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Dear South Somerset Planning Department,

I am writing to apply for permanent planning permission for the existing development at the above address.

Existing Situation

Tinkers Bubble is an off-grid, low-impact community, which aims to provide sustainable land-based livelihoods for up to 16 residents.

Tinkers Bubble was first granted a 5-year temporary permission in 1998 (98/01651/COU) after an initial application in 1994 was refused (94/01757/FUL and 94/01758/FUL).

This original permission was extended by 10 years in 2004 (04/01235/COU) and for a further 10 years in 2016 (15/05391/FUL).

These existing permissions, in place until 2026, cover agricultural and forestry enterprises and the associated low impact settlement, and allow:

- Up to 16 adults to reside at the site.
- Residential infrastructure, which consists of up to 20 low-impact buildings, confined to an area of land specified on the included plan.
- Ancillary small agricultural buildings, including polytunnels, field shelters and storage.

There are also permanent permissions in place for two related developments at the site:

- Permanent permission for a barn & sawmill structure (04/01235/COU).
- Permanent permission for an apple pressing and processing facility (15/05391/FUL).

Tinkers Bubble is now applying for permanent permission for residential status and for the development not already covered by permanent permission.

Outline Justification

Tinkers Bubble has been operating under temporary permission for 24 years. During this time, we have established ourselves as a flagship project within the UK's off-grid and intentional community sectors. We have developed the infrastructure and agricultural practises required to support our way of life, established sustainable land-based businesses, built a healthy relationship with the local community, and had a significant influence on different projects and groups across the UK.

At a time of increasing ecological and climate stress, and with increasing social stressors (including the Coronavirus lockdowns and the increasing cost of living), Tinkers Bubble offers a sustainable and resilient alternative. We believe that this project is ecologically and socially important, and plays a part in fulfilling local and national policies that attempt to mitigate the effects of climate change and unsustainable resource use. Having proven itself over the previous 28 years, the community has demonstrated that it is viable for Tinkers Bubble to be granted permanent planning permission.

The ecological, social, and financial viability of Tinkers Bubble is discussed in more detail throughout the rest of this covering letter. Attached documents include more information on the existing situation here and our approach to managing this project.

Project Details

Land Management & Building Principles

Tinkers Bubble uses traditional and sustainable techniques to generate our livelihood without using fossil fuels to manage the land. We produce the vast majority of our own food and our building materials from the land. We run a small-scale sustainable forestry business and an apple juice and cider business. The land management practices are detailed in the attached Land Management Plan and Forestry Management Plan.

The buildings are self-build low-impact structures, made primarily from locally sourced renewable materials. Building timber is felled and processed on site, and the majority of furnishings are reclaimed.. Any new buildings must be agreed with the community, and adhere to the attached Development Policy. Attached photos show the typical building style.

Social Structure and Safeguarding of Principles

Tinkers Bubble consists of a two-tier legal and organisational structure.

The land is owned by Tinkers Bubble Land Ltd (TBLL), which is a Community Benefit Society. Directors of TBLL are mostly former residents, who meet once a year to review TBLL's interests in the ongoing operation of Tinkers Bubble. TBLL has two main functions; to hold the primary asset (the land) in trust, and to intervene if the existing residents deviate from the agreed ethos and management practices of Tinkers Bubble. This legal structure safeguards the project against potential take-over or profiteering, and includes an asset lock on the land, which could only be sold to a similar organisation.

The day-to-day operation of Tinkers Bubble is managed by a group of residents. These people are tenants, and manage the land in a similar way to a worker's co-operative. Residents are bound by a Resident's Agreement (attached), which outlines the ethos and practices of the project. There has always been a turnover of residents, which allows Tinkers Bubble to continue to act as an educational project for new entrants, as well as disseminating the experience gained here across other projects. New residents are subject to a probationary period of a minimum of 3 months, during which time they and the community assess whether they fit with the ethos and existing community of Tinkers Bubble.

Details of Application

The land consists of different development zones, as shown on the attached Site Layout map.

Residential Zone

Existing permission allows up to 20 buildings, of which 14 may be residences. We seek to extend this permission to 24 buildings, without changing the limit of 14 residences.

During the last 10 years the number of ancillary buildings in the Residential Zone has increased as communal facilities have been improved. These structures include small communal workshops and food and tool storage. We seek to increase the number of permitted ancillary buildings in order to allow for future small scale infrastructure provision as need and opportunity allows. Anticipated developments include further tool storage and food processing areas, to be located close to the existing structures within the Residential Zone.

Woodland Zone

Consists of coniferous plantation woodland and coppice which is managed for forestry enterprises, and mixed broadleaf woodland which is primarily managed for ecological benefits. There is no infrastructure development within the woodland zone except for the existing small ancillary buildings adjacent to the Residential Zone.

Light Industry Zone

Comprises the existing permanent barn and sawmill (04/01235/COU) and the apple pressing and processing facility (15/05391/FUL), as well as a small car park and access track.

Agricultural Zones A & B

Comprises mixed agricultural land, including orchards, grazed meadows, vegetable gardens, and agroforestry. Existing development in this area comprises agricultural and garden sheds, animal shelters, and polytunnels.

Viability & Importance of Tinkers Bubble

As well as having demonstrated its long-term viability, Tinkers Bubble also has an important ongoing role in meeting the changing needs of our time. With many Councils declaring a Climate Emergency, shortages of affordable housing, and intensifying economic pressures on conventional farming, Tinkers Bubble explores an alternative approach to living, working and resource production, which is more socially and ecologically viable than many other options available. As local and national policy gain more focus on sustainability in housing, livelihoods, and land-management practices, Tinkers Bubble offers a successful example of how these targets can be met.

