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Planning and Heritage Statement in relation to the Change of Use of Agricultural Building to Dwelling

Boltongate Farm, Weston Coyney

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Contents

1 Introduction 3
2 Site and Planning History 3
3 The Proposed Development 4
4 Planning Policy Context 5
National Planning Policy Framework 5
Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy (2014) 7
5 Planning Considerations 9
Principle of Development 9
Visual Impact 11
Other Material Planning Considerations 11
6 Heritage Statement 12
7 Conclusions 16

1 Introduction

1.1 JMI Planning is a Midlands based town planning consultancy. Its directors are chartered town planners with over 30 years' combined experience in both the public and private sector.

1.2 The author of this appraisal, Jon Imber, has worked as both a development control and forward planning officer in local government, and more recently as a senior planning consultant in the private sector. He has extensive knowledge of the planning system and experience of the appeals process. He is a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

2 Site and Planning History

2.1 The application site consists of an outbuilding at Boltongate Farm, Weston Coyney. The building was most recently used for the sale of equestrian equipment.

2.2 The building is predominantly of brick and tile construction with blockwork lean-tos on the south and west elevations.

2.3 Surrounding uses include the applicant's yard to the south and west, the applicant's farmhouse to the east, and open countryside to the north.

2.4 The site slopes upwards slightly from east to west. Land levels rise relatively steeply to the north of the outbuilding. The site sits in a wider landscape context of gently undulating terrain.

2.5 The site is accessed via an existing driveway, which emerges onto Leek Road on the

outside of a gentle bend. Leek Road is subject to the national speed limit.

2.6 Boltongate Farmhouse is a grade II listed building. The site lies within the Green Belt.

2.7 The site has no recent planning history of particular relevance to these proposals.

2.8 The application site and its surroundings are shown on the aerial photograph below.



Figure 1 - Application Site and Surroundings

3 The Proposed Development

3.1 It is proposed to convert the existing outbuilding on the site to form a family home.

3.2 The proposed dwelling features three bedrooms (two with en-suites), a lounge, dining room, tv room and kitchen on the ground floor, and two bedrooms (one with en-suite) on the first floor. External alterations are limited to the sensitive installation of windows and doors, predominantly within existing or former openings, and the formation of a pitched roof over the lean-to on the west elevation.

3.3 The proposed dwelling features a garden area to the north, and benefits from ample off-street parking within the yard across its frontage.

3.4 The application is accompanied by a bat survey.

4 Planning Policy Context

National Planning Policy Framework

4.1 Paragraph 2 of the NPPF states that "applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise".

4.2 Paragraph 11 of the NPPF establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development. It explains that in the context of decision taking, this means approving proposals that accord with the development plan without delay.

4.3 Paragraph 12 confirms that the presumption in favour of sustainable development established by the Framework does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. Proposed development that conflicts with an up-to-date local plan should not usually be granted planning permission, and decisions that depart from an up-to date development plan should

only be taken if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed.

4.4 Paragraph 59 of the NPPF expresses a commitment to delivering housing growth. It states "*To support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed*".

4.5 Paragraph 76 of the NPPF states that isolated new homes in the countryside should be avoided unless there is special justification, such as where the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and lead to an enhancement to their immediate setting, or where the development would involve the subdivision of an existing residential dwelling.

4.6 Paragraph 143 of the NPPF states that inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except for in very special circumstances. Paragraph 144 clarifies that very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

4.7 Paragraph 145 of the Framework states that local planning authorities should regard the construction of new buildings within the Green Belt as inappropriate development, except for in certain specific circumstances. These circumstances include "the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building".

4.8 Paragraph 146 of the NPPF lists types of development not considered inappropriate within the Green Belt. This includes "the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction."

4.9 Chapter 16 of the NPPF relates to heritage considerations. Relevant policies are considered in detail in the Heritage Statement at Chapter 6 of this report.

Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy (2014)

4.10 The application site lies outside of any settlement boundary. As such, it falls within the category 'Other Rural Areas' as defined by Policy SS6c. Policy SS6c states that Other Rural 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*". One type of development which the policy identifies as acceptable to meet a local need is the "*conversion, extension or replacement of an existing rural building in accordance with policies R1 and R2*."

4.11 "***R1 - Rural Diversification***

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 which is otherwise acceptable within the terms of this policy, will still need to be justified by very special circumstances.

Priority will be given to the re-use of rural buildings for commercial enterprise, including tourism uses, where the location is sustainable and the proposed use does not harm the building's character and/or the character of its surroundings."

4.12 "***R2 - Rural Housing***

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 town and the 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."*

5 Planning Considerations

Principle of Development

5.1 The proposals involve the conversion of a rural outbuilding within the Green Belt. Paragraphs 143 to 146 of the NPPF, together with Policies R1 and R2 of the Core Strategy are therefore relevant.

5.2 Paragraph 143 of the NPPF resists inappropriate development in the green belt except for in very special circumstances.

5.3 Paragraph 146 of the NPPF confirms that the re-use of buildings does not constitute inappropriate development within the Green Belt provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction.

5.4 The proposals involve the re-use of a traditional outbuilding for residential purposes. The building to be converted is of permanent and substantial construction. It consists of a substantially enclosed brickwork and blockwork building, which is well maintained and appears structurally sound.

5.5 No extensions to the building are proposed, save for the formation of a pitched tiled roof over the lean-to on the west elevation. This is modest in scale and does not result in a disproportionate addition to the original building.

5.6 The proposals do not therefore constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

5.7 Policy R2 of the Core Strategy allows for the conversion of rural outbuildings to residential uses where the building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion and conversion to residential use would enable a building of particular merit to be safeguarded.

5.8 The building is a substantial brick and tile structure which lends itself well to residential end use. It appears structurally sound, and requires minimal alteration to facilitate conversion. The building is a traditional agricultural outbuilding which is of architectural and historic merit. By reinstating an active use the proposals would help to secure its long term retention in the landscape.

5.9 The principle of development therefore accords with Paragraphs 143 to 146 of the NPPF, together with Policies R1 and R2 of the Core Strategy.

Visual Impact

5.10 The conversion scheme is sensitive to the original building. New openings have been sensitively accommodated, predominantly within existing or former openings to maintain as much agricultural character as possible. The formation of a dual pitched roof above the lean-to on the west elevation will make the building more in keeping with traditional agricultural buildings prevalent in the area, including the existing range of barns across the southern edge of the farmyard.

5.11 The proposed pitched roof over the lean-to on the west elevation has been designed to reflect the vernacular character and appearance of the barn. It would be read as a subservient and sympathetic addition.

5.12 The proposed dwelling is served by a modest domestic curtilage which is visually well related to the existing buildings on the site.

5.13 The proposal therefore preserves the traditional form, character and appearance of these rural buildings and their surroundings.

Other Material Planning Considerations

5.14 The proposed dwelling would not unacceptably overlook the applicant's farmhouse or its private amenity space, and would not result in any material loss of daylight. The proposed dwelling has been provided with a sufficient level of outdoor private amenity space commensurate with its function as a family home.

5.15 Paragraph 109 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that development should only be refused on highway grounds where its impact upon the network would be severe.

5.16 The scheme provides sufficient off-street parking to meet the needs of the proposed property. It is accessed via the existing site entrance onto Leek Road, which emerges onto the outside of a gentle bend and as such benefits from good visibility in both directions. It is also material that the residential use of the property would involve the cessation of any retail function, and as such would likely result in decreased use of the site access as opposed to increased use. The proposals would not therefore prejudice the safe or efficient use of the highway network.

5.17 The application site lies within Flood Zone 1 where there is a less than 1 in 1000 annual probability of fluvial flooding. Flood risk is not therefore a constraint to development in this instance.

5.18 The application is accompanied by an ecological survey which demonstrates that the proposals would not harm protected species or their habitat.

