

Viability Report
on
Batts Barn, School Lane, Ashurst
West Sussex BN44 3AY



prepared for

Mr K Byrne OBE
Byrne Property Ltd

by
Robert Prall
AssocRICS

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The Granary, Cornfords Yard
High Street, Uckfield
East Sussex TN22 1RJ

Tel: (01825) 764488

Email: info@lawsoncommercial.co.uk

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Batts Barn, School Lane, Ashurst, Steyning, West Sussex, BN44 3AY

VIABILITY ASSESSMENT AND MARKETABILITY REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Batts Barn was inspected on 24th March 2026. The purpose of the inspection was to determine the property's viability on the open market as a commercial building supporting an ongoing business.

1.2 This report has been prepared to support the planning application with Horsham District Council for the Proposed conversion of disused and redundant rural building to a single dwellinghouse (Class C3).

1.3 On the day of inspection, the site was readily accessible, and the prevailing weather was clear and dry. The barn itself was unlocked, and all areas within were able to be viewed. Externally the site was fully accessible although the grass was a little long and the ground a bit rutted beneath.

2. SURVEYOR

2.1 Lawson Commercial are commercial surveyors and agents based in Uckfield, servicing East & West Sussex and parts of Kent. They offer all types of commercial properties, both for sale and to let, as well as professional surveying services and property management.

2.2 This report has been prepared by Robert Prall AssocRICS, Consultant Surveyor, in accordance with RICS professional standards. The report represents an honest professional opinion based on knowledge of the local commercial property market and a detailed inspection of the subject property.

2.3 Mr. Prall was instructed by Mr. Kevin Byrne OBE, via his planning agent, Wilbury Planning Ltd and as such has no material connection with the subject property or the client. There are no other factors that could limit the ability to provide an impartial and independent assessment. Accordingly, this report is presented on an objective and unbiased basis.

3. LOCATION

3.1 The small rural village of Ashurst in West Sussex is located between Partridge Green 3 miles to the North and Steyning 3 miles to the South on the B2135. It has a small population of 280 based on the 2024 Census and has a focus on local agriculture and scenic views to the South Downs. Its most famous resident was Sir Lawrence Olivier up until his death in 1989.

3.2 From the B2135 past the Village Hall and Fountain Public House, School Lane is located in centre of the village. Turning right into School Lane it quickly narrows from double to single carriageway with passing spaces. It appears there are only residential properties in the lane with a mix of detached, semi-detached and some

terraced houses and as the name suggests, Ashurst Church of England Primary school is ¼ of a mile from the subject property. Ashurst Football Club and Cricket Club are also located in the lane opposite the school at the recreation ground.

3.3 There is no evidence of any commercial or business premises in the immediate location of school lane, and the Fountain Pub appears to be the only commercial business in the centre of the village. Being a rural village there is a lot of farmland throughout the area which would be associated with local farms.

4. PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

4.1 Located behind a new close-board fence and gates, Batts Barn is set back from the lane and central in the plot towards the rear boundary. It is access directly off School Lane via double gates set back from the lane. A gravel covered drive leads into the site directly up from the Lane to the front of the building where there is ample parking. The grounds are mainly grass with some mature trees on both East and West boundaries and to the rear of the Barn.

4.2 With a solid concrete floor, the barn is constructed off a blockwork plinth with a lightweight steel frame incorporating warren trusses in the roof detail.

4.3 The external elevations have horizontal timber cladding with a pair of heavy weight timber sliding doors in the middle of the barn.

4.4 The roof is constructed of corrugated fibre cement roofing sheets with curved wrapping detail at the eaves. There is evidence of some chipped and cracked sheets which will likely allow water ingress. There are 4no fixed Perspex sheets withing the roof structure providing natural light. The roofing sheets may contain white Asbestos if constructed before 1999. It would be advisable to have the material tested by a specialist surveyor before any repair or maintenance is carried out.

4.5 Internally, the barn is rectangular in shape extending to 141 sq/m (1521 sq/ft). It is laid out as a single open plan space.

