Rob Duncan
Planning
Consultancy

PLANNING STATEMENT

FOULD HOUSE, MEERBROOK

SEPTEMBER 2019

Site Address:
Fould House, Meerbrook Road, Meerbrook, Staffordshire, ST13 8SQ

Applicant:
Mr. & Mrs. Platt

Proposal:
Demolition of existing dwelling and redundant agricultural outbuildings, and erection of replacement dwelling and conversion of former agricultural building to form a single dwellinghouse

Planning Statement:
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Job Reference: RDP/2019/069

Report Prepared By:
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1 Introduction

1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Mr. & Mrs. Platt to prepare a Planning Statement to support of a full planning application for the erection of a replacement dwelling at Fould House, Meerbrook Road, Meerbrook.

1.2 The existing dwelling comprises a two storey detached property of brick, render and tile construction, which dates from circa 1875, and which has fallen into disrepair. The application proposes to demolish the existing dwelling along with a number of existing poor quality agricultural buildings immediately to its north, and replace them with a new dwelling.

1.3 The replacement dwelling is to be sited to the north of the existing dwellinghouse, in the position currently occupied by the poor quality agricultural buildings. It will encompass a footprint of 163 square metres (exclusive of converted barn), and stand to a maximum ridge height of 7.7 metres.

1.4 An intrinsic component of the application is the conversion of the traditional brick and tile building to the NE of the existing farmhouse to provide further accommodation serving the new dwelling. This building will be connected to the new dwelling by way of a brick and tile porch / entrance building, with glazed links either side. The resultant accommodation will comprise of an open plan living room, kitchen and dining room, pantry, storeroom, w.c., and boot room, master ensuite bedroom, dressing room and snug, and four further bedrooms (three ensuite), w.c. and dressing room within the converted barn.

1.5 The application has been subject to extensive pre-application discussions with the Local Authority where it was confirmed that the principle of erecting a replacement dwelling on the site was acceptable, and that the building would not be considered to constitute a non-designated heritage asset. It was also confirmed that the rectangular form of the dwelling was acceptable, and that the proposed link between the new dwelling and the original agricultural building could be supported subject to the use of appropriate materials and fenestration.

1.6 A number of recommendations were nevertheless raised in respect of the scale of the proposed replacement dwelling, recommending that its width and depth be reduced slightly and that its height be reduced. To this end the depth of the property has been reduced from 9.45m down to 7.85m (-1.6m), its width has been reduced from 15.4m to 14.5m (-0.9m) and the ridge height reduced from 9.2m down to 7.7m (-1.5m).

1.7 This Statement should be read in conjunction with the following documentation which have been submitted to accompany the application:

- Design & Access Statement (Arkhi Architects Ltd.)
- Heritage Statement (Mel Morris Conservation)
- Structural Survey (Northern Structural Services)
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Brindle & Green)
- Bat Emergence and Re-Entry Survey (Brindle & Green)

2 Site Location

2.1 The application site is located within the rural area, on the northern side of Meerbrook Road, and is isolated from surrounding development, with agricultural fields extending to its west, north and northeast. The Meerbrook Road encloses the southern boundary of the site, beyond which lies a copse of mature trees.

2.2 The site is currently occupied by a detached dwelling which sits close to the site frontage with the Meerbrook Road, to the northwest and northeast of which lie a range of former agricultural buildings of varying degrees of quality. The most notable building is the large, twin gabled brick and tile outbuilding located to the immediate northeast of the farmhouse, which is proposed for conversion as part of the submitted proposal. The existing buildings to the east of that building are also to be retained, except for the large open-sided barn which is to be demolished. The more ramshackle cluster of modern agricultural buildings to the north and northwest of the farmhouse are to be demolished.

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 SS1** of the Core Strategy states that the Council will expect the development and use of land to contribute positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands in terms of delivering, in partnership with other agencies and services:

- *A mix of types and tenures of quality, affordable homes to meet the needs and aspirations of the existing and future communities;*
- *Quality local services, including provision for education, healthcare, leisure, community, cultural and tourist facilities in response to anticipated population change and visitor numbers;*
- *Easy access to jobs, shops and transport services by all sections of the community;*
- *Increased economic prosperity and opportunities for employment and greater local capacity with an educated, skilled and flexible workforce;*
- *A healthy, safe, attractive and well-maintained environment;*
- *Development which maintains the distinctive character of the Staffordshire Moorlands, its individual towns and villages and their settings;*

