PLANNING STATEMENT

Date Issued: September 2017

SITE ADDRESS:

- Land to the west of Sutherland Road, Longsdon, Stoke-on-Trent, ST9 9QF.

APPLICANT:

- Mr. G Messenger.

PROPOSAL:

- Outline planning application for the erection of up to three dwellings including approval sought for access. All other matters reserved for future approval.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This statement is submitted in support of an outline planning application for the erection of up to three dwellings on land located to the west of Sutherland Road, Longsdon close to the crossroads with Leek Road and to the south of the 'The Wheel' public house and the house, Hill-Crest. The application seeks outline permission with approval also sought for access. Matters of appearance, scale, layout and landscaping are reserved for subsequent approval.

1.2 The field in which the application site is located contains a septic tank (which serves three properties across on the other side of Sutherland Road) and a new septic tank, field access and access easement forms part of the proposal.

1.3 The submitted Site Plan (Drawing No. 1484-02) is submitted for illustrative or indicative purposes only; to show that up to three dwellings can be built on the site. Each of the properties shown would be accessed directly from Sutherland Road and are designed to allow vehicles to exit the site in a forward direction. The access arrangements meet the Highway Authority's standards in relation to gradients and other details.

2 APPLICATION SITE AND ITS SETTING

2.1 The application site is on the road frontage of an open overgrown rectangular field 0.39 hectares in area at the northern end of Sutherland Road. The land slopes down westwards from the road for a short distance and then flattens out.

2.2 The application site is 3959 square metres in size. The field in which the application site is located was the subject of an ecological survey commissioned by the Council in 2015 as part of its work preparing the Local Plan. A copy of this survey is submitted with the application. The ecological survey concluded that the site consisted of mainly (91%) ruderal vegetation and an area of marshy grassland. Two trees, just over the site boundary on neighbouring land outside the applicant's ownership, were identified as having potential for bats. The ecological report recommended the adoption of a Himalayan Balsam removal regime. The overall conclusion of the report is that the site has low potential to support protected species and that

the site is fairly poorly connected to the wider countryside; although the two trees on the adjoining land may have some potential for bats.

