Construction of self catering holiday accommodation unit – Horse Road, Alton

Design and Access Statement

On behalf of Mr R Prince

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December 2009

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1. Introduction and Context

1.1 This statement has been prepared in support of a detailed planning application for the construction of a self catering holiday accommodation unit on the site of a former dwelling at Horse Road, Alton. The statement should be read in conjunction with the submitted drawings and Arboricultural report.

1.2 The proposed unit will serve the village of Alton and the Churnet Valley. The application has been submitted in view of Policy SS7 of the emerging Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy, which seeks to encourage tourism faculties in the Churnet Valley Corridor.

1.3 The application site lies adjacent to an area of woodland, on the edge of the village of Alton. The site is contained within the Alton Conservation Area. The proposed scheme has been sensitively designed so as to protect the most important trees in and around the site, and to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

1.4 The submission of the application follows pre-application discussions with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and Staffordshire County Council Highways Dpt. Severn Trent have also been consulted about the adjacent storm drain.

2. Use & Amount

2.1 A single self catering holiday accommodation unit is proposed. The proposed unit will provide two bedrooms (one double and one twin), as well as living, kitchen and bathroom accommodation. The living area will have the potential to double up as additional sleeping accommodation, if required. The provision of a self catering holiday unit is in accordance with draft Core Strategy Policy SS7 (Churnet Valley Tourism Corridor), which states that “the Churnet Valley Corridor shall be identified as a major sustainable tourism corridor” and that within the corridor ‘short stay and long stay visitor accommodation’ and ‘tourist facilities and services’ shall be supported.

2.2 The proposal is also in accordance with draft Core Strategy Policy E3 (Tourism and Cultural Development), which sates that "support will be given to clusters of attractions, particularly within the Churnet Valley Tourism Corridor in accordance with Policy SS7" and that "within the Churnet Valley Tourism Corridor permanent new tourism accommodation of an appropriate scale to complement existing attractions will be supported where there is a demonstrable need which cannot be met in other ways".

2.3 Due to its location, it is considered that the proposal is also capable of meeting Policy R18 of the outgoing Local Plan (Tourist Accommodation), which states that "new build self catering accommodation will be expected to locate within town and village boundaries except where it is closely related to existing tourist development and of a scale which can be easily accommodated into the local landscape".

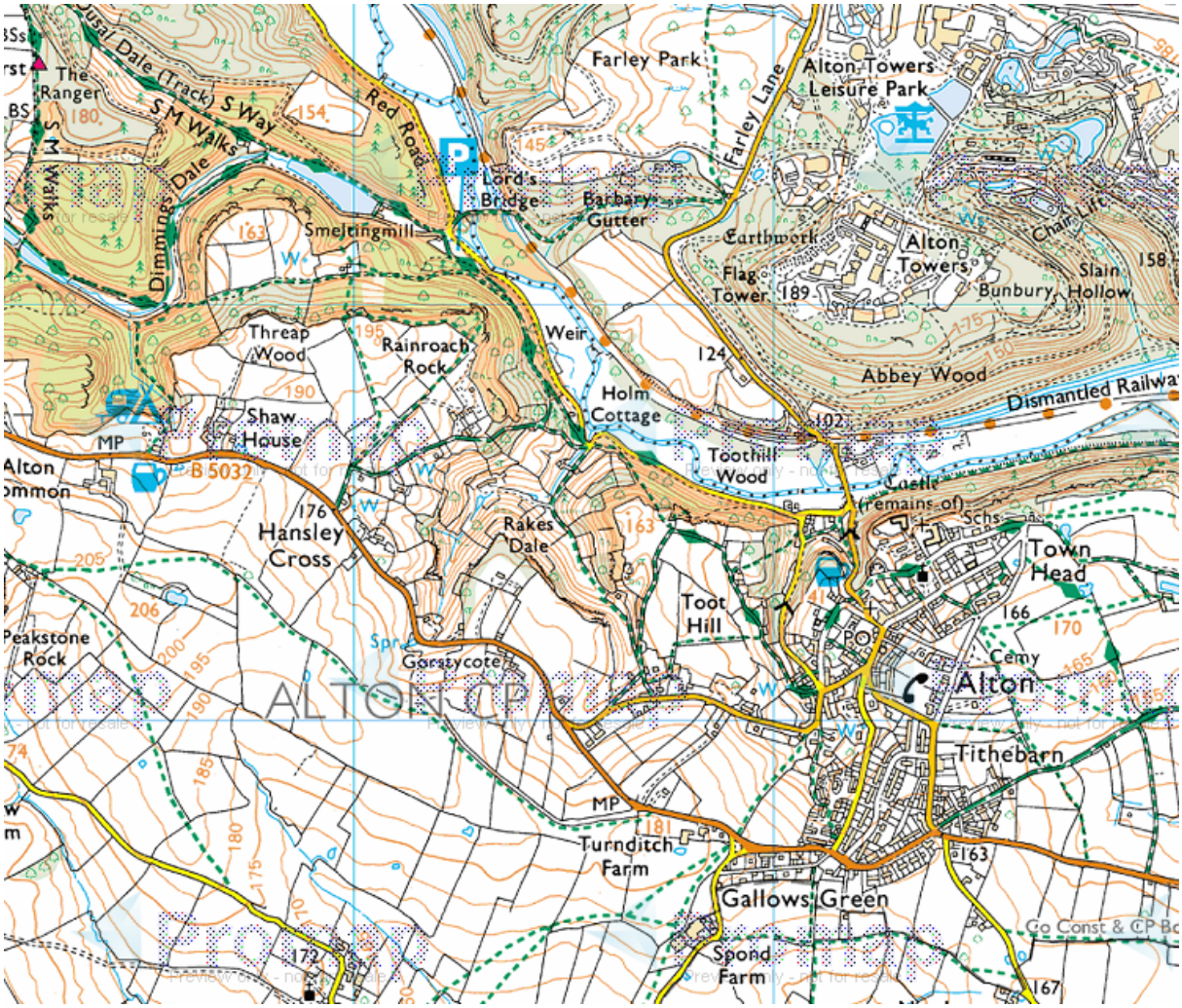
2.4 The site has an exceptional location in terms of visitor facilities, and offers a sustainable base for visitors to the area. The following visitor facilities are within walking distance:

