigation and adaptation, protect and enhance the natural, built and historic environment, improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently and minimise waste and pollution.

5.28 **Policy S3** confirms that decisions on development proposals should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Development proposals that accord with an up-to-date Development Plan and the national decision-making policies of the Framework should be approved without delay.

5.29 **Policy S5** supports particular forms of development outside settlements including outdoor sport and recreation and rural businesses, including tourism, where a countryside location is necessary

5.30 **Policy DM3** requires local planning authorities to determine applications in a positive and proactive manner. Decision-makers should work with applicants to identify solutions to planning issues where necessary and should not refuse applications that should clearly be approved having regard to the Development Plan, the Framework and other material considerations.

5.31 **Policy DM6** confirms that planning conditions should only be imposed where they are necessary, relevant, precise and reasonable. The policy also confirms that planning obligations should only be used where it is not possible to address unacceptable impacts through planning conditions. Where technical matters can appropriately be addressed through planning conditions, Policy DM6 encourages decision-makers to adopt a positive and proportionate approach to development management.

5.32 **Policy DM8** of the National Planning Policy Framework confirms that, in cases involving unauthorised development and retrospective planning applications, decision-makers should consider the planning merits of the development and the extent to which the development would otherwise be acceptable. The policy further states that substantial weight should only be given to intentional unauthorised development where it is concluded, based on evidence, that the breach was deliberate. The planning merits of the proposal are therefore the principal consideration in the determination of this application.

5.33 **Policy E4** supports the sustainable growth and diversification of rural businesses including facilities supporting leisure and tourism.

5.34 **Policy GB6** confirms that development within the Green Belt is inappropriate unless it falls within one of the categories identified by Policy GB7.

5.35 **Policy GB7** identifies certain forms of development that are not inappropriate, including material changes of use for outdoor recreation and the provision of appropriate facilities, including buildings, for outdoor recreation, provided openness is preserved and there is no significant conflict with Green Belt purposes.

5.36 **Policy DP3** requires development proposals to create well-designed places that respond positively to their context and are safe, inclusive and accessible. Development should contribute positively to local character and provide high-quality environments for users.

5.37 **Policy TR3** requires development to be located where it can support sustainable patterns of movement and Policy TR4 requires safe and suitable access, parking and movement arrangements.

5.38 **Policy TR6** confirms that development should only be refused where transport impacts would be severe or highway safety impacts unacceptable.

5.39 **Policy HC4** requires substantial weight to be given to proposals that make a demonstrable contribution towards promoting good health, preventing ill-health, reducing health inequalities or supporting social interaction.

5.40 **Policy P2** requires development sites to be suitable for their intended use having regard to land stability and ground conditions. Policy P3 requires development to avoid unacceptable impacts arising from noise, lighting and other forms of pollution.

5.41 **Policies HE4, HE5, HE6 and HE9** establish the national policy framework for heritage assets and conservation areas. The Framework requires significance to be identified and assessed and substantial weight to be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets and their settings.

Section 6

SCHEME ASSESSMENT

6.1 The following section will consider the compliance of the proposal with the Development Plan policies and material considerations for the application. It provides an analysis of the main planning matters related to the principle and a more detailed, policy-orientated assessment of planning considerations.

PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

6.2 Having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework ("NPPF") as a whole, it is important to note that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The Framework confirms that sustainable development has economic, social and environmental objectives which are interdependent and should be pursued in mutually supportive ways.

6.3 Policy S3 establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development and confirms that proposals which accord with the Development Plan and national decision-making policies should be approved without delay.

6.4 Policy DM3 requires local planning authorities to take a positive and proactive approach to decision-making and to work constructively with applicants to resolve planning issues where necessary.

6.5 The proposal seeks planning permission for the continued operation of an outdoor wellness centre comprising a wood-fired sauna, cold plunge baths, wood-fired hot tub, changing facilities, welfare facilities and refreshments. The development provides a recreational and wellbeing-focused use which contributes positively towards health, social wellbeing and economic activity.

6.6 Policy HC4 requires substantial weight to be given to development proposals that make a demonstrable contribution towards promoting good health, preventing ill-health and supporting social interaction. The proposal directly contributes towards these objectives through the provision of outdoor wellness facilities focused on physical and mental wellbeing.

