DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2019/0644 **Valid 21/10/2019**	**WOODHEAD FARM TOP ROAD** **BIDDULPH MOOR**	**PROPOSED CONVERSION OF GARAGE TO DWELLING** **(FULL - MINOR)**

MAIN ISSUES

Whether or not the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt
The principle of the change of use
The impact on the character and appearance of the area
The impact on residential amenity
The impact on highway safety
The impact on the ecological value of the site

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site lies in the open countryside to the north-east of Biddulph Moor village and is on the west side of Top Road on Lask Edge on a downward slope towards the west. It comprises a former farm with traditional stone farmhouse, a row of traditional stone barns (with concrete barn attached), small modern metal-sheeted storage buildings and a detached domestic car garage (with office above in the roofspace) built under a 2008 permission. Access is from Top Road in the form of a entrance gate and driveway. The site is surrounded by open land. The building has been used for stabling and storage uses. The overall property does not appear to be used for any significant agricultural purposes other than low-key grazing.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application for the conversion of the stone built domestic garage block to the north of the farmhouse, into a two-storey three-bed dwelling. There would be two parking spaces provided on an area of existing hard-standing and a small grass outdoor garden area.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Core Strategy (Adopted March 2014)

SS6c Other Rural Areas Strategy
H1 New Housing
R2 Rural Housing
DC1 Design Considerations
NE1 Biodiversity

National Planning Policy Framework (Feb 2019)

Sections 5 (Housing), 12 (Design), 13 (Green Belts), 16 (Natural Environment).

Emerging Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan

The Council agreed to publish the Local Plan Submission Version for representations in February 2018. At this point, the Council agreed that the Local Plan was "sound". Formal representations were then invited from residents, businesses and other stakeholders to provide them with the opportunity to support or challenge the soundness or legal compliance of the Local Plan. This stage in the process followed three previous public consultations since 2015 which had informed the preparation of the Local Plan alongside a comprehensive evidence base.

In June 2018, the Council subsequently agreed to submit the Local Plan Submission Version to the Secretary of State for examination. An examination in public is ongoing in order to determine whether the Local Plan is sound and legally compliant. Hearing sessions were conducted in October 2018 and the Inspector issued his initial post-hearing advice in January 2019 which set out some actions for the Council and a range of modifications that would be necessary to make the plan sound. The full schedule of modifications was agreed by the Council and the subject of public consultation between 18th September 2019 and 31st October 2019. The schedule consisted of modifications that the Inspector has deemed necessary to make the Local Plan sound. Following the consultation, the Inspector concluded that further hearing sessions were necessary to consider; proposals for safeguarded land at Gillow Heath in Biddulph, housing land supply, Local Green Spaces in Cheddleton (Ox Pasture), Biddulph (Dorset Drive and implications for the emerging neighbourhood plan) and Blythe Bridge. They were held on 4th and 5th February.

On 27th February, the Inspector issued his post hearing advice. Key recommendations in the letter include:

- The proposed safeguarded land at Gillow Health, Biddulph should be removed. Neither should the site be allocated for housing as requested by the landowners as the case for exceptional circumstances has not ben met. The land will remain Green Belt as per the Local Plan Submission Version agreed by the Council in June 2018
- No further housing allocations in Biddulph are required
- No further amendments to the housing trajectory are required aside from pushing back the predicted commencement of the Wharf Road, Biddulph site (excluding BDNEW) until 2022/23.
- Monitoring of housing supply will determine if a full or partial Local Plan review is required within 5 years
- Land at Ox Pasture (Cheddleton) and Dorset Drive (Biddulph) should revert back to the Local Green Space designations as per the Local Plan Submission Version as agreed by the Council in June 2018.
- Other modifications were considered during the recent hearings sessions are necessary to make the plan sound, including; updating neighbourhood area housing requirements (Policy SS4) to reflect the latest monitoring data, updating the employment land area for the Tunstall Road allocation to reflect the masterplan and other adjustments to the wording of Policy SS4 and Policy DC2.

No further representations will be sought by the Inspector. As such, the Local Plan policies as proposed to be modified in September 2019 along with the Inspector recommended revisions (February 2020) provide a strong indication of the final policies likely to be adopted in the Local Plan. The Inspector's final report is expected within 2 months and will reflect the post hearing advice. The Council will be able to consider the adoption of the Local Plan at this point. As such, the plan is at a very advanced stage of preparation with some of the key outstanding objections now having been resolved following the February 2020 hearing sessions.

