Rob Duncan
Planning
Consultancy

PLANNING STATEMENT

HEATH HOUSE FARM, FORSBROOK

JUNE 2017

Site Address:
Heath House Farm, Caverswall Old Road, Forsbrook,
Staffordshire, ST11 9BQ

Applicant:
Mr. A. Doherty

Proposal:
Proposed conservatory extension to existing shop / restaurant

Planning Statement:
Date Issued: 30th June 2016
Job Reference: RDP/2017/086

Report Prepared By:
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1 Introduction

1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Mr. A. Doherty to prepare a planning application for the erection of a single storey conservatory extension to the rear of the existing shop and tearoom at Heath House Farm, Caverswall Old Road, Forsbrook.

1.2 The application represents a resubmission following the refusal of application SMD/2017/0018 which had proposed a similar rear conservatory extension, along with a glazed porch extension to the front elevation. That application was refused under delegated authority for the following reasons:

1. *The development would result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building contrary to policies SS6c, DC1, R1 and NPPF section 12 all concerned with protecting the Green Belt.*

2. *In design the proposals, in particular the front entrance porch are found out of character with this simple form rural building and as such contrary to policies SS6c and DC1 and contrary to the Council's adopted Design Principles SPG*

1.3 This revised application excludes the originally proposed front porch with a view to resolving the design concerns raised in the second reason for refusal. This Planning Statement furthermore seeks to address the Green Belt concerns raised by the Council in the first reason for refusal.

2 Site & Surroundings

2.1 The application site comprises a one and half storey, U-shaped building that was previously occupied by two un-connected agricultural buildings that

were joined together and converted into a retail shop and tearoom associated with the existing garden centre (LPA reference: SMD/2003/1193). To the north and northeast of the building lie a cluster of agricultural buildings, as well as a former stable block which now benefits from consent for use as holiday apartments (LPA Reference: SMD/2016/0743). The existing farmhouse is located to the west, with the main retail garden centre located to the south and east of the building. The site as a whole is located within the Green Belt and lies a short distance to the northwest of the village of Forsbrook.

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 DPD (2014) of which the following policies are considered to be of relevance:

3.2 Spatial Aim 1 of the Core Strategy seeks to create distinctive, sustainable, self-supporting settlements.

3.3 Spatial Aim 2 of the Core Strategy seeks to meet the needs of local communities.

3.4 Spatial Aim 3 of the Core Strategy seeks to encourage a strong, prosperous and diverse economy.

3.5 Policy SS1 of the Core Strategy relates to 'Development Principles' and states that the Council will expect development and use of land to contribute

positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands in terms of delivering (amongst others):

- *Quality local services, including provision for education, healthcare, leisure, community, cultural and tourist facilities in response to anticipated population change and visitor numbers;*

- *Increased economic prosperity and opportunities for employment and greater local capacity, with an educated, skilled and flexible workforce;*

3.6 Policy SS6c of the 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 sustain the rural economy by (amongst others):

- *Enabling the limited expansion or redevelopment of an existing authorised business for employment uses;*

3.7 Policy SS6c goes on to state that strict control will continue to be exercised over inappropriate development within the Green Belt allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government policy.

3.8 Policy R1 of the Core Strategy relates to 'Rural Diversification' and states that all development in the rural areas will be assessed according to the extent to which it enhances the character, appearance and biodiversity of the countryside, promotes the sustainable diversification of the rural economy, facilities economic activity, meets a rural community need and sustains the historic environment. Appropriate development should not harm the rural

character and environmental quality of the area or any sites designated for their nature conservation, or historical interest by virtue of the scale, nature and level of activity involved and the type and amount of traffic generated or by other effects such as noise and pollution. Wherever possible development should be within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion. Where new or replacement buildings are involved, development should have minimal impact on the countryside and be in close proximity to an existing settlement. Within the Green Belt, inappropriate development which is otherwise acceptable within the terms of this policy, will still need to be justified by very special circumstances.