6.7 Policy E4 supports the sustainable growth and diversification of rural businesses including facilities supporting leisure and tourism. Happy Hideaway represents a small-scale rural enterprise which contributes towards the rural economy whilst supporting leisure and wellbeing opportunities within the borough.

6.8 Policy S5 supports outdoor recreation and rural businesses outside settlements where a countryside location is necessary. Given the nature of the proposal and its reliance on a tranquil outdoor environment, the use is appropriately located and is considered acceptable in principle.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

6.9 Policy HC4 of the National Planning Policy Framework requires substantial weight to be given to developments that make a demonstrable contribution towards promoting good health, preventing ill-health, reducing health inequalities and supporting social interaction within the local community.

6.10 The proposal provides a dedicated outdoor wellness facility focused on sauna bathing, cold-water immersion, relaxation, physical wellbeing and social interaction. The development promotes healthy lifestyles within a natural outdoor setting and provides an accessible recreational facility for local residents and visitors alike.

6.11 The proposal therefore attracts significant positive weight under Policy HC4 and contributes directly towards the social objective of sustainable development defined within the Framework.

IMPACT ON THE GREEN BELT

6.12 The site lies within the Greater Manchester Green Belt and therefore a key consideration is whether the development constitutes inappropriate development under the NPPF.

6.13 Policy GB6 of the NPPF confirms that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless it falls within one of the categories identified by Policy GB7. The NPPF continues to attach great importance to Green Belts, the essential characteristics of which are their openness and permanence.

6.14 The development occupies only a limited proportion of the overall site and consists primarily of lightweight and modest structures associated with the outdoor recreational use. The site remains predominantly open in appearance and function and continues to be experienced as part of the wider rural landscape. The proposal therefore preserves the openness of the Green Belt both spatially and visually.

6.15 The majority of structures within the site are lightweight, temporary or readily removable in nature and could be removed without lasting alteration to the character of the land. The reversibility of the development further limits any potential Green Belt impact.

6.16 Policy GB7 identifies certain forms of development that are not inappropriate in the Green Belt. These include material changes of use for outdoor recreation and the provision of appropriate facilities, including buildings, in connection with outdoor recreation, provided that the impact on openness is minimised and there is no significant conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt.

6.17 The proposal comprises the use of land as an outdoor wellness and recreation facility incorporating a wood-fired sauna, cold plunge

baths, a wood-fired hot tub, relaxation areas, welfare facilities and refreshments. The nature of the activity is fundamentally recreational and wellness-focused, taking place predominantly outdoors and relying upon the site's tranquil setting for its operation. The proposal therefore constitutes an outdoor recreation use for the purposes of Policy GB7.

6.18 The structures present on the site are modest in scale and lightweight in nature and are ancillary to the primary outdoor recreational use. The development occupies only a small proportion of the overall site and retains the open character of the wider landholding. The proposal therefore falls within the categories of development identified at Policy GB7(1)(f)(iii) and GB7(1)(f)(iv) and it is suggested that they should not be regarded as inappropriate development within the Green Belt.

6.19 The proposal preserves Green Belt openness, does not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt and should therefore not be regarded as inappropriate development. Accordingly, the proposal accords with Policies GB6 and GB7 of the NPPF.

6.20 In addition, Policy G4 of the Rochdale Core Strategy confirms that "*Development will be restricted to those limited types of development which are deemed not to be inappropriate by national planning policies unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated*". It is considered that the principle of the proposal can be supported as an appropriate facility that promotes health and wellbeing and supports rural diversification objectives, without undermining Green Belt purposes.

6.21 Accordingly, it is suggested that the proposal is acceptable in principle having regard to policies JP-G9 of Places for Everyone and policy G4 of the Rochdale Core Strategy.

VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

6.22 Without prejudice to the conclusion above that the proposal falls within the forms of development identified by Policy GB7 and is therefore not inappropriate development, it is considered appropriate to identify the other considerations that would clearly outweigh any perceived Green Belt harm in the event that the Local Planning Authority reaches an alternative conclusion.