In this context, the Council's position on the weight to be given to the policies contained in the Local Plan Submission Version in terms of the three criteria set out in Paragraph 48 of the NPPF is considered below:

- The stage of preparation – the Local Plan is now at an advanced stage of preparation as the main modifications have been subject to consultation
- The extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies this varies depending on the policy in question – the Inspector wishes to explore outstanding objections on a limited number of issues at the February hearing sessions further before drawing conclusions.
- The degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to this Framework – policies have been modified to address soundness issues identified by the Inspector to date. It is the Council's view that the policies (as modified) are consistent with national policy. The Inspector has yet to draw final conclusions, particularly on the matters subject to further hearing sessions.

Given the above, the majority of policies (as modified) can be given substantial weight.

Emerging Policies

The following policies are considered to be relevant to this application:

SS10 Other Rural Areas Strategy
H1 New Housing
DC1 Design Considerations
NE1 Biodiversity

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD/2008/0533 (08/01497): Replacement vehicle store. Approved October 2008.

SMD/2008/0803 (08/01013): Replacement garage. Refused July 2008 due to the scale being regarded as harmful to the Green Belt.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 16.12.19
Neighbour consultation period ends: 16.12.19

Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None.

Town / Parish Comments

No adverse comments.

Local Highways Authority

No objection subject to standard conditions.

Environmental Health

No objection subject to conditions.

Staffs Wildlife Trust

No objection subject to a condition. Survey effort is sufficient and confirms no bat roosts in either building. Section 5 p21 of the report makes a number of recommendations, which could form conditions as part of any approval - includes a requirement for a sensitive lighting scheme to protect foraging bats.

Severn Trent Water

No objection.

Waste Services

No issues

OFFICER COMMENTS

Policy SS6c requires strict control over inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Green Belt policy in the NPPF lists the forms of development which are not inappropriate in the Green Belt and this includes the change of use of buildings, where the buildings are solid and permanent.

However, the building is relatively modern and built as a domestic garage with office above under a 2008 planning permission (a revision of an earlier refused replacement vehicle garage). If the application was submitted in 2008 for a dwelling of the same design, scale and form, it would have been contrary to Green Belt polies in both the government planning guidance at the time and also the Local Plan at the time as new-build dwellings are deemed to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and are thus harmful to its openness (even if replacing a former garage block). This is still the case under current Green Belt policies. Although the conversion of current buildings is still acceptable in principle, this is a relatively far more recent building and to subsequently allow its change of use into an

inappropriate form of development under the Green Belt policies in the NPPF would undermine the operation of Green Belt policy and the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

Furthermore, the site is in an unsustainable location due to the rural area and the allowance of either a new-build or converted dwelling would lead to increased car journeys and emissions. Despite the acute undersupply of housing in the District, the marginal social and economic benefits would not outweigh the environmental harms.

Policy R2 prioritises commercial uses over housing for rural building conversions but this policy is proposed to be deleted when the forthcoming Local Plan is adopted, expected to be this year.

Although a small garden of sufficient size would be provided for the future occupants, the internal floorspace provided in the building would fall short of the thresholds required for a three-bedroom five bed-space house in the governments Nationally Described Space Standards. A floorspace of 93 sq.m is required with a minimum floor to ceiling height of 1.5m but the proposal would provide 88 sq.m in my measurements and calculations.

With regard to other impacts, the proposed works would not harm the appearance of the building. The residential amenities of the nearest existing dwelling (the farmhouse) would not be harmed as the windows would be at least 25.0 metres from the windows of the existing farmhouse and therefore privacy would not be significantly harmed.

The Ecology Report did not identify any bat roosts in the building and did not consider any harm would result from the conversion of the modern building. There would be no harm to the ecological value of the site.

Finally, with regard to highway safety, two parking spaces have been provided which is adequate for a three-bedroom dwelling and there is sufficient additional turning space to allow cars to leave the site in forward gear. The access ono the main road if of sufficient quality to serve an increase in vehicle movements as a result of the proposal and therefore highway safety would not be affected by the proposed dwelling.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The building was approved in 2008 as a vehicle garage. Although conversions to other uses are not in themselves unacceptable in principle, an application for a new-build dwelling in the form of building provided, would have been considered inappropriate development in the Green Belt and if submitted under current policies would also have been contrary to Green Belt policy and also Policy SS6c due to the rural and unsustainable location. The allowance of this scheme would therefore undermine the operation of Green Belt policy and therefore is deemed to be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt. The proposal would also fail to meet the requirements of the Nationally Described Space Standards and therefore not provide adequate living accommodation, contrary to Policies H1 and DC1 of the Core Strategy. There are no other harms as a result of this proposal with just the

principle of development and the inadequate floorspace being unacceptable but these matters do not outweigh the harm to the Green Belt or the residential amenities of the future occupiers of the building.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : REFUSE

Case Officer: Chris Johnston
Recommendation Date: 26.5.20

X

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council