3.9 Policy DC1 of the Core Strategy relates to 'Design Considerations' and states that all development should be well designed and reinforce local distinctiveness by positively contributing to and complementing the special character and heritage of the area. It goes on to state that new development should (amongst others):

- *be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area;*

- *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;*

- *protect the amenity of the area, including residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, sunlight, outlook, privacy and soft landscaping;*

- *provide for safe and satisfactory access and make a contribution to meeting the parking requirement arising from necessary car use;*

4 Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework

4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's policies for development within the Green Belt. It also sets out policies in respect of supporting the local economy and securing high quality design. The content of this document has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this Planning Statement and is explored in more detail within the Planning Assessment below.

5 Planning Assessment

Impact on the Green Belt

5.1 The previous application on the site (SMD/2017/0018) proposed a single storey rear conservatory to expand the existing tearoom, along with a single storey front porch extension. In determining that application the Local Authority concluded that the proposals amounted to inappropriate development by virtue of part of the existing building having been re-built at the time of its conversion, and thus amounted to substantial additions over and above the size of the original building to which they were attached. No very special circumstances had been advanced with the previous application, and thus it was refused on such grounds.

5.2 Paragraph 87 of the NPPF confirms that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt, and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 88 of the NPPF furthermore confirms that local planning authorities should give substantial weight to any harm to

the Green Belt and that very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

5.3 Before considering the applicant's case of very special circumstances it is first necessary to consider what harm this proposal has on the Green Belt over and above harm by inappropriateness. It is noted in this context that the proposed conservatory is to be located to the rear of the existing building, and in effect amounts to infill of the existing 'U' shaped building. The proposal adopts a single storey form and will wrapped around by the more substantial 1½ storey form of the existing building. To the north of the building lies a further cluster of buildings which serve to preclude any views of the development from the surrounding area. This leads me to conclude overall that the totality of harm to the Green Belt arising from this proposal will be limited.

Very Special Circumstances

5.4 The need for this extension is driven by the growth of the existing business and a requirement to meet demand from customers. The existing tearoom on site opened in 2007 and initially offered only drinks and cakes. The business at that time employed two full time members of staff. After an initial period of around 6 months it was recognised that there was a demand for light lunches, and the menu expanded accordingly. In more recent years, the applicant has increased their lunchtime offering to incorporate more substantial lunches which have proved to be incredibly popular. The business now employs some 18 people, including two full time chefs, a full time baker who produces all the pies and cakes sold in the tearoom, and associated waiting and kitchen staff. The business has established a strong reputation for serving quality, home cooked food and has a TripAdvisor rating of 4.5 out of 5. During most lunchtime sittings they have customers waiting for tables.

5.5 Whilst the popularity of the tearoom has grown, it finds itself at capacity. The tearoom is only able to accommodate 44 people, and this is within an extremely cramped space which detracts from the customers overall enjoyment of the restaurant. Access by those in wheelchairs or with pushchairs is extremely difficult during busier periods. The proposed extension will enable the capacity of the tearoom to be improved, with seating for an additional 30 customers, as well as deriving improvements to the customers experience by reducing its cramped layout. The resultant effect will be a more pleasant dining environment, and an ability to meet the demands placed on the tearoom by customers. Turning people away is not good for business, and the proposed extension will ensure the applicants no longer have to do so. The extension will also enable the applicant to offer small private functions, which will provide an additional revenue stream for the business.

5.6 The accounts for the business, which can be made available to the Local Authority as a private and confidential document, show that the tearoom made a net loss of £1,538 in 2015, and a net loss of £6,788 in 2016. The costs of running the tearoom have increased markedly over the past two years, attributable to the increase in the National Living Wage, compulsory pension contributions and increases in National Insurance, as well as increasing utility bills. There is accordingly a need to increase the number of covers the tearoom can accommodate, and improve the dining environment, in order to drive income levels up.