6.23 The proposal delivers a range of significant social benefits through the provision of a dedicated outdoor wellness facility focused upon physical health, mental wellbeing, relaxation and social interaction. Policy HC4 of the NPPF requires substantial weight to be given to developments that make a demonstrable contribution towards promoting good health, preventing ill-health, reducing health inequalities and supporting social interaction within the community. The proposal directly contributes towards these objectives.

6.24 The proposal also supports the sustainable diversification of the rural economy. Policy E4 of the NPPF supports rural businesses and facilities which contribute towards leisure and tourism. Happy Hideaway represents a small-scale rural enterprise that contributes to local economic activity, attracts visitors to the area and supports wider spending within Littleborough and the surrounding area.

6.25 The supporting technical evidence demonstrates that the proposal can be accommodated without unacceptable environmental impacts. The Heritage Assessment concludes that the significance and setting of the Town House Conservation Area and nearby Grade II listed buildings are unaffected by the development.

6.26 The submitted Noise Impact Assessment prepared by Philip Dunbavin Acoustics Ltd concludes that the operation of the facility would have a low noise impact at nearby residential receptors. Noise levels associated with both users and operational equipment remain below recognised amenity thresholds and the assessment concludes that the development will not result in unacceptable effects on neighbouring amenity.

6.27 The Transport Statement concludes that the development generates low levels of traffic, benefits from adequate on-site parking provision and does not result in material impacts upon highway safety or the operation of the local highway network.

6.28 The Lighting Assessment concludes that the site's low-level lighting installations are of limited intensity, operate within appropriate hours and are unlikely to result in adverse effects on nearby residential or ecological receptors.

6.29 The development is also largely reversible in nature and comprises lightweight structures that could be removed without permanent alteration to the wider landscape character of the site.

6.30 Taken together, the health and wellbeing benefits, support for the rural economy, negligible environmental impacts, lack of heritage harm and the reversible nature of the development would clearly outweigh any limited harm identified by reason of Green Belt inappropriateness. Accordingly, very special circumstances would exist in support of the proposal if such a balancing exercise were required.

DESIGN AND CHARACTER

6.31 The application site forms part of a farmstead setting at the edge of the settlement. Policy JP-P1 of Place for Everyone requires development to be distinctive and to conserve and enhance the natural environment, landscape features, historic environment and to respect the character and identity of the locality in terms of design, siting, size, scale and materials used. Policy P3 of the Rochdale Core Strategy similarly requires development to adhere to high standards of design and to respect context including scale, density, massing, height, layout, landscape, materials and access of surrounding buildings and areas.

6.32 It is suggested that the proposed wellness use is a low-key, landscape-led scheme that reads as ancillary and subservient to the wider rural character.

6.33 Historically, the land has been used as allotments, with several containers and sheds installed on site, as shown in figure 7.



Figure 7: Historic image of the site showing a range of outbuildings located on the plot.

6.34 Similarly, images taken from Google Earth show a range of outbuildings that have historically been positioned in various locations on the plot over the last 20+ years.



Figure 8: Google Earth image dated December 2005



Figure 9: Google Earth image dated March 2017



Figure 10: Google Earth image dated May 2019



Figure 11: Google Earth image dated June 2023

6.35 It is suggested that the presence of small outbuildings in this rural location is part of the character of the area. Each of the structures installed on site are of limited height and footprint, and could typically be found within the local context. The drinks trailer makes use of a former horse box, reinforcing the rural character of the area.

6.36 It is suggested that the proposal is of an appropriate design that respects local character and reinforces a semi-rural sense of place, in accordance with Policy JP-P1 of Places for Everyone, Policy P3 of the Rochdale Core Strategy.

6.37 The proposal also accords with Policy DP3 of the NPPF which requires development to respond positively to its context and create visually attractive, distinctive and characterful places. The modest scale of the structures, use of lightweight and ancillary forms of development and retention of the site's open character ensure that the proposal integrates successfully into its surroundings.

HERITAGE IMPACTS

6.38 Whilst the site is not located within the Townhouse Conservation Area, it is located in close proximity to two Grade II listed buildings, Town House Mill (List entry number 1309654), and Townhouse (List entry number 1068527). Accordingly, it is appropriate that the proposal is assessed with regard to the potential for effects on the setting of nearby heritage assets.

