Rob Duncan
Planning
Consultancy

PLANNING STATEMENT

LAND EAST OF LEEK ROAD
WETLEY ROCKS

MAY 2020

Site Address:
Land east of Leek Road, Wetley Rocks, Staffordshire,

Applicant:
JS Farming

Proposal:
Erection of agricultural building for use for lambing, storage of feed and implements and construction of new vehicular access

Planning Statement:
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Report Prepared By:
Rob Duncan BSc(Hons) MA MRTPI
Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd

Contact Details:
Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd.
70 Ferndale Road, Lichfield, Staffordshire, WS13 7DL
Email: rob78duncan@gmail.com
Tel. 07779 783521

1 Introduction

1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by JS Farming to seek full planning permission for the erection of an agricultural building on land east of the Leek Road, Wetley Rocks. The building will occupy a footprint of 459 square metres and is to be used for the rearing of sheep, along with the storage of feed and associated implements.

1.2 The application represents a re-submission following the refusal of application SMD/2019/0197 which had also proposed the erection of an agricultural building further north within the applicant's land holding. That application was refused for the following reasons:

a) *Due to the size and prominence of the proposed building as a wholly new and stand-alone development in open countryside it is found to bring significant harm to the landscape character and appearance and finding only limited agricultural justification to underlie the scheme on this scale it is thus found contrary to policies SS6c, DC1, DC3 and R1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy and to the NPPF.*

b) *Due to the impacts of the necessary removal of a substantial length of mature and well formed hedgerow to achieve required highway visibility standards and the significant change in character and loss of biodiversity which would arise and finding only limited agricultural justification to underlie the scheme on this scale it is thus found contrary to policies SS6c, DC1, DC3 and R1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy and to the NPPF.*

1.3 This revised application has sought to constructively address these previous reasons for refusal, and encompasses the re-siting of the proposed building

to a location at the southernmost end of the applicant's land holding, where it is enclosed to the west by an existing band of roadside trees, and by a coppice of trees along its south / southeastern boundary. The building is to be orientated so that its long access runs broadly north/south, with an open elevation on its eastern side. The elevations and roof of the building are to be finished in Moorlands Green cladding. A new vehicular is to be constructed off the Leek Road to serve the site, encompassing the removal of a section of the existing drystone wall and the laying of the new hard surface.

2 Site Location

2.1 The application site lies within the North Staffordshire Green Belt and forms part of a wider agricultural land holding that extends to some 6.4 hectares. The site is located at the southernmost end of the holding and is enclosed to the west and south east by bands of mature trees, with the agricultural land extending northwards. The Leek Road encloses the western boundary of the site.

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:

3.2 **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 allowing the conversion, extension or replacement of an existing rural building in accordance with policies R1 and R2. 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.

3.3 **Policy R1** of the Core Strategy relates to 'Rural Diversification' and states that all development in the rural areas outside the development boundaries of the towns and villages 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, facilitates 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 that is otherwise acceptable within the terms of this policy will still need to be justified by very special circumstances.

3.4 **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 also 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.

3.5 **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 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.

4 Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework seeks to secure the delivery of sustainable development and sets out policies, *inter-alia*, in respect of safeguarding the Green Belt, securing high quality design and supporting the rural economy. The content of the NPPF has been taken into account in the preparation of this Planning Statement and is discussed in more detail within the Planning Assessment below.

5 Planning Assessment

Green Belt

5.1 The application site lies within the North Staffordshire Green Belt wherein policy SS6c of the Core Strategy confirms that strict control will be exercised over inappropriate development, allowing only for exceptions defined by Government policy. Paragraph 145 of the National Planning Policy

Framework identifies the exceptions permissible within the Green Belt, which includes:

"buildings for agriculture and forestry"

5.2 The proposed development encompasses the erection of an agricultural building for use for lambing / shelter, along with the storage of feed, hay and associated implements, including a tractor and trailer, and consequently amounts to an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 145 of the NPPF.

5.3 The proposed construction of the vehicular access is also considered to constitute an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt, as it amounts to an engineering operation that will not give rise to any material harm to the openness of the Green Belt or the five purposes of including land within it. As a consequence, it accords with the provisions of paragraph 146 of the NPPF and is acceptable in principle.

Agricultural Need

5.4 Policies SS6c and R1 of the Core Strategy allow for the erection of new buildings within the rural areas where these provide for an essential local need and / or support rural diversification and the sustainability of the rural areas. The applicant's business entails the rearing of Shetland cross breed sheep. He currently has a flock of 65 sheep, which until recently have been kept on rented land on the outskirts of Leek. Whilst this arrangement had been sufficient to permit the initial growth of the business, the lack of available land in that location, and limited availability of buildings, had stifled further growth of the enterprise.