6 Heritage Statement

6.1 Boltongate Farmhouse is a Grade II listed building. The outbuilding to be converted pre-dates 1st July 1948 and as such is deemed to be listed by association.

6.2 Paragraph 189 of the NPPF requires that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail

should be proportionate to the asset's importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes or has the potential to include heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.

6.3 The listing description of Boltongate Farmhouse reads as follows:-

"*SJ 94 SW CAVERSWALL AND LEEK ROAD (West side) WERRINGTON C.P.*

4/20 Boltongate Farmhouse

- II

Farmhouse. Early C19 with minor C20 alterations. Coursed dressed and squared stone; tiled roof; end stacks. Two-storey, 3-window front; glazing bar sashes, replaced on ground floor by casements of similar style; central entrance with part glazed C20 door.".

The significance of The Old Rectory is considered to derive from its architectural value.

6.4 There is no mention of the outbuilding within the list entry. The outbuilding was converted to a shop selling riding equipment in the early 1980s, prior to the farmhouse being listed in 1986. At this time it appears to have been extensively

altered both internally and externally, losing some but by no means all of its traditional agricultural character.

6.5 The Staffordshire HER confirms that Boltongate Farm was constructed between 1800 and 1834, but does not otherwise offer any additional information on the application site.

6.6 Paragraph 192 of the NPPF advises that in the determination of planning applications local planning authorities should take account of:

- The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

6.7 Paragraph 193 advises that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be.

6.8 The proposals would result in a change in the character of the site from an agricultural to domestic one. The impact of this change is limited by the sensitive nature of the conversion scheme, and the fact that the alterations to the building to facilitate its former retail use have eroded some of its agrarian character.

6.9 Although the site is viewed in the context of Boltongate Farmhouse, it is a building of entirely different character, design and function. The proposed scheme does not

therefore compete with the Boltongate Farmhouse and does not diminish the architectural value which lends it its significance. The building will remain legible as a former agricultural outbuilding and maintains its subservient relationship with the farmhouse.

6.10 The proposals would therefore result in very minor harm to the character of the curtilage listed outbuilding and no harm to the setting of Boltongate Farm.

6.11 Paragraph 195 of the NPPF states that where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss. Paragraph 196 of the NPPF states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

6.12 Substantial harm is a high bar involving the total or near total loss of significance of a heritage asset. It is clear in this instance that the proposals will not result in substantial harm.

6.13 Although the harm identified in Paragraphs 6.10 is limited, it is nonetheless greater than no harm and as such requires balancing against the wider public benefits of the proposals in accordance with Paragraph 196 of the Framework.

6.14 The proposals would result in the creation of a new family home. In the short term there would be economic benefits involved with construction and the associated supply chain, and in the longer term there would be social and economic benefits

associated with supporting local services and facilities, including the local public house and primary school.

6.15 Public benefits can also include heritage benefits. The proposals would bring a heritage asset back into active use, helping to secure its long-term retention in the landscape so that it can continue to contribute positively. If an active use for the building cannot be found it is likely to deteriorate and is at risk of being lost.

6.16 On balance, the wider public benefits associated with the proposal are considered to outweigh and very minor harm associated with the use of the site for domestic rather than agricultural purposes.

7 Conclusions

6.1 The proposals involve the re-use of a redundant outbuilding to provide a family home.

6.2 The proposals do not constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and would have minimal impact upon the character or appearance of their rural surroundings, the amenities enjoyed by the occupiers of neighbouring dwellings and the safe and efficient use of the highway network. The proposals therefore satisfy Paragraphs 143 to 146 of the NPPF, and all relevant criteria of Policies R1 and R2 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy.

6.3 Any very minor harm to the significance of heritage assets is outweighed by the wider public benefits of the proposed development.

6.4 The proposals therefore constitute sustainable economic development which accords with Policies R1 and R2 of the Core Strategy, and the National Planning Policy Framework. In accordance with the presumption in favour of such development established by Paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework it is therefore respectfully requested that the application be approved.