Rob Duncan
Planning
Consultancy

PLANNING STATEMENT

LIGHTWOOD FARM, CHEADLE

JULY 2016

Site Address:
Lightwood Farm, Ashbourne Road, Cheadle, Staffordshire, ST10 1SJ

Applicant:
Saplings Associates Ltd.

Proposal:
Conversion and Alteration of Former Agricultural Buildings to form 3no. Dwellings

Planning Statement:
Date Issued: 11th July 2016
Job Reference: RDP/2016/087

Report Prepared By:
Rob Duncan BSc(Hons) MA MRTPI
Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd

Contact Details:
Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd.
70 Ferndale Road, Lichfield, Staffordshire, WS13 7DL
Email: rob@robduncanplanning.co.uk
Tel. 07779 783521

1 Introduction

1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Sapling Associates Ltd. to seek planning permission for the conversion and alteration of part of an existing complex of former agricultural buildings into residential use.

1.2 The application follows on from the recent grant of prior approval for conversion of the rest of the complex of buildings into 3no. dwellings under Class MB permitted development rights (LPA Reference: DET/2015/0008).

1.3 The proposed development relates to the westernmost section of the existing U-shaped complex of buildings, with the aforementioned prior approval scheme relating to the northern and eastern sections.

1.4 The application proposes the conversion and alteration of the western section of the complex to create 3no. dwellings. These are labelled as Units 4, 5 and 6 on the submitted plans.

1.5 Unit 4 will comprise of a kitchen, lounge, dining room, hallway and w/c at ground floor, with four ensuite bedrooms and a dressing room at first floor. Unit 5 will comprise of a kitchen, lounge, study, dining room, hallway and study at ground floor, with four bedrooms (3 ensuite) and family bathroom at first floor. Unit 6 is set over one floor, and comprises a lounge, kitchen/diner, hallway, three bedrooms and family bathroom.

1.6 The application is accompanied by a Structural Survey and a Bat & Bird Survey which should be read in conjunction with this Planning Statement.

2 Site Location

2.1 The existing building comprises part of a U-shaped range of brick and tile agricultural buildings that form part of Lightwood Farm, Ashbourne Road, Cheadle. The building is predominantly two storeys in nature, with a modest single storey element located opposite the farmhouse, and benefits from numerous existing openings. Access to the site, as with the adjacent residential conversions permitted under application DET/2015/0008, is to be taken direct off the Ashbourne Road via an improved access point.

3 Planning Policy

3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires proposals to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan taking into consideration any material considerations relevant to the determination of the application. The Development Plan for this area comprises the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy (2014) of which the following policies are considered to be of relevance:

3.1 Policy SS1 of the Core Strategy relates to 'Development Principles' and states that the Council will expect development to contribute positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands in terms of delivering, amongst others, easy access to jobs, shops and transport services by all sections of the community; development which maintains the distinctive character of the Staffordshire Moorlands, its individual towns and villages and their settings, and development that secures high quality, sustainable environments.

3.2 Policy SS1a of the Core Strategy relates to the 'Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development' and states that when considering development proposals the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. It will always work pro-actively with applicants jointly to find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible, and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area. Planning applications that accord with the policies in the Core Strategy will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision then the Council will grant permission unless material considerations indicate otherwise – taking into account whether:

- *Any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole;*

- *or specific policies in that Framework indicate that development should be restricted.*

3.3 Policy SS6c of the adopted Core Strategy relates to the 'Other Rural Areas Area Strategy' and states that these areas will provide only for development which meets an essential local need, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside. The policy goes on to state that the Council will meet essential local needs by (amongst others):

- *Allowing the conversion, extension or replacement of an existing rural building in accordance with policies R1 and R2.*

3.2 Policy R2 of the Core Strategy relates to 'Rural Housing' and states that the conversion of non-residential rural buildings for residential use will be acceptable where the building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion and it can be demonstrated that agricultural or commercial use is not viable or suitable through a marketing exercise, or its conversion to residential use would enable a building of particular merit to be safeguarded.

3.3 Policy DC1 of the Core Strategy relates to 'Design Considerations' and states that new development should be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area. Proposals should be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance.

3.4 Policy T1 of the Core Strategy relates to 'Development and Sustainable Transport' and states that the Council will promote and support development which reduces reliance on the private car for travel journeys, reduces the need to travel generally and helps deliver the priorities of the Staffordshire Local Transport Plans, where this is consistent with other policies. This will be achieved by, amongst others, ensuring that all new development is located where the highway network can satisfactorily accommodate traffic generated by the development or can be improved as part of the development.

3.5 Policy NE1 of the Core Strategy relates to 'Biodiversity and Geological Resources' and states that development should ensure that it produces a net gain in biodiversity, and ensure that any unavoidable impacts are appropriately mitigated for. Proposals should also protect and enhance habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity.

