FOREFRONT
DEVELOPMENT CONSULTING
9 Britannia Park, North Road, Stoke on Trent, ST6 2PZ
Office 01782 216912 WWW.FOREFRONTDC.UK

Design and Access Statement

Proposed change of use from disused agricultural barn into dwelling at Oak Barn, Bagnall, Staffordshire.

1.0 Introduction

This Planning Statement has been prepared to accompany a submission for full planning permission seeking change of use of a redundant agricultural building in order to create a dwelling (Class C3).

This statement supports the application and considers the planning issues associated with the proposal.

The structure of the statement is as follows:

- A description of the application site and its surroundings;
- A description of the proposal;
- A review of the national and local planning policies of relevance to the scheme; and
- An appraisal of the scheme against the relevant policy context

2.0 The Application Site and Surroundings

The application site is located surrounded by open farmland. There are no nearby residents. A hedge marking the field boundary lies close to the side of the barn. The site is within the Green Belt as defined in the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (1998).

The building on the site is constructed from natural stone with a timber roof structure. It was used for farming until recent decades, since when it has fallen into disuse, and there has been partial collapse of parts of the buildings in recent years.

The building on the site is likely to have been a former threshing barn, which is double height. There is evidence that a large proportion of the north and south facing elevations were traditionally open for vehicle access and storage. The form and plan of such threshing barns remained comparatively unaltered between the 12th and early 19th Centuries; typically displaying blank exteriors, with provision for ventilation to the storage bays and doors opening into the threshing floor.

Acknowledged as some of the most ubiquitous of historic building types in the countryside, traditional barn buildings are of course important in providing a sense of place and local distinctiveness but also represent an economic asset in terms of capacity for accommodating new uses, as recognised within recent changes made by Government to permitted development rights. (GPDO 2015 (Part 3, Class Q).) The Government's intention has been clear that these rights are to support increased housing supply in rural locations without the need to build in the countryside.

3.0 The Proposed Scheme

This is a full planning application for the conversion of a redundant agricultural building, together with rebuilding works in association with the creation of 1 no. new dwellings with associated private amenity space.

The proposed conversion would involve modest but necessary additions in the form of new walls with window and entrance door insertions, which would not result in any material increase in the existing floor space available. The work would have the result of enabling an efficient layout capable of accommodating a single dwelling.

The main aspirations for the conversion are to bring about the effective, sustainable re-use of a rural building. It would result in the continued stewardship of the building without detriment to the visual amenity or openness of the surroundings.

The residential curtilage of the new dwelling would be restricted to a small area to the rear (south) of the existing building. This is to ensure that the proposed use of the building has a minimal impact upon the landscape. The land between the barn and the road would remain as a paddock or orchard. Vehicular access to the barn would be reinstated and the existing public of right way running close the barn will be retained. Any new boundary demarcation would be in the form of post and rail fencing, to complement the rural setting of the building.

Access to the site for vehicles and pedestrians is to be maintained in its current location.

4. 0 Relevant Local And National Planning Policies

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:

Core Strategy Development Plan Document (Adopted 2014)

S01 Spatial Objectives

SS1 Development Principles

SS1a Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

DC1 Design Considerations

T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

SS6c – Other Rural Areas Area Strategy

R1 Rural Diversification

R2 – Rural Housing

DC3 – Landscape Impact

H1 New Housing Development

NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources

Design Principles' SPD

Policy SS1of 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.

National Planning Policy

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.

Planning policies and decisions are required to ensure that developments respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation. Particularly relevant are:

Chapter 6 Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes

Chapter 7 Requiring good design

Chapter 9 Protecting Green Belt land

Chapter 11 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Section 7 of the NPPF sets out the position regarding the design of the built environment.

Section 9 of the NPPF 'Protecting Green Belt Land' sets out the position concerning Green belt land for the decision making authority. It is made clear that there are five main purposes for including land within the Green belt, amongst which is the aim to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. When considering planning applications within the Green belt it is clear that there is a general presumption against inappropriate development and such development should not be approved, except in very special circumstances.

Section 11 of the NPPF highlights the need for the planning system to give consideration to the protection of biodiversity. The planning system should promote sustainable forms of development whilst minimising impacts upon biodiversity and providing net gains where possible.