6.39 Policy JP-P2 of Places for Everyone seeks to positively conserve, sustain and enhance heritage assets and their settings and expects proposals, where necessary, to be informed by appropriate heritage assessment. Policy P2 of the Rochdale Core Strategy similarly requires the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets, including consideration of their wider settings.

6.40 Policies HE4 and HE5 of the NPPF require applicants to identify the significance of heritage assets and assess the likely effect of development upon that significance, including any contribution made by their setting.

6.41 A Heritage Assessment prepared by Garry Miller Heritage Consultancy accompanies the application. The assessment considers the significance of the Town House Conservation Area, the Grade II listed Town House and the adjacent Grade II listed former wool warehouse together with the contribution made by their setting.

6.42 The Heritage Assessment concludes that the proposal site has no meaningful visual association with the designated heritage assets due to its secluded position, screening from public views and the modest scale of the structures present on the site. The report concludes that the significance of the conservation area and listed buildings is unaffected by the proposal.

6.43 The proposal therefore results in no heritage harm and satisfies the requirements of Policies HE4, HE5, HE6 and HE9 of the NPPF. The development preserves both the significance and setting of nearby designated heritage assets.

6.44 Accordingly, there are no heritage reasons why planning permission should be withheld.

RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

6.45 The surrounding context includes established residential properties along Carriage Drive and Ballard Close. Policy DM1 of the Rochdale Core Strategy requires that developments do not adversely affect the amenity of residents through visual intrusion, overbearing impact, overshadowing or loss of privacy and that proposals mitigate against any impacts due to noise, light and traffic generation where such mitigation is necessary. Policy JP-P7 of Places for Everyone also emphasises that recreation facilities should be located and designed to be accessible but minimise the potential for complaints due to disturbance to residential amenity from recreational activity.

6.46 It is suggested that a wellness centre is generally compatible with a quiet environment and can be operated in a manner that avoids undue disturbance, particularly given that the activities are low-intensity and managed through booking arrangements and clear operational procedures.

6.47 Potential sources of disturbance could include customer arrivals and departures, use of external areas, and any servicing associated with the business. It is suggested that these can all be managed through the limited operating hours.

6.48 A Noise Impact Assessment has been submitted in support of the application. The assessment includes detailed baseline monitoring and considers both noise from customers using the facility and operational plant associated with the sauna installation.

6.49 The assessment concludes that the proposal would result in a low noise impact at nearby residential receptors. Noise levels associated with both users and equipment remain below recognised thresholds for residential amenity and the report concludes that the development will not result in unacceptable impacts on neighbouring occupiers.

6.50 It is suggested that the proposal would protect residential amenity and align with policy DM1 of the Rochdale Core Strategy, policy JP-P7 of Places for Everyone and Policy P3 of the NPPF.

ACCESS AND HIGHWAYS

6.51 A Transport Statement prepared by Countywide Consulting Engineers accompanies the application. The report assesses the site's accessibility, existing highway conditions, parking provision and traffic generation associated with the operation of Happy Hideaway and concludes that the development can be safely accommodated without material impact upon the local highway network.

6.52 The Transport Statement concludes that the development generates low levels of traffic and that visitor numbers remain tightly controlled through an advance booking system. The use operates at a modest scale and does not give rise to any material transport impacts.

6.53 The site benefits from dedicated on-site parking provision and the Applicant confirms that no parking displacement, overspill parking or highway safety concerns have arisen during operation of the business. The site is also accessible by walking, cycling and public transport.

6.54 The Transport Statement concludes that the proposal will not result in severe transport impacts or unacceptable highway safety effects and is therefore consistent with policies T2 and DM1 of the Rochdale Core Strategy and policies TR3, TR4 and TR6 of the NPPF.

FLOOD RISK AND DRAINAGE

6.55 The site lies predominantly within Flood Zone 1, with a small area at the far western edge indicated as lying within Flood Zone 2. A Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy prepared by T J Booth Associates accompanies the application and assesses the suitability of the site for the proposed outdoor wellness use. The assessment identifies the development as Water Compatible Development, comprising outdoor recreation with associated changing and welfare facilities.

6.56 The development consists of a series of lightweight and largely temporary structures positioned on permeable gravel surfaces. The submitted assessment confirms that the structures do not require conventional in-ground foundations or concrete slabs and therefore do not materially alter the existing drainage characteristics of the site.