4 Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework

4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places a strong emphasis on promoting sustainable development, including the delivery of new housing and seeks to secure high quality design. The provisions of the NPPF are discussed in more detail within the Planning Assessment below.

5 Planning Assessment

Principle of Development

5.1 The application proposes the conversion of part of an existing range of former agricultural buildings to create 3no. dwellings. Policy SS6c of the Core Strategy states that within the rural areas, the Council will meet essential local needs by allowing the conversion of an existing rural building to residential use where it accords with policy R2 of the Core Strategy. Policy R2 of the Core Strategy states that the conversion of non-residential rural buildings for residential use will be acceptable where the building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion and it can be demonstrated that agricultural or commercial use is not viable or suitable through a marketing exercise, or its conversion to residential use would enable a building of particular merit to be safeguarded.

5.2 In terms of the building's suitability for conversion it is considered that the building is worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion as it forms part of an impressive range of two-storey former agricultural buildings. A Structural Survey furthermore accompanies the application. This has assessed the structural condition of the building and has undertaken investigations in terms of foundations and ground conditions.

5.3 The Survey identifies the need for replacement of some perished brickwork, general repointing, and the replacement of some roof timbers to remedy existing deflections, but overall concludes that there are no major structural defects to the interior of the buildings, and that they are generally considered to be robust and ideal for conversion.

5.4 The application nevertheless proposes a degree of rebuilding to an existing single storey section of the barn complex, which has suffered the loss of its roof as well as some of its elevations. The position and extent of the extension is nevertheless still discernable and the application proposes to reconstruct this section of building using reclaimed materials, with a new pitched roof to match that which previously existed on the site. The extent of these alterations, taken as a whole, amounts to rebuilding in the order of less than 15%. I would not regard such extent of rebuilding as constituting 'significant' rebuilding, and given the benefits of reinstating its original relationship to the complex of buildings, coupled with the works facilitating the delivery of a new dwelling in a sustainable location, I submit that they are justified in planning terms.

5.5 I reach this conclusion having regard to the provisions for development within the Green Belt (of which this site is acknowledged to not form part), which allows for the limited extension of existing buildings. The Government attaches significant weight to the Green Belt and yet permits such extensions. By contrast the Government does not attach significant weight to the open countryside. I therefore submit that extensions to buildings should also be permissible within the rural area. The extension is modest, well related to the character of the existing buildings and will not result in any additional encroachment into the countryside beyond that which already occurs. As such it will not result in significant and demonstrable adverse impacts to the character of the existing buildings or the character and appearance of the

surrounding area. I therefore submit that the proposal accords with the relevant provisions of policy R2 of the Core Strategy in this regard.

5.6 In terms of exploration of other uses, the applicant has commissioned Kevin Ford Associates to undertake marketing of the buildings, and a Marketing Report summarising this exercise has been submitted to accompany the application. The Marketing Report confirms that the buildings have been on the open market since April 2015 (circa 14 months at time of writing), and they were advertised specifically for agricultural, equestrian, commercial or tourism reuse (please see accompanying Sales Particulars). The Sales Particulars furthermore confirmed that a clause would be imposed on any sale to preclude the conversion of the buildings to residential use, thereby serving to target the marketing exercise specifically at those who might have been interested in commercial/tourism reuse.

5.7 Whilst the marketing exercise generated a number of enquiries, the Marketing Report confirms that no offers to purchase the buildings were received. The Report comments that feedback from potential purchasers was that the cost of renovating the barns to form commercial buildings would not be viable from a capital point of view and that access to the site by larger vehicles would be difficult. The Marketing Report furthermore identifies that there are numerous purpose built shops/offices available within Cheadle Town Centre, and that the demand for commercial premises is generally low in this area. The Marketing Report also comments that the local holiday lettings market has been severely affected by the reduced number of visitors to Alton Towers, and the expansion of their on-site accommodation facilities, including the recently constructed self-catering lodges. As with commercial uses, the costs of renovation of the barns to form holiday accommodation is prohibitive as the rate of return on the investment would be extremely low.

5.8 In addition to the marketing report undertaken, I would also submit that the presence of the commercial uses such as offices or holiday lets, in close proximity to the residential properties that have been permitted under application DET/2015/0008, would derive harm to neighbouring amenity as a result of the comings and goings of visitors, noisy guests etc. This leads me to conclude that the applicant has demonstrated that agricultural or commercial use is not viable or suitable and as a consequence the proposal accords with the provisions of policy R2 of the Core Strategy.

Design & Layout

5.9 Policy DC1 of the Core Strategy states that new development should be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area. Proposals should be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance.

5.10 This proposal entails the sympathetic conversion of the existing building, in a manner which reflects the design approach adopted for the adjacent units approved under application DET/2015/0008. The proposal makes full and effective reuse of the numerous openings that the building already benefits from, with only one 'new' opening proposed which will be within the re-constructed single storey section of the building, and the insertion of three roof lights.