- *Development that is undertaken in a way that protects and enhances the natural and historic environment of the District and its surrounding areas both now and for future generations.*
- *Development which secures high quality, sustainable environments, efficient and effective use of resources and contributes effectively to tackling climate change and reduced carbon emissions.*

3.2 **Policy SS1a** of the Core Strategy 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 Core Strategy relates to the 'Other Rural Areas 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. It goes on to state that essential local needs will be met by (amongst others)

- *Allowing the conversion, extension or replacement of an existing rural building in accordance with policies R1 and R2*

3.3 **Policy R2** of the Core Strategy relates to 'Rural Housing' and states that other than sites allocated for housing development in the Site Allocations DPD, only the following forms of housing development will be permitted in the rural areas outside the settlement and infill boundaries of the towns and villages:

- *Affordable housing which cannot be met elsewhere, in accordance with Policy H2.*

- *A new dwelling that meets an essential local need, such as accommodation for an agricultural, forestry or other rural enterprise worker, where the need for such accommodation has been satisfactorily demonstrated and that need cannot be met elsewhere.*

- *Proposals for replacement dwellings, provided they do not have a significantly greater detrimental impact on the existing character of the rural area than the original dwelling or result in the loss of a building which is intrinsic to the character of the area.*

- *Extensions to existing dwellings provided they are appropriate in scale and design and do not have a detrimental impact on the existing dwelling and the character of the rural area.*

- *The conversion of non-residential rural buildings for residential use 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. In such cases there will be a requirement for a marketing exercise to be carried out by a suitably qualified professional or other evidence that the building would be unsuitable for a commercial use; or*
  - *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 DC3** of the Core Strategy relates to 'Landscape and Settlement Setting' and states that the Council will protect and, where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements in the Staffordshire Moorlands by (amongst others):

- *Resisting development which would harm or be detrimental to the character of the local and wider landscape or the setting of a settlement*

and important views into and out of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment;

- *Supporting development which respects and enhances local landscape character and which reinforces and enhances the setting of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment;*

- *Supporting opportunities to positively manage the landscape and use sustainable building techniques and materials which are sympathetic to the landscape;*

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 (2019)

4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places a strong emphasis on promoting sustainable development and sets out policies, *inter-alia*, in respect of securing high quality design, taking opportunities to improve the quality of an area, and ensuring a net gain in biodiversity. The content of the NPPF has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this Statement, and is referred to in more detail within the Planning Assessment below.

Staffordshire Moorlands Design SPD (2018)

4.2 This document sets out guidance aimed at securing good quality design, and confirms that the architectural style of new development should be guided through an assessment and understanding of the character and context of the area, going on to confirm that sites may be capable of accommodating both contemporary and traditional forms of development that are high quality and functional. The content of the SPD has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application and is referred to in more detail within the Planning Assessment below.

Staffordshire Moorlands New Dwellings and Extensions to Dwellings SPG

4.3 This document sets out guidance in respect of the design of new residential development, including matters of siting, roof design, elevations, and materials. The content of this SPG has been taken into consideration in the preparation of the application and is referred to in more detail within the Planning Assessment below

Staffordshire County Council Planning for Landscape Change SPG

4.4 This document provides descriptions of the landscape throughout Staffordshire, breaking the county down into character areas, in order to provide guidance aimed at securing the conservation of the landscape. The content of this SPG has been taken into consideration in the preparation of the application and is referred to in more detail within the Planning Assessment below.

5 Planning Assessment

Principle of Development

5.1 The application proposes the demolition of the existing dwelling on the site and the erection of a replacement dwelling, incorporating within that proposal the conversion of a former agricultural building to provide part of the proposed living accommodation.

5.2 Policies SS6c and R2 of the Core Strategy allow for the erection of replacement buildings within the rural areas, provided that they do not have a significantly greater detrimental impact on the existing character of the rural area than the original dwelling or result in the loss of a building which is intrinsic to the character of the area.

5.3 Policies SS6c and R2 also allow for the conversion of non-residential rural buildings into residential use, provided that:

- *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. In such cases there will be a requirement for a marketing exercise to be carried out by a suitably qualified professional or other evidence that the building would be unsuitable for a commercial use; or*

- *Conversion to residential use would enable a building of particular merit to be safeguarded.*

5.4 The applicant has commissioned a Structural Survey and Heritage Statement to accompany the application, the latter confirming that the existing dwelling has no intrinsic historic merit. The Local Authority has subsequently confirmed during pre-application discussions that the existing dwelling does not constitute a non-designated heritage asset, and that its demolition would not give rise to the loss of a building which is intrinsic to the character of the area.