2.3 The following Google Earth image shows the location of the site and its context:-

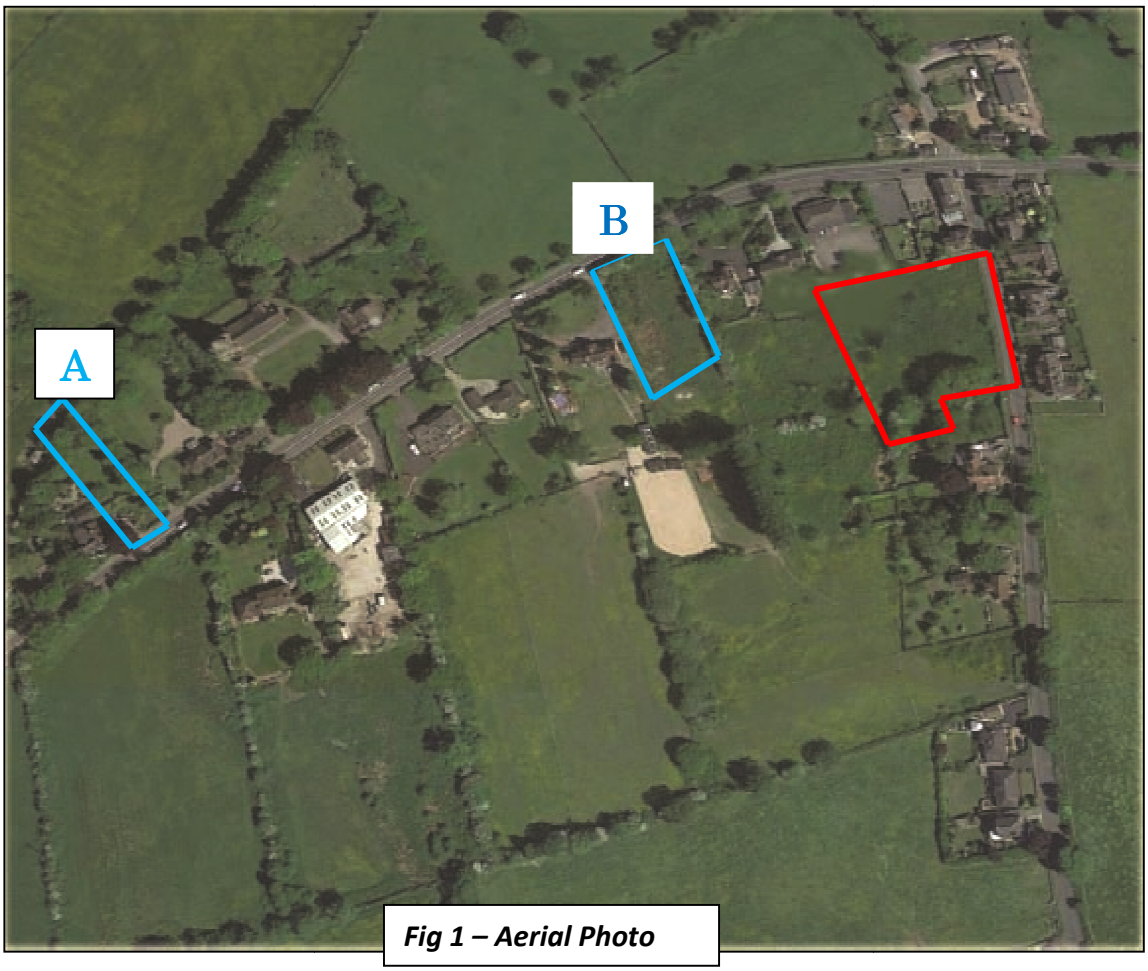


Fig 1 – Aerial Photo

2.4 The red line marks the edge of the field. The development site is towards the road frontage; please see the submitted Indicative Site Plan and the submitted Location Plan. The two sites edged light blue are where planning permission for infill development was recently approved. These are:

- Site outlines permission with access for a single dwelling. Reference: SMD/2016/0647.
- Site B – outline permission with access for two dwellings. Reference: SMD/2016/0822.

2.5 For the purposes of the Development Plan the site lies within the Green Belt but in a location that is considered sustainable in terms of its proximity to services and public transport; close to what is the village centre with the pub and bus stops and where the former post office was located. The site has good road links to Leek, the Moorlands, Stoke and the Potteries and is close to 'The Wheel' public house, the village hall and a short walk away from the village church. Bus Service 16 (Buxton- Leek – Hanley) provides a regular bus service through the village along Leek Road. There are bus stops adjacent to School Lane near the crossroads. A second bus service that passes through Longsdon is Service 93 (Leek-Endon-Biddulph; operates Monday-Saturday). This also stops at the School Lane.

2.6 The site is located within a predominantly residential area with some residential housing to the north and west. The predominant building height and style varies across the village, but the immediate area, particularly across the other side of the road, consists of large 2-3 storey residential houses with rear gardens.

3 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 The key document when assessing planning applications is the Development Plan for the area. In the Staffordshire Moorlands the Development Plan consists of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy approved in March 2014 supported by a number of Strategic Planning Documents and Design Guidance.

3.2 Relevant policies in the Core Strategy include:

- **SS1 - Development Principles.**
- **SS1 (a) – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development.**
- **SS2 - Future Provision of Development.**
- **SS3** - **Distribution of Development.**
- **SS4 – Managing the Release of Housing Land.**
- **SS6b – Smaller Villages.**
- **H1 - New Housing Development.**

3.3 The application lies in the Green Belt. However, there is no specific Green Belt policy in the Core Strategy. Instead the Council relies on national policy as set out in Chapter 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

3.4 In the previous Local Plan before the Core Strategy was adopted the Green Belt washed over the entire village of Longsdon which consists of several areas of housing in ribbons along the roads in the village.

3.5 The key Development Plan policy with regard to the application site is Policy SS6b (Smaller Villages). This sets out the policy, amongst other things, for new housing development in the Smaller Villages of which Longsdon is one. A key element of this policy is tightly drawn Infill Development Boundaries. However, the Infill Development Boundaries for the Smaller Villages have not yet been drawn up and it is possible that they may not be drawn up at all; see later in this section of the Statement.

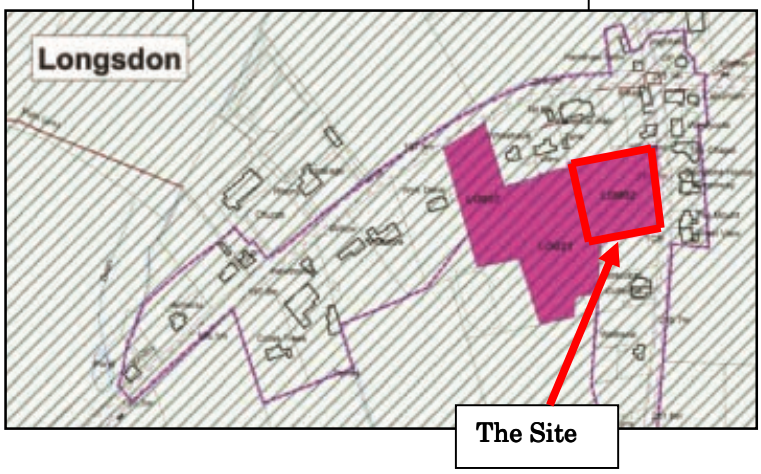
3.6 Therefore, the present situation is that there is no Infill Development Boundary in Longsdon and the Green Belt continues to wash over the entire village and Paragraph 89 is the relevant policy in respect of infill development in the village.