- Alton Village –an attractive village of considerable historic interest
- Alton Towers Theme Park –the site is conveniently located on the western side of the village close to the Theme Park entrance
- Alton Castle –now run as a Catholic Youth Retreat Centre
- Ramblers Retreat Country Restaurant and Coffee House – situated on nearby Red Road
- National Trust woodland –north west of the application site
- Forestry Commission woodland at Dimmingsdale
- Former Churnet Valley railway route –cycle / footpath route linking Oakamoor and Denstone
- A myriad of footpaths and bridle paths around Toot hill, Rakes Dale and Dinningsdale, including the Staffordshire Way. A

popular footpath bordering the site provides access up to Toot Hill

- Toot hill Rock vantage point, providing spectacular views of the Churnet Valley
- Blacksmiths Arms PH
- Bulls Head PH
- Royal Oak PH
- White Hart PH
- Alton Bridge Hotel (approximately 110m from the site)
- Talbot PH (approximately 100m from the site)
- St Johns Church
- St Peters Church
- Methodist Church
- Londis convenience shop
- Post Office
- Village Hall

Regular bus services operate from Alton, picking up adjacent to the post office and also from nearby Tithebarn.

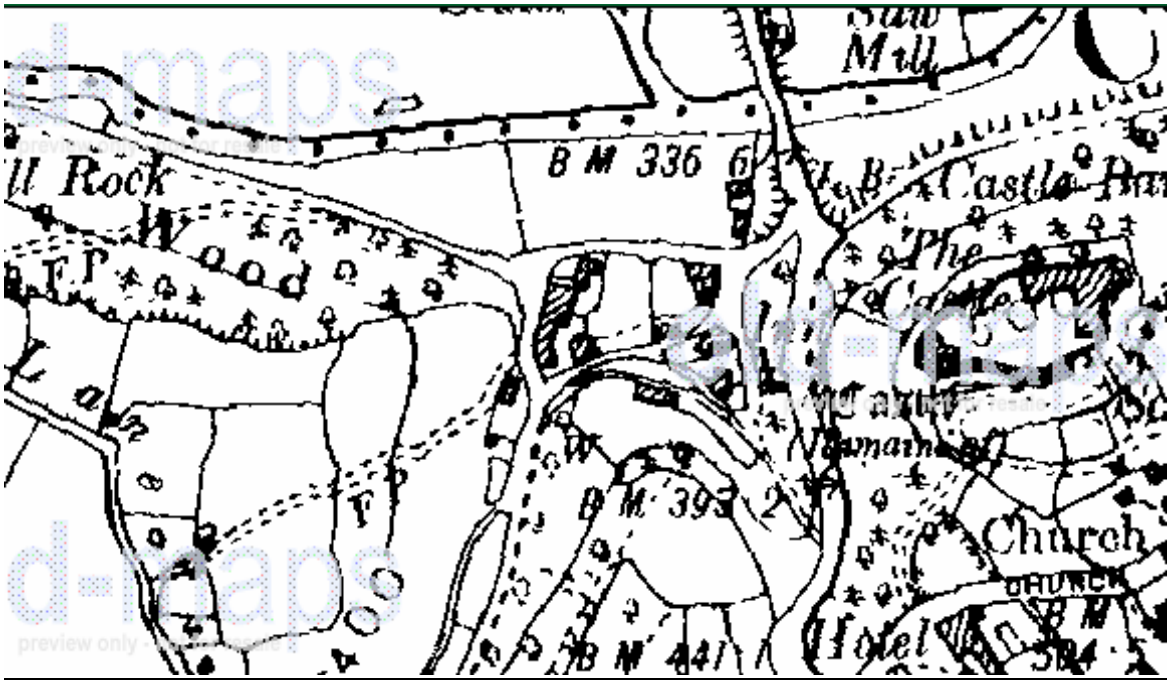


Above: Ordnance Survey map of Alton and the surrounding area

3. Layout

3.1 The siting of the proposed building has been given very careful consideration. A number of factors have influenced the final layout, including the following:

- *The previous use of the site.* The site is part of a larger land holding, including woodland to the west and an open area to the south. The site was preferred to other locations on the holding partly because it was formerly the site of a dwelling (see historical Ordnance Survey map extract below). In this sense the site constitutes previously developed land, and it is more sustainable to focus development in this type of location.



Above: 1924 Ordnance Survey map extract, showing the dwelling which formerly existed on the site

- *The relationship of the site with Chestnut Cottage and other adjacent cottages to the north*. It is considered important that the new building is in close proximity and appears visually tied to these existing buildings, in order that the building is seen as being part of the village, rather than detached from it. Accordingly it is proposed that the new building is closely related to the nearby cottages. This will help to maintain the character and appearance of the settlement itself and of the undeveloped land to the south of the site. The orientation of the proposed building also takes account of the relationship with the adjacent cottages. The building will be positioned parallel with Horse Road. This will help to provide balance and enclosure to the views up and down Horse Road, and will complement existing views towards Chestnut Cottage.



Above: The proposed self catering holiday unit will be positioned in the same approximate location as the dwelling which formerly existed on site, closely related to the existing cottages to the north and parallel with Horse Road. This will provide balance and enclosure to views up and down Horse Road, complement views towards Chestnut Cottage, and ensure that the new building is seen as part of the built framework of the village.