5.5 The proposed conversion of the existing brick and tile former agricultural building is also considered to be acceptable, and will make beneficial reuse of the existing building, which is considered to be worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion. The proposed development is therefore considered to be acceptable in principle, subject to the development not having a significantly greater impact on the existing character of the rural area than the existing dwelling.

Design & Visual Impact

5.6 During pre-application discussions it was recommended that the scale and form of the proposed replacement dwelling be reduced in order that it more closely reflects that of the existing dwelling. The proposed development has responded positively to those comments, and now encompasses a dwelling that is much smaller in terms of both width (-0.9m) and depth (-1.6m) compared to that submitted at pre-application stage, and also incorporates a substantial reduction in ridge height (-1.5m). The resultant scale and massing of the dwelling is considered to be acceptable and in keeping with the character of the area.

5.7 The proposal also adopts a sensitive approach to the conversion of the adjacent former agricultural building, and seeks to make beneficial reuse of existing openings wherever possible. Only two new openings are proposed,

and these are to be located on the northern elevation of the barn, and will be obscured from any public view. Given the variety of opening sizes within this building, it is not considered that the introduction of these windows will give rise to harm to the agrarian character of the building.

5.8 The former agricultural building is to be linked to the dwelling by way of a subservient outbuilding with glazed links on either side. Connecting the two buildings together is *imperative* to the applicant's vision for the site. It is not their intention or desire to retain the barn as an ancillary structure; both it, along with the replacement building and link structure, are to form one single dwellinghouse. The glazed links are to be subservient and lightweight in nature, and will appear as very subtle links between the buildings, and consequently will not have any material adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area. During pre-application discussions it was confirmed that the proposed links in their amended form were now acceptable and could be supported.

5.9 In terms of more general scale, massing and design considerations, the Local Authority's Design SPD and New Dwellings and Extensions SPG set out a number of parameters which development should seek to adhere to in order to deliver high quality design that is appropriate to the District. The guidance includes, *inter-alia*, the following requirements:

- ***Buildings should sit comfortably in the landscape – best achieved by emulating the horizontal, ground-hugging form of traditional buildings with their strong eaves and ridge lines:*** The proposed dwelling accords with this objective and encompasses a dwelling with horizontal proportions and a strong eaves and ridge line;

- ***A new dwelling should respect the scale of those surrounding it.*** The proposed dwelling in its revised form is broadly commensurate in scale to the existing dwelling, and consequently accords with this objective;

- ***A balance of proportions between the overall shape of the walls and the openings they contain:*** The proportions of the dwelling are appropriate, and achieve a two thirds elevation / one third roof approach which is traditional of the Moorlands, and thus accords with this objective;

- ***Using a similar size and proportion of opening throughout.*** The proposed window sizes and proportions are generally consistent throughout, with larger openings consolidated to ground floor level on the rear elevation where they will be obscured from public view. The proposal is therefore in accordance with this objective;

- ***Limiting the number of openings to achieve a high solid to void ratio.*** The proposed development will achieve a solid to void ratio of 79% / 21%, and thus accords with this objective;

- ***Arranging the openings harmoniously, often in a formal, symmetrical manner:*** The proposed development encompasses a simple arrangement of openings, aligned in a symmetrical manner within the elevations. A centrally positioned materials panel is incorporated within the front elevation to reinforce the symmetricality of the elevation. During pre-application discussions it was recommended that traditional sash windows be incorporated and that a front door be provided centrally in the front elevation – such changes go against the contemporary style of approach that the applicants had wanted to bring

forward for this site, and it is considered that the alternative solutions proposed are an acceptable compromise, as the general form and shape of the window openings is the same as a sash window, and some horizontal subdivision is incorporated. The overall arrangement of the front elevation is also symmetrical, as advocated by the Design SPD. The proposed development is therefore considered to accord with this objective;

- ***Sited to maximise solar gain and increasing proportion of glazing on south facing elevations;*** In this case the proposed dwelling will be orientated so that its principal elevation faces south in the interests of achieving this objective;

- ***The roof form should be simple with a dominant roof line and, where appropriate to the locality or the building, emphasised by gables:*** The proposed dwelling encompasses a dominant roof line, with gabled ends, and is therefore consistent with this objective;

- ***The roof should span the shorter side where practicable:*** The proposed roof spans the shorter side of the roof and thus accords with this objective;

- ***Flat roofs should be avoided:*** No flat roofs are proposed, and consequently the proposal accords with this objective;

- ***The roof pitch and materials should match those of the locality:*** The proposed roof pitch is consistent with the vernacular of the Moorlands and will facilitate the use of Staffordshire Blue plain clay tiles, and consequently the proposal accords with this objective;

- ***Window patterns should be aligned in columns and storeys rather than randomly placed:*** The proposed development accords with this objective.