3.7 The Council is currently consulting on Preferred Options for a Local Plan which contains preferred site allocations and some changes to the policies in the Core Strategy. The Council's intention is to combine the Preferred Options and the proposed policy changes with the Core Strategy to produce a single Local Plan. The target date for the adoption of this plan is March 2018.

3.8 It is the third time the Council has consulted on the proposed Local Plan having carried out public consultations in 2015, 2016 and now in 2017. The proposals for the application site have been different in each consultation. Whilst no weight is given in this Statement to the emerging Local Plan it is worth recapping the various proposals and policies relating to the application site as they inform the present situation.

3.9 In 2015 this site together with the field to the west and the land to the west of that which fronts onto Leek Road were identified as Potentially Suitable Housing Sites. The adjoining map shows the three sites. The estimated local need in Longsdon in 2015 was 20 dwellings.

Fig 2 – 2015 Site Options



3.10 The 2015 proposals for the village also included a Draft Infill Boundary; the purple line on the plan. As can be seen on Fig. 2 above the application site was within the Infill Boundary (the purple line) and it was proposed to remove it and the two other potentially suitable housing sites from the Green Belt. As can be seen on the above plan the site was within the 2015 draft infill boundary and the entire site was identified as having potential for limited infill development.

3.11 In 2016 the three possible housing sites had been removed from the proposals whilst the proposed Infill Development Boundary remained. The two sites to the west were outside the proposed Infill Boundary but the whole of the applicant's field including the application site was within the Boundary and was considered potentially suitable for infill development; an indication that the site was recognised as an integral part of the village.

3.12 In 2017 the Council now proposes in the present consultation to omit Infill Development Boundaries all together in the Smaller Villages. Therefore, if this policy were to come into effect there would be no village boundaries; the Green Belt would wash over the entire village. As such Green Belt policy in the NPPF would apply. It should be noted that throughout the Local Plan consultation process the Council have considered that the site has potential for infill development.

3.13 The section on "Achieving Sustainable Development" and Chapters 6 (Homes), 7 (Design), 9 (Green Belt) and 11 (Natural Environment) in the NPPF are relevant to this application and they are discussed in detail as appropriate in this Statement as are the Development Plan policies.

Other material policy considerations

3.14 Staffordshire Moorlands does not have five year supply of deliverable housing land and the housing policies in the Core Strategy, including Policy SS6b are out of date in line with the policy in Paragraph 49 of the NPPF. The full extent of the urgent need for more housing is explained later in Paragraphs 6.6 to 6.10.

3.15 This latter paragraph also states that "housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development which is set out in paragraph 14 of the NPPF.

4 PREVIOUS PLANNING APPLICATIONS ON THE SITE and IN THE VILLAGE

4.1 Three previous applications on the site are shown on the Councils Interactive Map. These are:

- **APPLICATION NO: SMD/2008/1067**
  DESCRIPTION: Erection of a dwelling (outline)
  DECISION: REFUSED
  DECISION DATE: 09/12/2008

- **APPLICATION NO: SMD/1986/0879**
  DESCRIPTION: SITE FOR DWELLING
  DECISION: REFUSED
  DECISION DATE: 02/01/1987

- **APPLICATION NO: SMD/1986/0879**
  DESCRIPTION: SITE FOR DWELLING
  DECISION: REFUSED
  DECISION DATE: 02/01/1987

4.2 The first of the above applications was refused in 2008 under the previous Local Plan (adopted in 1998) policies which omitted Longsdon, amongst other villages, from the list of villages where infill development was allowed in the Green Belt. Therefore, the application was refused on local Green Belt policies and because it was in a Special Landscape Area and because it was considered contrary to national guidance.

4.3 However, the policy situation is very different now. The previous Local Plan (1998) policies no longer apply. The Special Landscape Area no longer exists and the entire village is now washed over by the Green Belt and as such the exceptions to new built development listed in paragraph 89 of the NPPF apply. There is also a substantial and growing need for new housing across the entire Staffordshire Moorlands including the small rural villages.