5.11 A modest degree of rebuilding is proposed as discussed above, but this is considered to be complementary to the character of the range of buildings. The openings proposed within this section of building are understood to reflect those which previously existed, aside from the window in the western elevation and the single rooflight. The overall extent of alterations to the

building is not however considered to be significant, and will result in a high quality design that complements the existing buildings. The proposal is therefore considered to accord with the provisions of policy DC1 of the Core Strategy.

Ecological Impacts

5.12 Policy NE1 of the Core Strategy states that development should ensure that it produces a net gain in biodiversity, and ensure that any unavoidable impacts are appropriately mitigated for. Proposals should also protect and enhance habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity.

5.13 The application is accompanied by a bat and bird survey prepared by Evolution Ecology which has assessed the likelihood of bats being present on the site. Based on evidence of bat droppings and feeding remains the presence of bats in the building is considered likely. The building is considered to be of high ecological value with numerous potential ingress/egress points for nesting birds and bats. During the surveys of the building, the presence of bats was identified and it is concluded that there are existing roosts for Common Pipistrelle bats and Brown Long-Eared Bats within the building. In mitigation, the survey recommends the provision of bat access tiles into the roof, and the provision of two bat boxes and two blackbird nest boxes. The applicant is agreeable to these measures which can be secured by an appropriately worded planning condition. As a consequence the proposal will not give rise to harm to protected species and thus accords with the provisions of policy NE1 of the Core Strategy.

Highway Safety

3.4 The proposed dwellings will be accessed via the existing driveway that serves the U-shaped complex of buildings, and which is shared with the adjacent

Lightwood Farmhouse. The access will benefit from visibility splays of 2.4m x 90m which represents a significant enhancement to visibility over the current access arrangements. This is the same arrangement that was approved under application DET/2015/0008 and existing boundary treatments will be replanted behind the new visibility line. Such details are understood to have been previously agreed between the applicant and the Local Highway Authority at pre-application stage, and can be secured through a Grampian style condition. The access will lead into the existing courtyard area in front of the U-shaped buildings, wherein residents' vehicles will be parked. This area affords more than adequate space for the turning and manouvering of vehicles and as such the proposal is unlikely to generate any significant highway safety concerns. The proposal is therefore considered to accord with the provisions of policy T1 of the Core Strategy.

Other Matters

5.14 In addition to the above matters, it is considered that there are a number of other material considerations which weigh in favour of the proposed development. The first of these is the Local Authority's inability to demonstrate a five year deliverable supply of housing which means that this proposal has to be determined in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in policy SS1a of the Core Strategy, and paragraph 14 of the NPPF. As a consequence, this proposal should only be refused if any adverse impacts of doing so would *significantly and demonstrably* outweigh the benefits of the development.

5.15 The conversion of the building to residential use is considered to be acceptable in the context of the NPPF as the site occupies a sustainable location, close to an area that is a target for substantial new development within the adopted Core Strategy. The proposal will furthermore deliver a number of benefits including social economic benefits associated with

helping the Local Authority to meet its housing needs, and the additional expenditure which would be derived from three additional households. The proposal will also derive significant benefits by securing the long-term future of the existing buildings on the site to the benefit of the heritage of the local area. These benefits are considered to weigh heavily in favour of the proposed development and should be taken into consideration when the application is determined.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Paragraph 186 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should approach decision-taking in a positive way to foster the delivery of sustainable development. It goes on to state in paragraph 187 that local planning authorities should look for solutions rather than problems, and decision-takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

6.2 It is considered that this proposal constitutes a sustainable form of development that accords with the Development Plan having regard to the following conclusions:

- *The building is considered suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion;*

- *The building is unsuitable for continued agricultural use, and the accompanying Marketing Report has demonstrated conclusively that there is no interest in converting the building for commercial/tourism uses;*

- *The reinstatement of the single storey section of building will not amount to significant rebuilding and will serve to restore the character of this complex of buildings;*

- *The absence of a five year deliverable supply of housing means this proposal should be considered in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development and should only be refused if any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits;*

- *The proposal makes full and beneficial reuse of existing openings;*

- *The proposal will not give rise to any adverse impact on Protected Species, and will result in an enhancement to local biodiversity;*

- *The proposal will not result in any adverse impact to highway safety in the locality and proposes the same access arrangements as those which have been previously approved by the Local Authority;*

- *The proposal will deliver a number of material planning benefits in the content of the three dimensions of sustainable development;*

- *The site occupies a sustainable location within easy walking and cycling distance of the town centre.*

6.3 It is therefore considered that the proposed development accords with the provisions of policies SS1, SS6c, R2, DC1, T1 and NE1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy DPD, and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework. The proposal will furthermore not result in any

adverse impacts sufficient to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the development.

6.4 The Local Authority is therefore respectfully requested to grant planning permission accordingly in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in policy SS1a of the Core Strategy and paragraph 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework.