Rob Duncan
Planning
Consultancy

PLANNING STATEMENT

WHISTON BARN,
EAVES LANE, WHISTON

OCTOBER 2018

Site Address:
Whiston Barn, Eaves Lane, Whiston, Staffordshire, ST10 2JD

Applicant:
Mr. P. Robertson

Proposal:
Conversion and alteration of former agricultural building to form 1no. dwellinghouse and erection of detached garage

Planning Statement:
Date Issued: 3rd October 2018
Job Reference: RDP/2018/062

Report Prepared By:
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1 Introduction

1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Mr. P. Robertson to seek planning permission for the conversion and alteration of a former agricultural building known as Whiston Barn, Eaves Lane, Whiston, to form a single dwellinghouse.

1.2 The building proposed for conversion is an impressive two-storey structure, constructed from local sandstone with a Staffordshire Blue plain tiled roof. It is proposed to convert the building into a single dwellinghouse, comprising of a kitchen, snug, utility, w.c, office, hallway and lounge at ground floor, with three bedrooms (one ensuite) and family bathroom at first floor.

1.3 Vehicular access to the site is taken from Eaves Lane via an existing hard surfaced track that runs through the curtilage of nearby Cottage Farm (owned by the applicant) and which then follows the boundary of the adjacent woodland. Parking for two vehicles is to be provided within a separate detached garage constructed from stone and a Staffordshire Blue tiled roof to match the existing barn. This detached outbuilding will also accommodate a bat loft as part of the recommended mitigation set out within the accompany Bat Survey. The land immediately to the east, west and south of the building is to be utilised as domestic curtilage.

1.4 The application is accompanied by the following documentation which should be read in conjunction with this Planning Statement:

- Structural Survey (HBL Associates Ltd.)
- Bat Survey (Absolute Ecology)

2 Site Location

2.1 The application site lies occupies a secluded location approximately 400 metres to the north/northeast of Whiston Eaves Lane, and comprises a good quality former agricultural building, constructed from coursed stone with a Staffordshire Blue tiled roof. Park Wood extends to the south of the site, with open agricultural fields extending to the east, north and west of the building. Vehicular access to the site is taken via an established track that leads westwards from the building, and which then turns southwards towards Eaves Lane via the farmyard of Cottage Farm. The site as a whole lies within the rural area.

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 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.*

3.2 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 DC2 of the Core Strategy relates to 'The Historic Environment' and states that the Council will safeguard and, where possible, enhance the historic environment, areas of historic landscape character and interests of acknowledged importance, including significant buildings (both statutory listed and on a local register. This will be achieved by, inter-alia, preventing the loss of buildings and features which make a positive contribution to the character or heritage of an area through appropriate reuse and sensitive development unless their retention is not viable or there would be substantial planning benefits to outweigh the loss.

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 recently revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out policies in respect of rural housing, and in respect of securing high quality design, safeguarding non-designated heritage assets and securing a net gain

in biodiversity. The content of the NPPF is discussed in more detail within the Planning Assessment below.

SMDC Housing Land Supply Statement (March 2018)

4.2 This document assesses the Local Authority's performance in respect of housing delivery and the availability of deliverable sites. It confirms that the Local Authority has a deliverable supply of housing land equivalent to 1.8 years. The content of this document is considered in more detail within the Planning Assessment below.

5 Planning Assessment

Principle of Development

5.1 The application proposes to alter and convert this former agricultural building to create a single dwellinghouse. Policies SS6c and R2 of the Core Strategy make provision for the reuse of rural buildings for residential purposes, with the latter stating that conversion to residential use will be acceptable where the building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion and where 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 The existing building is evidently suitable and worthy in architectural and character terms for conversion, comprising as it does a fine example of a traditional Moorlands agricultural building. The building is also considered to be suitable in physical terms for conversion, as evidenced by the accompanying Structural Survey which confirms that the building is in a good structural condition, with only minor remedial repairs required. No marketing of the building has been undertaken, as these requirements are in direct

conflict with the provisions of the NPPF, a fact that the Local Authority acknowledges within the emerging Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan. The proposal will furthermore enable this high quality building to be brought into beneficial use, thereby safeguarding it into the future. The principle of converting the building to residential use is therefore considered to be acceptable in the context of policies SS6c and R2 of the Core Strategy.

Rural Housing

5.3 Paragraph 79 of the NPPF relates to rural housing and states that the development of isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided, except in a number of limited circumstances. These include where:

> *"the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets"*

5.4 The existing building is not a designated heritage asset, but is considered to constitute a non-designated heritage asset, as it comprises a fine example of a traditional Moorlands agricultural building, and is in particularly good structural condition, having been well maintained over the years. The building furthermore appears on the 1839 Whiston Tithe Map.

5.5 In this particular case, the existing building stands vacant and has been unused for some time. The building is unsuited for continued agricultural use, and would not be a viable proposition for conversion to commercial use such as offices or a holiday let given the costs that would be associated with its conversion, the limited returns that would ensue, and the general saturation of the holiday let market in this area. The conversion of the building to residential use therefore represents the optimal viable use for the building, and will provide an end use that will ensure its long-term retention.

The location of the site is therefore considered to be acceptable in the context of paragraph 79 of the NPPF.

Design & Heritage Impacts

5.6 Paragraph 190 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal. Paragraph 197 of the NPPF goes on to confirm that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining an application, with a balanced judgement required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss to the significance of the heritage asset.

5.7 The existing building constitutes a fine example of a traditional Moorlands agricultural building, and whilst not a designated heritage asset, it can reasonably be considered as a non-designated heritage asset. The submitted proposal adopts a sensitive approach to the conversion of the building, making beneficial reuse of existing openings to avoid a proliferation of new openings with the main elevations of the building. A number of conservation style rooflights are proposed in order to provide natural daylight to the first floor accommodation. These rooflights are not considered to derive any significant adverse harm to the significance of the building as a non-designated heritage asset. Externally an area of domestic curtilage is to be created, but this will in the main be consolidated behind an existing stone wall and by the building itself, which in turn will serve to preserve the visual relationship between the front / northern elevation of the building and its

rural surrounds. A detached garage is also proposed to provide secure parking for two vehicles, and this has been designed to reflect the characteristics of the main barn, including matching parapet eaves and steeply pitching roof.

5.8 Any perceived impacts arising from the conversion of this building also have to be weighed against the benefits of ensuring the long-term future of this building, which currently stands vacant and prone to dereliction. The proposed residential use represents the only viable use for this building, and will serve to safeguard this non-designated heritage asset into the future. For these reasons the proposed development is therefore considered to accord with the provisions of policies DC1 and DC2 of the Core Strategy and the relevant provisions of the NPPF.

Highway Safety

5.9 The site is accessed from Eaves Lane in the southwest, along an established hard surfaced track that passes through the complex of redundant buildings associated with Cottage Farm (owned by the applicant), before winding its way up to the building. Parking for two vehicles is proposed within a detached garage, along with turning space so that vehicles can exit the site in a forward gear. Visibility from the site access is partially constrained to the west on egress owing to a rise in the road, but any potential impact on highway safety has to be balanced against the lawful use of the building for agricultural purposes, which itself is a generator of vehicular movements, including movements by much larger, slower vehicles. The proposed development would not derive any greater impact to highway safety than the established use, and indeed may represent an enhancement. Such considerations lead me to conclude that the proposed development will not derive an unacceptable or severe impact to highway safety, that being the test to be applied under paragraph 109 of the NPPF.

Ecology

5.10 The application is accompanied by a Bat Survey prepared by Absolute Ecology. The survey comprised on an initial assessment of the building followed by three activity surveys carried out during the optimum period for bat activity. Two species of bat were recorded roosting within the barn, with the survey concluding that the barn is in use as a maternity roost for brown long-eared bats, and as a summer day roost for common Pipistrelle bats.

5.11 In mitigation the survey acknowledges that a Natural England European Protected Species Licence will be required, and that this will require a comprehensive mitigation strategy to be provided. The mitigation will include the provision of a bat loft, which is proposed to be accommodated within the roofspace of the proposed double garage, along with the provision of three bat boxes on trees within the vicinity of the site. The implementation of these mitigation measures can be secured by way of an appropriately worded planning condition, and in doing so the proposal will accord with the provisions of policy NE1 of the Core Strategy.

Other Considerations

5.12 The submitted proposal also has to be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in policy SS1a of the Core Strategy, and paragraph 11 of the NPPF. This is owing to the Local Authority's inability to demonstrate a five-year deliverable supply of housing as required by the NPPF (paragraph 73 of the NPPF refers).

5.13 The Local Authority's Housing Land Supply Statement (March 2018) confirms that a housing supply of just 1.8 years can be demonstrated, and as a consequence, the tilted balance in favour of approval, as set out in paragraph 11 of the NPPF, is engaged. In such circumstances permission should only be refused if any adverse impacts of granting consent would *significantly and*

demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the development when assessed against the NPPF taken as a whole.

5.14 The conversion of the existing building to residential use is considered to constitute a sustainable form of development when assessed against the NPPF as a whole, as the proposal involves the reuse of an existing building, something which is explicitly encouraged by the NPPF, in particular paragraph 118 which states that planning decisions should:

> *"promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially if this would help to meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained"*

5.15 Economic and social benefits will also be derived as a consequence of creating one additional household to contribute towards the Local Authority's substantial shortfall in housing land supply. Further economic benefits will ensue as a consequence of generating additional household expenditure within the District. Environmental benefits will also ensue as a consequence of the proposal safeguarding the future of this non-designated heritage asset.

5.16 Having regard to the considerations discussed within the Planning Assessment above, it is submitted that the proposed development will not give rise to any adverse impacts to significant and demonstrably outweigh the aforementioned benefits, and the proposal should therefore be approved in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

6 Conclusion

6.1 The submitted proposal is considered to constitute a sustainable form of development having regard to the following conclusions:

- The building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural, and character terms for conversion, and will enable a building of particular merit to be safeguarded;

- The proposal represents the optimal use for this non-designated heritage asset, and will assist in safeguarding it into the future;

- The proposal adopts a sensitive design approach, which makes beneficial reuse of existing openings and safeguards the agrarian character and appearance of the building;

- The proposed means of access will not derive any unacceptable or severe residual impacts to highway safety;

- The accompanying bat survey demonstrates that appropriate mitigation can be undertaken to ensure that protected species will be safeguarded;

- The proposal will derive a number of material benefits when assessed against the NPPF taken as a whole.

6.2 For these reasons the proposal is considered to meet the requirements of policies SS6c, R2, DC1, DC2 and NE1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy, and policies contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

6.3 It is furthermore submitted that no adverse impacts will arise to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the development when assessed against the National Planning Policy Framework as a whole. The Local Authority is therefore respectfully requested to grant planning permission for the proposed development in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development.