Green Belt

The adopted proposals map identifies the site as being located within the Green belt, making adopted policies R1, R2, DC1, DC2 and SS6c of direct relevance.

Policy R1 sets out the approach with regards to Rural Diversification, which clearly states that development of this nature will be assessed according to the extent to which it enhances the character, appearance and biodiversity of the countryside. This policy makes clear that inappropriate development within the Green Belt, which is otherwise acceptable within the context of this policy, will still require justification by very special circumstances.

Policy R2 sets out the position with respect of rural housing and the scenarios in which it will be accepted outside of settlement and infill boundaries. Within this context conversion of non-residential rural buildings for residential use will be accepted where the building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms and it can be demonstrated that agricultural or commercial use is not viable or suitable.

Policies DC1 and DC2 are also of relevance to the scheme and highlight general design matters relevant to the consideration of development proposals, with Policy DC2 highlighting general level of protection, which will be afforded to the Historic Environment which is consistent with the general aims of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act (1990).

Policy SS6c sets out the Rural Areas Area Strategy and again makes clear the position of continuing to exercise strict control over inappropriate development within the Green Belt allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government Policy.

Design and Impact on visual amenity including rural character

Paragraph 17 of the NPPF seeks to ensure that new development secures a high standard of design and that it takes account of the character of different areas. Similarly paragraph 58 advises that new development should respond to local character and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials. Policies DC1 and DC3 of the adopted Core Strategy are consistent with this ethos and seek to ensure that new development is of a character, form and design which respects local distinctiveness.

The design of conversions also needs to be considered under Policy R2 to ensure that the character of the agricultural buildings is not eroded by proposals for their conversion. This is supplemented by the 'Design Principles' SPD which states that proposals for barn conversions should;

• Avoid alterations to the roof

• Roof structure should be retained and exposed internally

• Maximise use of existing and blocked door and window openings

• Provision of new door and window openings is discouraged, where essentially they should relate to the position, size and appearance of existing openings

• Conversions should be within the shell of the existing buildings.

• Extensions are discouraged and where essential should be small and unobtrusive e.g. a small lean to on a secondary elevation

• Joinery Details should be carefully repaired or matched

• Use of surrounding land is very important to the character of the building and should avoid suburban style lawns

Sustainable Development

Policy SS1a of the Core Strategy relates to the “presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development” and states that the when considering development proposals the council will take a positive approach that’s reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. It will always work proactively 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 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, then the Council should grant planning permission unless material considerations dictate 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.

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.

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.

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.

5.0 Design

Design policies DC1 and DC2 are consistent with the aims of the NPPF in relation to design and the historic environment. Clearly whilst there is variation in design and materials used for farm buildings there are typical design considerations relevant to most conversion proposals.

Policy DC1 requires new development to be of a high quality that adds value to the character of the local area. Developments 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. Paragraph 64 of the NPPF states that "permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of the area and the way it functions".

After review of policies DC1 and DC2 the following matters are considered to be of key relevance to the proposal:

- incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area
- respect the site and surroundings
- enhance the setting of the designated assets
- provide for safe and satisfactory access
- sustain and respect the building and features, which contribute to the character of the site

The proposed scheme has been conceived solely with the aim of reinstating the original building, in terms of its form and appearance. The existing collapsed areas of stonework will be rebuilt. The elevation treatment draws on the historical traditional appearance of the barn

The scheme offers a development that would complement the heritage of the original farm building. This proposal is therefore considered to accord with policy DC1 of the Core Strategy and chapter 7 of the NPPF.

6.0 Heritage

The barn is not Listed and are not within a Conservation Area, however, the building is considered to be non – designated heritage assets.

Paragraph 133 of the NPPF states that the effect of an application on the significance of a non designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining planning applications and that in weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly non designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset. Policy DC2 of the core strategy also applies.

Whilst the proposals include additions and alterations that might be considered inappropriate in principle, the proposals would result in a long term beneficial use for the building in question that could secure its future. It is considered that any concerns regarding the extent of reinstatement required to retain the dilapidated building should be considered against the positive benefits of retaining the heritage asset

Oak Barn is an impressive building, and its dominance in the landscape is exacerbated by its location away from other buildings. It represents a remnant of the historic landscape, as a building which was erected and used for traditional agricultural activities. Buildings of this size are rare in the area and its careful conversion will retain this rare and valuable building.