- *The position and quality of existing trees on the site*. The proposed building has been strategically positioned so as to avoid damaging the root systems of the most important trees in and around the site.
- *The availability of visibility splays*. The proposed building and access have been positioned so as to maximise visibility sightlines. The required 2.4m by 43m sightlines are provided.
- *The proximity of the adjacent storm drain*. A storm drain runs beneath Horse Road. Severn Trent have been informally consulted about the proposal and the building positioned so as to avoid damage to the drain.

4. Scale

4.1 The proposed building will be of a similar scale to the existing cottages to the north. The cottages have relatively low eaves heights and narrow gable depths. Chestnut Cottage for example has an eaves height of 4.27m and a gable depth of 4.94m. Similarly, the main section of the new building will have an eaves height of 4.25m and a gable depth of 5.2m, and the subservient section an eaves height of 3.5m and a gable depth of 4.4m. The width of the main section will be 7.5m. This compares well with Chestnut Cottage, which has an overall width of 9.3m



Above: Existing cottages to the north of the site. The proposed building reflects the proportions of these buildings well.

4.2 The provision of a lower, narrower section at the northern end of the building will help to break the form of the structure and will help to visually tie the building with the adjacent cottages and other vernacular buildings in Alton, which tend to have subservient annexes.

5. Landscaping

5.1 The proposed scheme is designed to ensure minimise disturbance to existing trees. It will be necessary to remove a small number of young specimens, namely a group of small Elm and Hawthorn in the centre of the site, and a Sycamore and Hawthorn adjacent to the road. As is detailed by the submitted Arboricultural report, the group of trees in the centre of the site are unsuitable for retention in any case, and felling is recommended, and the second two trees have a C2 retention category (meaning that "retention should not be allowed to impose a constraint on development"). The report confirms that the other trees adjacent to the proposed building "need not be adversely affected by the proposal".

5.2 The removal of the two trees which are situated adjacent to Horse Road will not have a significant impact on the character and appearance of the road due to the presence of several adjacent trees which are to be retained.

5.3 With the retention of the vast majority of the existing trees to the south and west of the site (which form an L-shape around two sides of the site, restricting views from the south and forming a backdrop to views from the north), the proposed building will appear well assimilated with the local landscape. Horse Road will retain its rural character and sense of enclosure.

5.4 In accordance with the recommendations of the Arboricultural report, a 'no-dig' three dimensional cellular confinement system beneath the parking and turning area. Stone or brick pavers will be used to provide areas of hard surfacing (the precise material type is to be subsequently agreed with the local authority). The use of stone or brick pavers is considered appropriate because it is permeable, facilitates wheelchair access, and allows for a high quality finish as befits a Conservation Area. There is a precedent of the use of stone and brick paving in Alton, as is demonstrated by the photographs below.