4.4 Two applications for infill development in the Green Belt elsewhere in Longsdon have been approved in 2017. These are:

- **APPLICATION NO: SMD/2016/0822**
  LOCATION: Land Adjacent to Whitehaven LEEK ROAD LONGSDON
  DESCRIPTION: Outline Planning application with all matters reserved (except for access) for the erection of two houses (Resubmission of SMD/2015/0634).
  DECISION: APPROVED
  DECISION DATE: 24/02/2017

- **APPLICATION NO: SMD/2016/0647**
  OLD REFERENCE:
  LOCATION: Ridgeway House Leek Road Longsdon ST9 9QF
  DESCRIPTION: Outline planning application with some matters reserved (except for access, layout and scale) for the erection of a single dwelling with garage.
  DECISION: APPROVED
  DECISION DATE: 19/07/2017

5 KEY PLANNING ISSUES

5.1 The key issues are considered to be:

- The principle of development, in particular whether the proposed development is appropriate in the Green Belt;
- The effect on the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt
- Sustainability
- Impact on neighbours and residential amenity;
- Precedent
- Biodiversity.

5.2 These issues are addressed in the next section.

6 THE CASE FOR THE PROPOSAL

Principle of development:

6.1 Chapter 9 – particularly paragraph 89 – of the NPPF and Core Strategy Policy SS6b are the key polices. It is the applicant's contention that the proposal is in accord with both national Green Belt policy as set out in the NPPF and with Core Strategy Policy SS6b for the reasons set out below.

The NPPF

6.2 Paragraph 89 of the NPPF lists amongst the exceptions to the prohibition of new buildings in the Green Belt is "limited infilling in villages" which as such is considered to be acceptable development in the Green Belt. It is contended that the proposed development of up to three dwellings falls within the definition as Longsdon is recognised as a village in the Core Strategy and the proposal is limited infilling at a low density. Whilst there is no formal definition of "limited infilling" in the NPPF or the Core Strategy "limited infill" is normally the development of gaps between existing buildings.

6.3 In this case the application site lies in a "ribbon" of development down the eastern side of Sutherland Road from the junction with Leek Road to Micklea Lane. Immediately opposite the site there are houses fronting on to Sutherland Road in a "ribbon" along the road frontage.

6.4 The proposed development would infill the space between "Hill Crest" to the north of the site and the ribbon of houses to the south starting at the two semi-detached houses to the south - "Boscobel" and "Cullenta". It would be would be a continuation of an established linear pattern of development. The scale and form of the proposed development would be in keeping with the village character.

6.5 The development would be in keeping with the character of this part of the village and the village as a whole. If the application is approved the type and design of the dwellings would be discussed with the Council at the detailed design stage. Although the indicative drawing shows three houses no decision has yet been taken as to the type of dwelling; they could be houses or bungalows or a mix.

Policy SS6b and the shortage of housing land

6.6 The policy of allowing limited development in Longsdon is supported in the supporting text to Core Strategy Policy SS6b which states that some limited infilling and redevelopment is considered acceptable subject to Green Belt or countryside policies. As previously stated the intention in the Core Strategy to identify an Infill Development Boundary for the village has not been carried forward and may not be. The loss of local population through lack of housing opportunities is recognised and the strategy for the smaller villages therefore seeks to allow an appropriate level of sensitive development which amongst other things meets a local social or economic need of the settlement and its hinterland. The supporting text (para. 8.1.65) also states that permitted housing can include both open-market housing and affordable housing. Whilst there is no definition of what constitutes local need in the Core Strategy it is contended that "local need" includes the needs of the District as well as the village.

6.7 The District has had a significant shortage of deliverable housing supply since 2010/ 2011 as a result of which a 20% buffer and a shortfall in five years with 20% added to the shortfall. This shortfall is addressed in detail later in the Statement.

6.8 Very little new development has been delivered in Longsdon. This has resulted in a falling population and less young families. This has subsequently led to the closure of local facilities, such as the Post Office and a Public House. New housing is urgently required in Longsdon and other rural areas to allow new young families to live and enjoy the village and allow it to thrive.

6.9 The supporting text to Policy SS6b indicates that the intention is to allow an appropriate level of sensitive development which enhances community vitality or meets a local social or economic need of the settlement and its hinterland. No indication is given as to what is an appropriate level of development. In the 2015 Site options consultation the housing needs target for Longsdon was 20 houses. In the current consultation no target is given. However, what is clear is that there is a strong case for new houses in the village to meet both need and add vitality to the village and which would support services in the nearby village of Endon in line with national policy in Paragraph 55 of the NPPF.