The manner of re-use proposed will respect the traditional character and appearance of the building, and ensure its retention for future generations. Its contribution to the heritage of the area and the landscape will be ensured.

7.0 Highways

Policy DC1 requires new development to provide for safe and satisfactory access and to make a contribution to meeting the parking requirements arising from necessary car use. Policy T1 requires new development to be located where the scale of the development can be satisfactorily accommodated by the highway network and for the appropriate level of car parking to be accommodated on the site.

The existing field access to the site will be retained and used for vehicular access to the site. This will be lightly treated and single vehicle width with passing places, this is to reduce the visual impact of the reinstated driveway. The driveway will also accommodate the existing Public Right of Way.

The existing point of access from the highway can satisfactorily accommodate traffic generated by the development.

The proposed development allows for the provision of at least 2 no. parking spaces to serve the dwelling proposed. The hard surfaced parking area will incorporate a turning area so that vehicles enter and leave the site in a forward direction.

The proposal is therefore considered to accord with the provisions of policy T1 of the Core Strategy.

8.0 Biodiversity

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.

The NPPF seeks to halt the overall decline in biodiversity. In this case the proposal seeks conversion, with a limited number of building operations to a vacant structure.

This application has been supported by an Ecological Appraisal that was carried out. The Appraisal found that the buildings were to be of medium to low value to roosting bats. Furthermore, no evidence was found of bats using the building was found,

There are no bodies of water near the site so there is little likely effect on Great Crested newts. There are no known badger setts in close proximity of the site. Accordingly the only protected wildlife species with potential to be affected by the proposals are bats. The hedge line close to the site will not be affected by the plans.

In accordance with paragraph 118 of the NPPF opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around developments should be encouraged. In accordance with policy NE1 the biodiversity of the District shall be conserved and enhanced by positive management and strict control of development by "ensuring development where appropriate produces a net gain in biodiversity and ensuring that any unavoidable impacts are appropriately mitigated for"; and by ensuring that developments promote appropriate maintenance enhancement of biodiversity through scale, location and design.

In mitigation, the applicant is agreeable to the provision ofbat access tiles into the roof, and the provision of bat boxes and wild bird nest boxes. These measures 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 and paragraph 204 of the NPPF.

9.0 Other Matters

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.

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 and economic benefits associated with helping the Local Authority to meet its housing needs, and the additional expenditure which would be derived from an additional household.

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.

It is considered that in this case a residential conversion would be more appropriate in terms of the impact upon the openness of the Green Belt. The use of the site for economic purposes would likely result in a more intensive use and detract from the character of the Green Belt and also negatively impact upon the residential amenity of existing residents.

The dwellings integration into the landscape will ensure minimal harm to the rural character and openness of the Green belt, due to the use of unobtrusive materials and limited alteration to the scale and mass of the structure.

The proposed scheme has been designed to respect the landscape character and maintain its distinctiveness, taking cues from the SPG with regards conversions. The limited alterations to the existing external fabric of the building have been designed with the intention that the natural landscape and associated habitats are maintained.

10.0 Conclusion

The proposed scheme would not result in greater harm to openness than the existing building on the site. The application site is located within a sustainable location and lies within close proximity to local amenities. The proposed scheme has been appropriately designed to reflect the scale, character and proportions of the traditional barn. The development would provide and appropriate standard of amenity. The development is not considered to result in significant harm to highway safety or protected species. Accordingly this application is considered to accord with the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework.

The building is considered suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion to ensure the retention of a traditional building in the landscape. This consideration outweighs the extent of rebuilding needed. The proposal makes full and beneficial reuse of existing openings.

The proposed conversion scheme is of a high design quality and is sensitive to the character of the immediate surroundings and its wider setting. The proposal should not be viewed as inappropriate development within the Green belt and accords with the National Planning Policy Framework and Local Development Plan where relevant.

The building is unsuitable for agricultural use, and not viable for commercial/tourism

The proposal will not give rise to any adverse impact on Protected Species.

The proposal will not result in any adverse impact to highway safety in the locality

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

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.