5.7 Without the proposed extension the business will continue to suffer losses, which will eventually lead to its closure. It is therefore imperative that it is allowed to grow in a sustainable manner. The proposed extension will help to ensure the sustainable growth of the business and enable it to meet the demands being placed on it by its customers, and in turn boost the income it

generates. It will furthermore serve to safeguard the 18 existing jobs that the business supports, with two additional jobs created.

5.8 Paragraph 19 of the NPPF confirms that:

> *"The Government is committed to ensuring that the planning system does **everything it can to support sustainable economic growth**. Planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth. Therefore **significant weight** should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system". (my emphasis)*

5.9 Paragraph 28 of the NPPF reinforces this aim, stating that planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. It goes on to state that plans should:

> *"support the **sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business** and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings"*
>
> *(my emphasis)*

5.10 Paragraph 28 of the NPPF also states that plans should:

> *"promote the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages, such as **local shops, meeting places**, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship" (my emphasis)*

5.11 These provisions are reflected within the Strategic Aims of the Core Strategy, which seek to create sustainable, self-supporting settlements (SA1), to meet the needs of local communities (SA2), and to encourage a strong, prosperous and diverse economy (SA3).

5.12 The existing business supports a significant number of employees, and thus makes a positive and beneficial contribution to the rural economy. The proposed extension will enable the continued growth of the business and help to safeguard these existing jobs, whilst supporting the creation of two new job opportunities. It will furthermore enable the applicant to grow the business in a sustainable manner in order to meet the demands being placed on it by customers, whilst also enhancing the visitor experience. The business also acts as a meeting place for the local community, where friends can meet for a drink and a meal, and this will be safeguarded by the proposal.

5.13 Such economic benefits should be afforded significant weight in the determination of this application, and I submit that they collectively amount to very special circumstances sufficient to outweigh the totality of harm to the Green Belt. The proposed development is therefore considered to be justified in the context of paragraph 87 of the NPPF, and policies SS1, SS6c and R1 of the Core Strategy.

Design

5.14 The previous application encompassed the same rear extension as that currently proposed, along with the erection of a glazed front porch. In determining that application the Local Authority cited concerns that the proposed porch would be over-elaborate and have prominence for all-comers and thus refused permission on this basis. In respect of the rear extension, it was concluded within the delegated report that:

> *"The conservatory to the rear, as a lean-to on a secondary elevation with no public aspect, may be found on balance tolerable on this non-original building"*

5.15 The previously proposed porch extension has now been omitted from the scheme, and given the aforementioned conclusions, and in particular the fact that the proposed conservatory extension will be subservient to the existing building and will have no wider public impacts, it is considered that the design objections raised previously have been resolved and the proposal meets the requirements of policies SS6c and DC1 of the Core Strategy.

Other Issues

5.16 The proposal was previously found to be acceptable in the context of its relationship to the holiday accommodation located to the north of the building, and the same conclusion can reasonably be reached with this revised proposal. The proposal is also acceptable from a highway safety perspective as the site benefits from a substantial area of hardstanding to its frontage that is available for the parking of vehicles.

6 Conclusion

6.1 For the reasons discussed within the Planning Assessment above, it is considered that very special circumstance exist to justify approval of the proposed development in the context of Green Belt policy. In particular, the proposal will serve to safeguard the existing business and facilitate its sustainable growth. The proposal in turn will also safeguard a significant number of jobs, and will support further job creation on the site. The proposal also supports the sustainability of the rural area, will protect and enhance the existing facility, will facilitate economic activity, and meet a rural community need.

6.2 The proposed development is therefore considered to accord with Strategic Aims 1 – 3, and policies SS1, SS6c, R1, and DC1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy DPD, as well as policies contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

6.3 The Local Authority is therefore respectfully requested to support the retention and sustainable growth of this existing business by granting planning permission for the proposed development.