6.10 The proposal therefore meets a local need and will also help meet the district level housing requirement. It will deliver new homes on a windfall site through the type of infill development supported by planning policy. The proposal therefore entirely satisfies Policy SS6b as well as meeting NPPF policy. Housing on the site at the heart of the settlement will enhance the vitality of the village and provide opportunities for new residents to live in the village.

The effect on the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt

6.11 Sutherland Road is characterised by a mix of housing types and sizes and frontage development. Whilst there are clear views into the Green Belt the proposal as "limited infill" is appropriate development in the Green Belt and will have no greater impact on the Green Belt than the existing housing on the western side of Sutherland Road. With good design and spacing there would still be views through to the Green Belt beyond. The fact that much of the site is at a lower level than Sutherland Road will reduce the visual impact of the proposal both on the Green Belt and the Road.

6.12 Relevant to this application is the result of the last (2016) consultation on the Local Plan. The overwhelming preference of the respondents in Longsdon preferred infill to larger developments in the village including infill on this site.

6.13 The Council has already indicated that it is prepared to consider development on this land in the two previous Local Plan consultations (see paragraphs 3.10 and 3.11 above). The Council's assessment in these consultations considered the site suitable given its location at the centre of the village, the direct frontage onto Sutherland road, and because there is development on three sides.

6.14 The National Planning Policy Framework incorporates a presumption in favour of sustainable development and is considered to be a material consideration of the highest weight in the determination of this application. As a whole the NPPF seeks to expedite the achievement of housing targets and paragraph 14 is clear that harm would have to "*significantly and*

demonstrably outweigh the benefits" of a housing application to justify refusal. Furthermore, in order to significantly boost the supply of housing para 47 of the NPPF asks LPA's to have a 5 year continuous supply (including an additional 5% buffer) of deliverable land at all times. It also goes on to state that housing applications should be considered in the context of presumption in favour of sustainable development (para 49). It further advises that where a LPA cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites, the relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up to date.

6.15 The amount of available housing land in the Moorlands as of March 2017 amounted to 1.99 years supply against a requirement that local planning authorities should have a five year supply of housing. From these figures it can be seen that there is an urgent significant need for more housing in rural areas and the District as a whole. The housing completion target for 2017/2018 is 300 and yet last year only 99 houses were completed in the entire District. The target for rural areas last year was 62 houses and yet only 32 were completed. From these figures it can be seen that there is an urgent need for more housing in rural areas and the District as a whole.

6.16 The Local Planning Authority cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing site and as a consequence the authority's policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up to date. The NPPF guidance in paragraph 89 states that limited infilling is appropriate development and should take precedence. This application should therefore be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development as confirmed by paragraphs 14 and 49 of the National Planning Policy Framework. This is a significant material consideration that weighs heavily in favour of the proposed development.

6.17 Longsdon is acknowledged within the adopted Core Strategy as a smaller village where new housing development – both open market and affordable housing – is acceptable. It has its own Memorial Hall which is actively used by the local community and a public house. It is located on the main A53 Stoke on Trent Road 2 miles west of Leek where a wide range of services can be found and Endon village 2 miles to the west also has a good range of services including schools. The village is also fortunate to have a regular bus service operating with routes to the

neighbouring towns including Leek, Endon and Stoke on Trent. The development would therefore be located in a sustainable settlement and there is more than a reasonable prospect that any future occupiers of the site will not be solely reliant on the car as their sole means of transportation to access services and facilities as they will be able to access them on foot, by cycle and public transport.

Residential amenity

6.18 Whilst the detailed design of the scheme is not for consideration at this stage it is considered that the plot is more than capable of accommodating three dwellings which would have an acceptable relationship with the neighbouring dwellings.

Precedent

6.19 Two applications for infill development (see paragraph 4.4) have been permitted in the village this year and whilst the gap is larger than in those cases the scale and type of development would be in keeping with the character of the area. In March 2015 planning permission for another residential dwelling was granted in the garden of property, Wyndene, on Leek Road (SMD/2014/0748). As with this site all these applications are in the same part of Longsdon.

Biodiversity

6.20 The site is poor in terms of biodiversity apart from the possibility that two trees on adjacent land might be used as bat roosts. The indicative layout shows that houses can be built on this site without the need to remove or prune these trees. No tree survey is included for this reason.

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 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.

7.2 In summary it is contended that the proposal:

- Is appropriate development in the Green Belt in the centre of the village;
- Would have no significant impact on the Green Belt;
- Is in a sustainable location and in accord with Core Strategy Policy SS6b;
- Would have no adverse impact on diversity;
- Would provide much needed housing in both the village and the District.

7.3 The LPA is therefore respectfully requested to approve planning permission for the proposal.