6.57 Surface water drainage is proposed to remain consistent with the site's existing greenfield characteristics. Rainfall falling upon the site infiltrates through the permeable gravel surfacing into the underlying soils, allowing runoff to continue at natural greenfield rates. The assessment confirms that no additional surface water drainage

infrastructure is required and that the proposal will not increase runoff or flood risk elsewhere.

6.58 Foul drainage arrangements have also been considered. The welfare facilities are contained within a temporary welfare unit which is serviced and emptied by a specialist contractor at regular intervals. The plunge baths do not require chemical treatment and operate using chilled water and mechanical filtration. The hot tub is periodically drained and refilled and, due to the presence of treatment chemicals, the assessment proposes that discharged water is directed to the local combined sewer rather than to any nearby watercourse.

6.59 The Flood Risk Assessment concludes that the proposal can be accommodated safely without increasing flood risk on or off the site, that the proposed drainage strategy is appropriate to the nature of the development and that the existing flood risk situation is not materially altered by the proposal. The assessment therefore concludes that the development is consistent with Policy JP-S4 of Places for Everyone, Policy DM1 of the Rochdale Core Strategy and the flood risk and drainage objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework.

6.60 Given the low-intensity nature of the use, the predominantly permeable treatment of the site and the temporary nature of the structures, the submitted assessment confirms that the development maintains the existing greenfield drainage regime and does not result in any loss of floodplain, overland flow routes or infiltration capacity.

LIGHTING

6.61 A Lighting Assessment prepared by Designs for Lighting Ltd has been submitted in support of the application. The assessment confirms that the site's lighting comprises low-output festoon lighting and limited PIR-controlled security lighting intended to provide subtle amenity lighting only.

6.62 The assessment concludes that the lighting associated with the proposal is of low intensity, operates for limited periods and is unlikely to result in adverse effects on neighbouring residential properties or ecological receptors. The proposal therefore accords with Policy P3 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

ECOLOGY AND BIODIVERSITY

6.63 Policy G7 of the Rochdale Core Strategy requires that no development should result in a net loss of biodiversity and supports opportunities to protect and enhance ecological interests.

6.64 The proposal is retrospective and small scale, focused on siting structures within land associated with an existing farmstead. Existing boundary vegetation is retained and lighting is limited in scale and

intensity, helping to minimise the potential for effects on habitats and species.

6.65 Given the limited scale of the development, the retention of existing boundary vegetation, the use of predominantly permeable surfacing and the low-intensity nature of the operation, it is suggested that the proposal would not give rise to unacceptable ecological effects and would accord with Policy G7 of the Rochdale Core Strategy.

COAL MINING RISK ASSESSMENT

6.66 A Coal Mining Risk Assessment has been prepared by Geoinvestigate Limited and is submitted in support of the application. The assessment confirms that the site lies within an area identified by the Coal Authority as containing probable unrecorded shallow workings together with a coal seam outcrop and a geological fault.

6.67 The Coal Mining Risk Assessment concludes that the site-specific risks can be satisfactorily mitigated through further intrusive investigation and routine engineering solutions and that planning permission should not be withheld on coal mining legacy grounds.

6.68 The proposal can therefore be safely accommodated having regard to land stability considerations and accords with Policy P2 of the NPPF and Policy DM1 of the Rochdale Core Strategy.

PLANNING CONDITIONS

6.69 The submitted technical evidence demonstrates that the development is acceptable in planning terms. Insofar as any outstanding technical matters require further verification, including elements of coal mining investigation or drainage implementation, these can be appropriately addressed through planning conditions in accordance with Policy DM6 of the National Planning Policy Framework. Such matters do not provide a basis for refusing planning permission.

PLANNING BALANCE

6.70 The proposal provides a range of social, economic and environmental benefits which should be afforded substantial weight in the planning balance.

6.71 In social terms, the proposal provides an accessible wellness and recreation facility focused on physical health, mental wellbeing and social interaction. The development contributes towards healthy lifestyles through sauna use, cold water immersion and outdoor recreation and therefore directly supports the objectives of Policy HC4 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

6.72 In economic terms, the proposal supports a small rural business enterprise, contributes towards the diversification of the rural economy and attracts visitors to the area. The development therefore benefits from positive support under Policy E4 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

6.73 In environmental terms, the proposal makes use of a modestly developed parcel of land through a low-intensity and largely reversible form of development which retains the open character of the site and does not result in unacceptable impacts on heritage assets, residential amenity, highway safety or ecological interests.