Financial Viability

The limit of 16 adults has been previously justified (see 15/05391/FUL covering letter) based on the potential for food production and business income. These estimates are still relevant; despite the cost of living increasing nationally, this has yet to significantly impact the cost of living within Tinkers Bubble. We estimate an annual income of £1,500 to £2,000 per person is sufficient.

The cost of living at Tinkers Bubble remains low due to the scale of self-sufficiency. The vast majority of food is produced on site, and the community is completely self-sufficient in fuel for cooking and heating, and in power. The ethos of the community means that there is a focus on reducing expenses and consumption, and on re-using and repairing rather than buying new. Our land stewardship, linked to organic standards, relies very little on external inputs.

Income has typically been generated through sales of timber, award-winning apple juice, cider, and vegetables. Over the previous few years, resident numbers have been below the maximum (between 5 and 12 adults) which has meant that the businesses have been generating less than their maximum potential income. Currently, the 7 residents are supported by an apple, cider and vinegar business which turns over approximately £6,000 - £8,000 p.a., a forestry business which turned over £6,500 to £10,800 annually in its last three years of operation (2021/22 saw a hiatus in operations because of the need for major repair work to the sawmill machinery), and individual enterprises. The current principal individual enterprise is a salad business, the income from which supports one resident. All businesses are scalable and have demonstrated in the past that they are capable of meeting the financial needs of a full community of 16 adults.

Ecological Viability & Importance

Our approach to forestry and agriculture is sustainable and based on ecological values and we attempt to approach land work with a regenerative attitude. The integration of humans with the landscape and with their food production has multiple benefits, including ecosystem and soil health, biodiversity increase, reduction in carbon emissions, and the closing of input/output loops. The agricultural enterprises are managed to organic standards, and the ban on fossil fuels restricts high-impact tillage and other practices which damage soil fertility and structure.

Overall, forestry operations at Tinkers Bubble seem to have had a beneficial impact on the environment. The thinning of the coniferous plantation that makes up the majority of the land has brought light into the

understory, allowing for natural regeneration. Areas of clearfell with broadleaf re-plant create patchwork ecosystems that allow a change from commercial coniferous landscape back towards natural succession. In other areas, standing and fallen dead wood is left as habitat, coppice is being brought back into rotation, and woodland has been thinned rather than clear-felled. These approaches to woodland management are all shown to have a positive impact on the ecosystem.

The lifestyle of the residents of Tinkers Bubble creates less pollution than that of conventional Western lifestyles. Our greenhouse gas emissions and our resource use are both well below the national average, and our lifestyle is one approach which can move us towards net-zero carbon emissions and 'one-planet' resource use.

Social Viability & Importance

The management practises that benefit the ecology of Tinkers Bubble also have beneficial impacts on its human inhabitants. By developing food sovereignty in community, mental and physical health are improved whilst giving people meaningful and rewarding work.

As well as the benefits to the residents, Tinkers Bubble hosts approximately 70 short-stay volunteers each year. Volunteers learn different aspects of land management and develop the skills required to live in community. We also host a variety of day visits, including an annual open day, recent events with South Somerset District Council and the Land Workers Alliance, and educational visits from university groups and local school groups. The educational amenity of Tinkers Bubble spans different interests, including inspiring children to engage differently with the natural world, developing practical skills through volunteering, and sharing different approaches to land management and ecological stewardship with people working in those fields.

As well as bringing people to the land, Tinkers Bubble has acted as a catalyst for sustainable developments elsewhere. Past and present residents have gone on to establish and participate in various significant projects, including;

- Establishing and supporting the Land Workers Alliance (a union and campaigning group for land-workers)
- Establishing and supporting the Green Scythe Fair (a regional annual land-skills event)
- Establishing and supporting the Green Earth Awakening Festival (an annual Buddhist/ecological event run by Triratna)
- Running Monkton Wylde Court educational centre for sustainability in Dorset
- Establishing Fivepenny Farm, a land-worker's co-operative in Dorset
- Food production and agri-wilding at 42 Acres, a regenerative estate & wellbeing centre in Somerset
- Developing commercial food production and distribution enterprises, including the local Trading Post, Avalon Glasshouse in Somerset, and Little Valley Veg in Devon
- Establishing commercial craft enterprises, including Woven Farewell, currently based in Dorset

Tinkers Bubble residents have also been involved in local community activities, including volunteering in the local shop, participating with Friends of Ham Hill, and putting on a monthly open-mic folk evening in the village hall. We also attend local markets and supply businesses in the area with produce from the land.

Supporting Documentation & Validations

In support of this application we have provided the following documents:

- Application Form
- Site location and boundary
- Site Layout
- Photos of existing development

- Resident's Agreement
- Land Management Plan
- Forestry Management Plan
- Development Policy
- Letters of Support (Ham Hill Country Park and Norton-sub-Hamdon Community Land Trust)

Following consultation with SSDC, we have not provided the validations that are typically required for a major planning application. This is because this application is an update to an existing permission for a project that has already been established for 28 years, and so will not create new impacts on the ecology or visual amenity of the area.

If you require any further information from us, please contact me.

Thank you for your consideration,

Alex Toogood

Tinkers Bubble Resident