- ***The emphasis should be on vertical proportions which is in keeping with the style and tradition of the locality;*** Vertical emphasis is achieved by way of the vertically proportioned window openings, and is considered to accord with this objective;

- ***Window frames should be recessed by a minimum of 50mm to avoid a flat appearance to the elevation and to emphasise the solidity of the walls:*** The applicant is agreeable to recessing the proposed windows to accord with this requirement, and this can be secured by way of an appropriately worded condition. In doing so the development will accord with this objective;

- ***Bow windows should be avoided as well as large picture windows, top hung lights and leaded lights:*** The proposed development does not include any such components, and therefore accords with this objective;

- ***Traditional surround to doors and windows should be incorporated, for example stone cills and lintels;*** The proposed development incorporates a solider brick course atop the proposed windows and wrapping around the whole elevation. The brickwork to the sides of the windows is also modestly splayed in order to create some subtle visual interest. The proposal is therefore considered to accord with this objective.

5.10 The above assessment demonstrates that the proposed development responds positively to the Local Authority's adopted guidance, and encompasses a two-storey design that is in keeping with the character and appearance of the surrounding area. It is concluded as a consequence that the proposed replacement dwelling will not have a significantly greater impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area than the existing dwelling.

5.11 Paragraph 130 of the NPPF confirms that permission should be refused for development that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area. In this case, I submit that the proposed development will serve to *improve* the character and quality of the local area, by removing the existing dwelling and its attendant poor quality agricultural outbuildings, and replacing them with a high quality, bespoke designed replacement dwelling that is has been demonstrated to accord with local vernacular. The proposed development is therefore considered to accord with the objectives of policies SS1, SS6c, R2, and DC1 of the Core Strategy.

Landscape Impact

5.12 The application site lies within the Gritstone Highland Fringe character area, as set out within the Planning for Landscape Change SPG, which is characterised by a prominent upland ridge landform, gritstone walls, small ancient lanes, pastoral farming, extensive views, conifer plantations, wooded valleys and heathlands. A number of incongruous landscape features are also identified within the SPG, including urbanised improved commuter dwellings, deteriorating walls and hedges and poor quality pasture.

5.13 For the reasons set out above, the proposed replacement dwelling will encompass a high quality design that is in keeping with the vernacular of the Moorlands, and consequently will not introduce any incongruous landscape

features into the landscape. It will furthermore not erode any of the characteristic landscape features. As a consequence I submit that the proposed replacement dwelling will not derive any significant adverse impacts to the character and appearance of the landscape.

Ecology

5.14 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Bat Emergence and Re-Entry Survey have been prepared to accompany the application, and they demonstrate that the proposed development will not have an adverse impact on protected species or give rise to a loss of important habitats. The reports recommend a number of mitigation measures in the interests of ensuring a net gain to biodiversity, including a barn owl nesting box, and these can be secured by way of appropriately worded condition. In doing so the development will accord with the provisions of policy NE1 of the Core Strategy.

6 Conclusion

6.1 It is considered that the proposed development constitutes a sustainable form of development that accords with the Development Plan having regard to the following conclusions:

- *The proposed replacement dwelling will not have a significantly greater impact on the character of the area than the existing dwelling, and will not result in the loss of a dwelling that is intrinsic to the character of the area;*

- *The existing dwelling has no material historic interest, and does not comprise a non-designated asset;*

- *The proposed conversion of the former agricultural building to provide part of the proposed living accommodation entails the reuse of a building that is suitable in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion;*

- *The proposed dwelling is of a scale, massing and design which is in keeping with the character and appearance of the area;*

- *The proposed dwelling will derive a beneficial enhancement to the character of the area through the removal of the range of ramshackle agricultural buildings that currently occupy the site;*

- *The proposed development will not adversely affect the character and appearance of the landscape;*

- *The proposed development will not give rise to harm to ecological interests on the site;*

6.2 It is therefore considered that the proposed development accords with the provisions of policies SS1, SS6c, R2, DC1, DC3 and NE1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy, and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework, Design SPD and New Dwellings and Extensions SPG.

6.3 The Local Authority is therefore respectfully requested to grant planning permission for the proposed development.