Above: Stone and brick pavers in use in Alton. Above left –junction of Horse Road and Station Road. Above right –Knight Lane

5.5 The areas of land to the west of the building and the parking / turning area will be grassed. The existing post and rail fence which runs along the frontage will be restored, protected and retained (except for a gap at the entrance). A new stone wall is not practicable due to the need to avoid digging in close proximity to the storm drain.

6. Appearance

6.1 As stated earlier in the report, the scale and proportions of the building are designed to reflect those of the adjacent cottages and other vernacular buildings in Alton. The subservient annex is deliberately positioned at the northern end of the building so as to provide a gradual transition from the modest domestic cottages to the north. The section will be built entirely of sandstone, to provide a visual link with those cottages. The main section of the building will have a sandstone base, to provide a sense of weight and horizontal emphasis, and a timber clad upper.

6.2 Timber cladding is favoured as a building material for the following reasons:

- To reflect the woodland character of the immediate vicinity.
- To distinguish the building from the domestic properties to the north. It is considered that the new building should not attempt

to compete with or mimic the nearby traditional cottages, but rather should have its own identity and look appropriate for its age.

- Allow for greater flexibility and simplicity in the design of the openings. A building constructed entirely of stone would require the use of lintels, jambs and sills throughout, which could make for an over elaborate, domesticated appearance. The use of timber cladding enables cleaner lines around the openings. This is particularly appropriate for the large opening on the southern elevation.

6.3 The building will have a contemporary look by virtue of the timber cladding and large opening on the southern gable, but equally, the fenestration of each of the elevations will be simple, balanced and restrained. This is considered to be appropriate given the building's Conservation Area location and its proximity to the Listed Chestnut Cottage. The eastern and northern elevations are particularly restrained, in view of their relationship with Chestnut Cottage. The eastern (roadside) elevation will consist of two first floor openings only, plus a plain timber door and small window in the subservient section, and the northern elevation will contain only a single high level gable window.

6.4 High quality materials are proposed throughout, as is appropriate given the site's Conservation Area location, including cut sandstone, Staffordshire Blue Plain Clay tiles, oak window frames and stone / brick paving.

7. Access

7.1 Vehicular and pedestrian access to the site will be provided immediately to the south of the building, in roughly the same location as the existing pedestrian gate (which formerly served the dwelling which used to stand on the site).

7.2 The proposed entrance will emerge onto a speed controlled stretch of road subject to a 30mph limit. The Department for Transport document Manual For Streets recommends visibility sightlines of 2.4m by 33m in 30mph zones (including an adjustment for bonnet length). These splays are provided as part of the submitted scheme, and cross land 'controlled' land in their entirety. Prior to the submission of the application pre-application discussions were held with Staffordshire County Council Highway Authority and no objections were raised.

8. Impact on Climate Change

8.1 As discussed in section 2 of this statement, the site is situated in a very sustainable location, accessible via public transport and short and long distance footpath, cycle path and bridle path routes, and well related to a wide range of popular tourist attractions and visitor facilities.

8.2 The building itself will be extremely well insulated and therefore energy efficient. Sandstone has good thermal mass qualities and the use of external timber cladding will allow for a significant depth of wall insulation. The building will be heated primarily by a wood burner, situated in the open plan living / kitchen area on the ground floor. Using a wood burner in this context represents a sustainable choice: there is a ready supply of wood available in the surrounding woodland, which is part of the same land holding.

9. Secure by Design

9.1 Secure by Design principles have also been fully considered in the design of the property.

9.2 It is inventible that there will be short periods of non occupation between one set of guests leaving and the next group arriving. The timber shutters to be provided on the ground floor section of the large southern gable opening and the lack of ground floor windows on the roadside elevation, will help to keep the building secure during these periods. Notwithstanding the above there are sufficient windows in the scheme to enable active surveillance of all sides of the building during periods of occupation.

10. Conclusion

10.1 The proposed development will provide a self catering holiday accommodation unit in a popular, sustainable location within the Churnet Valley, on the western edge of Alton village adjacent to a number of popular visitor attractions and facilities.

10.2 The proposed scheme will offer an excellent quality of design that is appropriate for the site and its setting in terms of scale, form, orientation, and architectural style, and which incorporates high quality materials throughout. The proposed building will relate well with the existing cottages to the north, and will assimilate well with the surrounding woodland. The development will preserve and enhance key views up and down Horse Road, and towards the Listed Chestnut Cottage.

10.3 Overall it is considered that the proposal is in full conformity with both the wording and spirit of Policy SS7 of the emerging Core Strategy, and complies fully with all other relevant local, regional and national policies. It is therefore considered that the proposed scheme is acceptable in planning terms and should be approved.

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December 2009