4.6 There is no evidence of any services i.e. power or water.

5. MARKET EVIDENCE AND DEMAND ANALYSIS

5.1 Current Commercial Demand in Ashurst is very limited with no businesses located in the village other than the Fountain Inn. The nearest commercial center is at Star Trading Estate in Partridge Green approximately 3 miles to the north of Ashurst on the B2135.

5.2 There tends to be more commercial activity in the larger conurbations locally such as Partridge Green, Henfield, Cowfold, Ashington and Steyning, however businesses here tend to be grouped together on commercial trading estates. Individual commercial premises may be found in rural locations on former farm sites where diversification has been identified to generate income.

5.3 More modern retail and trading estates are found in local areas with better access to the A24 or A23 such as Billingshurst, Southwater and Burgess Hill. Larger towns towards the coast will have a greater range of commercial activity and trading estates, in areas such as Lancing, Shoreham by Sea and Worthing. Modern facilities and good transport links will mean prime rents are evident and will be significantly higher than the rural rates of Partridge Green.

5.4 Comparable Market Evidence

Analysis of recent commercial lettings and sales in the Ashurst vicinity demonstrates:

- Limited demand for small stand-alone commercial units in village locations
- Rental values are significantly lower than urban locations
- Preference for locations with good road access and parking facilities
- Strong competition from purpose-built business parks

All of these factors are relevant to Batts Barn, Ashurst and indicators are that this would not be a suitable position to build or refurbish a property for commercial use.

5.5 Market commentary

The local area of Ashurst doesn't compare favorably with the rest of the Horsham District.

A large district stretching from Horsham (& neighboring Crawley) in the North and Steyning in the South, rents vary with an average of £11.07 per square foot, compared with £14.70psf for the West Sussex market as a whole. The average yield across Horsham district is currently 7%.

Local rents as demonstrated in the comparables below range between £6.00-£9.00psf. This is partly expected as it is a predominantly rural area and less suited to commercial activity with more for farming and residential communities evident.

Mid Sussex performs better with average rents at £13.20psf, however it has a greater proportion of Business parks, especially in the Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath areas.

6.0 COMPARABLES

Partridge Green

Star Road Industrial Estate is a well-established business district, comprising offices, industrial units and workshops. Occupiers represented within Star Road Industrial Estate include The Dark Star Brewery, Casco, Plysolene, Upgrade Bikes, Forza Doors, A & H Display, Audio Production Services, SICPA, Heritage Travel, Forest Litho Printers, Jayess Tools, Seawhite, Kerry Foods, Lismore Instruments, Margrasil (Marble & Granite) and Amber Scaffolding.

Unit F4, Star Road Trading Estate, Partridge Green, RH13 8RA

Located 3 miles north of Ashurst in Partridge Green, Star Road Trading Estate is a well-established but ageing trading estate. As with many older estates, the access roads were designed for smaller cars and freight with significantly less parking. Many small to medium, light industrial, office, storage & distribution premises are present with very few vacancies. A popular location with many long-established tenants as listed above. Unit F4 to let: comprises 3900sq/ft of ground floor light industrial space with small office, wc etc. Ideal premises for light manufacturing, assembly, packaging, storage & distribution offered at £29,250pa. Overall rate of £7.50psf.

Unit 1-6 Star Road Trading Estate, Partridge Green, RH13 8RA

Also at Star Road Trading Estate, a larger older style brick-built factory premises with large ground floor warehouse and dedicated office space. GIA of 4050 sq/ft with 570 sq/ft of office on first floor. Offered to Let at £33,000pa which represents £8.14 psf overall.

Watermead, Cowfold, Nr.Horsham, RH13 8DT

Located 6 miles north of the subject property at Batts Barn, Ashurst.

To Let, large industrial/workshop/agricultural premises extending to 8062sq/ft. New lease being offered at rent of £60,000pa producing overall rate of £7.44 per sq foot, included yard space and parking.

Premises is not directly comparable to subject property as much larger in size and clearly offered previously as a business premises. Semi-rural location and proposed rent psf indicate similarities for what could be expected from the subject property.

Unit 1, East Wolves Business Park, Ashington, RH20 3AX

Located 6 miles west of the subject property, East Wolves offers a large industrial unit of 16,719sq/ft at a former farm site with direct access onto the A24.

The large warehouse on the ground floor extends to 15,303 sq/ft with a first-floor mezzanine office area of 1,416 sq/sf being offered at £150,000pa. The overall rate is at £9.00psf, although I would expect a discount for quantum. Ideally suited for a distribution depot with access onto the A24.

Store 3, Hill Farm, Codmore Hill, Pulborough, RH20 1BW

Located 20 miles west of the subject property near Pulborough, Hill farm is a large ex-agricultural premises extending to 4306 sq/ft. Store 3 is being offered at £32,000pa for the large open plan space with some parking and loading externally. Formally used as an equestrian barn overall it represents £7.43 psf. Access along Hill Farm Lane is limited due to being narrow, which is likely to limit the price being asked for. A more realistic price of £7.00psf is possibly more achievable. It's a good rural location close to Pulborough which would suit semi-agricultural, equestrian or storage use.

For sale:

Star Road trading Estate 15,862sq/ft over 4 units of industrial space producing income in the region of £130,000pa, represents £8.19psf. Offers invited for the freehold iro £2.1m.

Huffwood Trading Estate, adjacent to Star Road, small light industrial, workshop premises of 819sq/ft available at £175,000 for the freehold.

Units 1-20 Henfield Business Park fully occupied industrial business units of 13,950 sq/ft with income of £128,000pa averaging £9.21psf. Freehold available for £1.75m. (N.B. excluding U13-15 previously sold).

(source: CoStar)

7. KEY INPUTS AND REASONING

7.1 Located in a beautiful stretch of countryside, Ashurst is a small parish with very little commerce to speak of and clear connections to the surrounding farmland and countryside. Local amenities are available at Partridge Green 3 miles away and very little will have changed for generations. A small residential village with an active primary school, the possibility of commercial property establishing itself in School Lane seems unlikely. With narrow access for vehicles and being set off the main B2135 preventing any passing trade, it is a most unsuitable location for a new commercial business. Also, the prospect of additional commercial traffic will pose a safety risk in a quiet residential lane frequented by children and parents attending the school.

7.2 However, in its current condition Batts Barn may appeal to tenants for use as a storage facility and yard storage. The prices wouldn't be on a par with what is stated in the comparables, but a rent of £4.50 might be achievable for the barn with some associated yard space and access. The barn currently has no services and is a simple lock up barn ancillary to the main house which will limit the potential rent.

This might equate to 1521 sq/ft @ £4.50 = £6,844 pa. Say £7,000pa.

7.3 This would however be conditional to a change of use to B2/B8 as the barn is currently within the residential curtilage of the main house. Plus, a commercial business is going to require services to be installed. For a longer-term tenancy a new lease would need to be created, with the expectation of an electricity supply and plumbed water system for fresh and foul water. The likelihood is that a water treatment plant would need to be constructed and installed for the benefit of a commercial tenant. These costs are most likely to be borne by the landlord and would far outstrip the initial first years rent. In its current form Lawson Commercial would not be able to undertake the marketing of the property. Only if a change of use could be achieved and a ratable value created could it be officially marketed to let.

7.4 With most commercial businesses located at Star Road Trading Estate, even with the installation of services there is no guarantee that a commercial building at the subject property would attract prospective tenants in the future.

7.5 As a commercial venture it seems that School Lane in Ashurst is the wrong place to build a new business premises. A rural location with poor access in a residential area doesn't make economic sense and is unlikely to attract occupiers. Conversion of the existing barn into a small residential property in keeping with the surrounding would seem a better option and reduce traffic movements in the quiet residential lane.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 It would appear that the Horsham district is not lacking commercial property, and the local plan has been effective in keeping them collated in local business or trading parks. This is beneficial to the countryside and prevents local roads and lanes being clogged with large commercial vehicles.

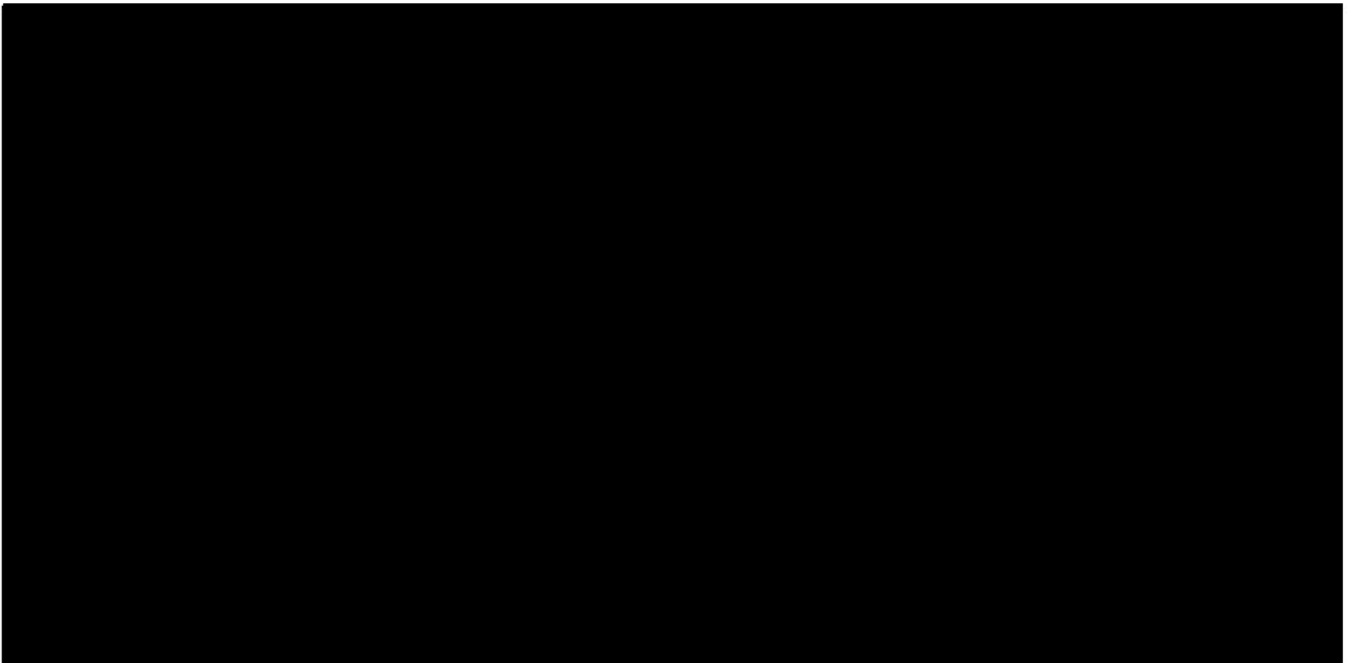
8.2 The nature of School Lane could possibly be ruined with the introduction of a business at the subject property. It is the wrong location for a long-term business premises and will fail to attract any passing trade.

8.3 Increased traffic movements from deliveries could cause potential road safety issues, especially with the Children attending the Primary school a quarter of a mile past the site further up the lane.

8.4 Whilst the site is currently used as a material store for the construction of the adjoining new house, this will end once the house is completed. A new business on the site could become an eyesore if waste materials or machine parts, for example, were to be stored on the land. This in turn could attract fly tipping, which is all too common a rural crime.

8.5 As School Lane is currently a quiet rural lane it seems appropriate to preserve this. This would be achieved by allowing the subject property to be converted into a small single dwelling with a well-maintained entrance and garden, which predominantly faces the road and the terraced cottages opposite.

8.6 Local residents living on school lane would most likely support a change of use of the site to residential rather than to commercial use.



Batts Barn, School Lane, Ashurst, BN44 3AY - Photos

1. Front elevation



2. Front elevation with driveway



3. Rear elevation



4. Front elevation, sliding entrance doors



5. Internal, roof trusses



6. Internal area