6.74 The proposal has been assessed against the Development Plan and the national decision-making policies of the National Planning Policy Framework.

6.75 Supporting technical evidence demonstrates that the proposal does not result in heritage harm, unacceptable impacts to residential amenity, highway safety concerns, unacceptable lighting impacts or unmitigable ground stability risks. The proposal therefore delivers clear economic, social and environmental benefits and the planning balance weighs decisively in favour of approval.

6.76 This application is submitted on a retrospective basis. In accordance with Policy DM8 of the National Planning Policy Framework, the proposal should be assessed on its planning merits. The supporting technical evidence demonstrates that the development can be accommodated without unacceptable impacts in relation to heritage, residential amenity, transport, lighting or land stability and therefore the retrospective nature of the application does not alter the conclusion that the development is acceptable in planning terms.

Section 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 The proposed development seeks planning permission for the continued use of land as an outdoor wellness centre together with associated facilities including a wood-fired sauna, cold plunge baths, hot tub, changing facilities, welfare facilities and refreshments at Town House Farm, Townhouse Road, Littleborough, OL15 9JX.

7.2 The proposal delivers clear and demonstrable benefits through the provision of a dedicated outdoor wellness facility that promotes physical health, mental wellbeing, relaxation and social interaction. The development therefore attracts positive support under Policy HC4 of the National Planning Policy Framework which requires substantial weight to be given to development that promotes good health and wellbeing.

7.3 The proposal also supports the sustainable diversification of the rural economy through the provision of a small-scale leisure and tourism business consistent with Policy E4 of the NPPF and the objectives of the Development Plan.

7.4 The proposal has been carefully assessed against Green Belt policy and is considered to fall within the forms of development identified at Policy GB7, namely outdoor recreation and associated facilities for outdoor recreation. The development preserves openness, does not conflict with Green Belt purposes and should not therefore be regarded as inappropriate development.

7.5 In terms of design and character, the proposed structures are modest in scale, ancillary in nature and reflective of the semi-rural context. Materials, form and layout are considered to respect local character and integrate effectively with the surrounding landscape, in accordance with design policy requirements.

7.6 The supporting Heritage Assessment concludes that the proposal results in no harm to the significance or setting of the Town House Conservation Area or nearby listed buildings. The proposal therefore fully accords with the historic environment policies of the NPPF.

7.7 The application is supported by specialist assessments relating to transport, flooding and drainage, noise, heritage, lighting and coal mining risk, all of which conclude that the proposal is acceptable in planning terms. The proposal represents sustainable development that accords with the Development Plan and the relevant national decision-making policies of the National Planning Policy Framework and should therefore be approved without delay.

7.8 The proposed use is inherently low-intensity and would operate with limited hours, small group sizes and controlled booking arrangements. The supporting Noise Impact Assessment concludes that the development results in a low noise impact on nearby residents and will not adversely affect residential amenity. The supporting Lighting Assessment concludes that the low-level lighting

associated with the development is unlikely to result in adverse effects upon residential amenity or ecological receptors.

7.9 The supporting Transport Statement demonstrates that the development generates low levels of traffic, benefits from adequate on-site parking provision and does not cause material impacts on highway safety or the operation of the surrounding highway network.

7.10 The site lies predominantly within Flood Zone 1, with only a small area of land at the far western edge falling within Flood Zone 2. The submitted Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy demonstrates that surface water can be appropriately managed and that the development would not increase flood risk on or off the site.

7.11 Overall, the proposal represents sustainable development that accords with the Development Plan and the relevant national decision-making policies of the NPPF. The proposal delivers social, economic and environmental benefits without giving rise to unacceptable harm.

7.12 It is considered that the proposal would align with the Development Plan in that it provides for appropriate use and would provide benefits to the area in terms of health and wellbeing, rural diversification and local economic activity.

7.13 It is therefore respectfully requested that the planning application is approved. Should Rochdale Borough Council not agree with this view, the applicant would seek to engage with the authority to secure a solution, in line with the NPPF.

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