5.5 To address the matter the applicant purchased some 6.4 hectares of land at Wetley Rocks, east of the Leek Road, and has since relocated the sheep to this new location. The land is registered under Agricultural Holding Number 37/023/0234. The applicant has invested heavily in new fencing and drainage on the site and is firmly committed to growing the enterprise. The problem with the current arrangement however is that there are no buildings on the site for the keeping and caring of the animals, nor for any storage of feed, hay or associated implements, such as a tractor, trailer, post knocker etc. Consequently, the sheep have to be regularly taken elsewhere for basic care to be administered and to provide a safe environment during the lambing season. This is not sustainable, either financially or environmentally, and consequently the applicant is seeking consent for the erection of a new building on this site to help facilitate the growth of the business.

5.6 The applicant's intention is to double the number of sheep in 2020 up to 130, and then over the course of the next 18 months to increase this further to between 250 – 300 sheep. However, such growth cannot be achieved without appropriate infrastructure to support it. The proposed building will provide adequate space to accommodate the growth of the business, whilst also ensuring that FABBL welfare standards are achieved ($1.2m^2$ – $1.4m^2$ for loose housed sheep during pregnancy and $2.0m^2$ – $2.2m^2$ after lambing) in the interests of good stock management and hygiene conditions.

5.7 The building will also provide shelter for the animals during cold, wet and windy weather, space for provision of basic care, along with space for lambing and subsequent care of lambs, who are prone to conditions such as hypothermia. The building will also accommodate space for the secure storage of associated feed, hay and implements. An essential need for a building of this size is therefore considered to exist, and as such the proposal accords with the provisions of policies SS6c and R1 of the Core Strategy.

5.8 In addition to the commentary above, consideration also needs to be given to the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which confirms in paragraph 83 that planning decisions should enable:

> *"The sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas both through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings:*
>
> And
>
> *"The development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses"*

5.9 The proposed development will remove the existing barriers to the growth of this business and by doing so will help the agricultural business to flourish. The provisions of paragraph 83 of the NPPF are therefore considered to weigh heavily in favour of the proposed development.

Design & Landscape Impact

5.10 The previously refused application had raised concerns that the originally proposed location of the building would have been harmful to the landscape owing to its open position and being unrelated to existing development. The Local Authority also raised concerns that the removal of the roadside hedgerow to facilitate the construction of the vehicular access would also be harmful, and that there would be associated impacts from the curtilage of the building.

5.11 To address these matters the proposed location of the building has been revisited, and a more appropriate location identified in the southernmost corner of the applicant's land holding. The chosen location is enclosed by a

mature band of trees along the western boundary of the site, with further trees extending along the southeastern boundary, providing a strong degree of visual enclosure to the development. By siting the building in this location it will also be more closely associated with an existing cluster of buildings on the western side of the Leek Road, at Highfields Farm and consequently far less exposed than had previously been submitted. An aerial photograph showing the location of the site is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Aerial photograph of site (Source: Google Maps)



5.12 It is furthermore proposed to construct the building using Moorlands Green cladding in the interests of assimilating it into its rural surroundings, and further lessening its visual impact. The building is to be orientated with its long access running broadly north/south so that the shorter span of the building is presented in any views on approach along the Leek Road. The design of the building is dictated by its intended use and owing to the presence of the existing boundary vegetation and proposed materials palette

will not have a significant adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area.

5.13 The proposed new vehicular access will necessitate the removal of part of the existing boundary wall, with new drystone walling provided either side running back into the site to reinforce the character of the area. The proposed access passes through the existing band of trees where a number of poor-quality specimens have already been removed. The accompanying Tree Survey demonstrates that the remainder of the trees will not be adversely affected by the proposed development, subject to adherence to the construction recommendations set out therein. The proposed development is therefore in accordance with policies DC1 and DC3 of the Core Strategy.

Highway Safety

5.14 The new vehicular access to the site is to be located at a point within the highway where it affords good visibility in both directions on egress from the site. The submitted location plan demonstrates that visibility splays of 215 metres can be achieved in both directions and consequently anyone exiting the site will be readily able to observe any oncoming traffic approaching the site. The proposed gates are to be set back from the site entrance, with the first part of the access rear of the highway surfaced in a bound material.

5.15 The access is shown as being 4m wide which is considered sufficient for the applicant's needs. The same width of access was proposed in the original application and was not a point of concern to the Local Highway Authority. Nevertheless, there is some degree of scope for this to be widened if the Local Highway Authority deem it necessary.

5.16 Having regard to the above considerations it is concluded that the proposed vehicular access will not give rise to an unacceptable impact to highway safety in the locality, and thus accords with the objectives of paragraphs 108 and 109 of the NPPF.

6 Conclusion

6.1 The proposed agricultural building constitutes an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt and is of a scale that meets the agricultural needs of the existing business. The siting, design and palette of materials for the development will ensure that there is no significant adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area, and the proposed means of access will not give rise to any adverse impacts to highway safety.

6.2 The proposed development is therefore considered to accord with the provisions of policies SS6c, R1, DC1 and DC3 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy DPD, and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

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