

PLANNING STATEMENT

**SOUTHFIELDS FARM, LEEK ROAD
WETLEY ROCKS**

MARCH 2021

Site Address:

Southfields Farm, Leek Road, Wetley Rocks, Staffordshire, ST9 0AR

Applicant:

Mr. G. Plant

Proposal:

Creation of new vehicular access

Planning Statement:

Date Issued: 31st March 2021

Job Reference: RDP/2021/066

Report Prepared By:

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Mr. G. Plant to seek full planning permission for creation of a new vehicular access at Southfields Farm, Leek Road, Wetley Rocks so serve the existing haulage depot on the site.
- 1.2 By way of background, the applicant has recently applied for planning permission for the erection of a replacement commercial building on the site and formation of new vehicular access under application SMD/2020/0101. During the determination of that application amended plans were submitted to omit the proposed vehicular access after concerns were raised by the Local Authority about compliance with Green Belt policy and visual impact.
- 1.3 This fresh application seeks consent to construct a vehicular access to serve the site off the Leek Road. The existing access to the site is to be retained solely for use by the existing dwellinghouse, with all commercial operations utilising the new access. The new access will be located to the northeast of the existing dwellinghouse and will extend for a distance of approximately 60 metres into the site, connecting with the existing yard area. The access is to be flanked by low level brick walls set behind the new visibility splays, with an indigenous hedgerow planted behind.
- 1.4 The Planning Statement sets out the applicant's case for planning permission to be granted having regard to the Green Belt concerns previously raised by the Local Authority.

2 Site & Surroundings

- 2.1 The application site lies within the North Staffordshire Green Belt and comprises an established haulage yard and associated buildings, along with a four bay stable block. The site is served by an established vehicular access point located immediately south of the existing dwelling. The access has no radius kerbs and has restricted visibility. Mature vegetation encloses the northern and eastern boundaries of the site, with the A520 Leek Road, running beyond the latter. On the opposite side of the Leek Road lies an established residential farmhouse, with further residential development to the northeast.

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 Local Plan (2020) of which the following policies are considered to be of relevance:

3.2 Policy SS10 of the Local Plan relates to the 'Other Rural Areas Strategy' and states that these areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be located in the countryside, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside. This will be achieved by (amongst other measures):

- Enabling the limited expansion or development of business for employment uses where a rural location can be justified

3.3 Policy SS10 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.

3.4 Policy DC1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Design Considerations' and states that all development shall be well designed and reinforce local distinctiveness by positively contributing to and complementing the special character and heritage of the area in line with the Council's Design Guide SPD. In particular, new development should (amongst other considerations):

- be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area
- be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, height, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance
- create, where appropriate, attractive, active, functional, accessible and safe public and private environments which incorporate public spaces, green infrastructure including making provision for networks of multi-functional new and existing green space (both public and private), landscaping, public art, 'designing out crime' initiatives and the principles of Active Design
- provide for safe and satisfactory access and make a contribution to meeting the parking requirement arising from necessary car use

3.5 Policy NE2 of the Local Plan relates to 'Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows' and states that the Council will protect existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows, in particular, ancient woodland, veteran trees and ancient or species-rich hedgerows from loss or deterioration. This will be achieved by requiring that existing woodlands, healthy trees and hedgerows are retained and integrated within a proposed development unless the need for, and benefits of, the development clearly outweigh their loss. Landscaping schemes will also be required to mitigate against negative landscape impact and complement the design of new development and make provision for future maintenance.

3.6 Policy T1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Development and Sustainable Transport' and states that the Council will promote and support development which

reduces reliance on the private car for travel journeys, reduces the need to travel generally and accommodates residual development traffic in line with the Integrated Transport Strategy. This will be achieved by (amongst other measures):

1. Ensuring that all new development is located where the highway network can satisfactorily accommodate traffic generated by the development or can be improved as part of the development.

4 Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

- 4.1 This document sets out the Government's approach to development in the Green Belt, and also provides guidance, *inter-alia*, in respect of supporting the growth of the economy. The content of this document is explored in more detail in the Planning Assessment section.

SMD/2019/0451 – Land rear of former St. John's School, Wetley Rocks

- 4.2 The above application represents a material consideration in the assessment of the application and relates to the construction of a new access road on land within the Green Belt off the Leek Road at Wetley Rocks. Reference is made to this application within the Planning Assessment section.

SMD/2020/0265 – Isaac Walton Farm, Cresswell Old Road, Cresswell

- 4.3 The above application represents a material consideration in the assessment of the application and relates to the construction of a new access road on land within the Green Belt off the Cresswell Old Road at Cresswell. Reference is made to this application within the Planning Assessment section.

5 Planning Assessment

- 5.1 The application proposes the construction of a new vehicular access off the Leek Road to serve the applicant's existing haulage depot. The application site is long established as a haulage yard, with vehicular access to the site taken to the immediate south of the existing dwellinghouse on the site. Planning permission has recently been granted under application SMD/2020/1010 to demolish two existing commercial buildings on the site and to replace them with a single, new build commercial building.
- 5.2 The proposed creation of the new vehicular access is considered to constitute an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt. Paragraph 146 of the NPPF allows for the carrying out of engineering operations and changes of use of land within the Green Belt, provided that the development preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the five purposes of including land within the Green Belt.
- 5.3 The proposed vehicular access is required in order to improve highway safety within the locality and amounts to an engineering operation and a material change of use of the land. The proposed access will be open in nature, with no requirement for any retaining structures on land which is otherwise flat in nature, and will be used to access the site, rather than for the parking of any vehicles. Any vehicles passing over the access will therefore be transient in nature.
- 5.4 By resultant effect, the proposal will ensure that the openness of the Green Belt is preserved and that no material conflict with the five purposes of including land within the Green Belt will ensue. The application proposes the erection of low level boundary walls either side of the access, but the applicant

would be agreeable to removing these if they were of a concern to the Local Authority.

- 5.5 In reaching the above conclusion I have had regard to the Local Authority's conclusions in their assessment of two other recent applications for the creation of vehicular accesses within the Green Belt. Under application SMD/2019/0451 for land rear of former St. John's School, Wetley Rocks, the Local Authority has granted consent for the creation of a new vehicular access some 205 metres long across an agricultural field to serve a scheme of six affordable dwellings. The site is highly conspicuous from the Leek Road, as evidenced by the photographs in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 – Photograph of Approved Access (SMD/2019/0451)



- 5.6 In granting consent for the formation of this new vehicular access the Local Authority concluded in respect of Green Belt impacts that:

“For the purposes of Green Belt policy openness is regarded as being “freedom from development”. Clearly re-routing the track around the edge of the field would result in an even longer, disproportionate length of adopted road for such a small scheme, not forgetting the Green Belt encroachment of residential use. Views across the field from the main road are very open so even if hugging the outside, it could be argued that a new road of adoptable standards (to meet the requirements of the Registered Provider who will take on the new units) would be very noticeable and far more prominent than the existing track”.

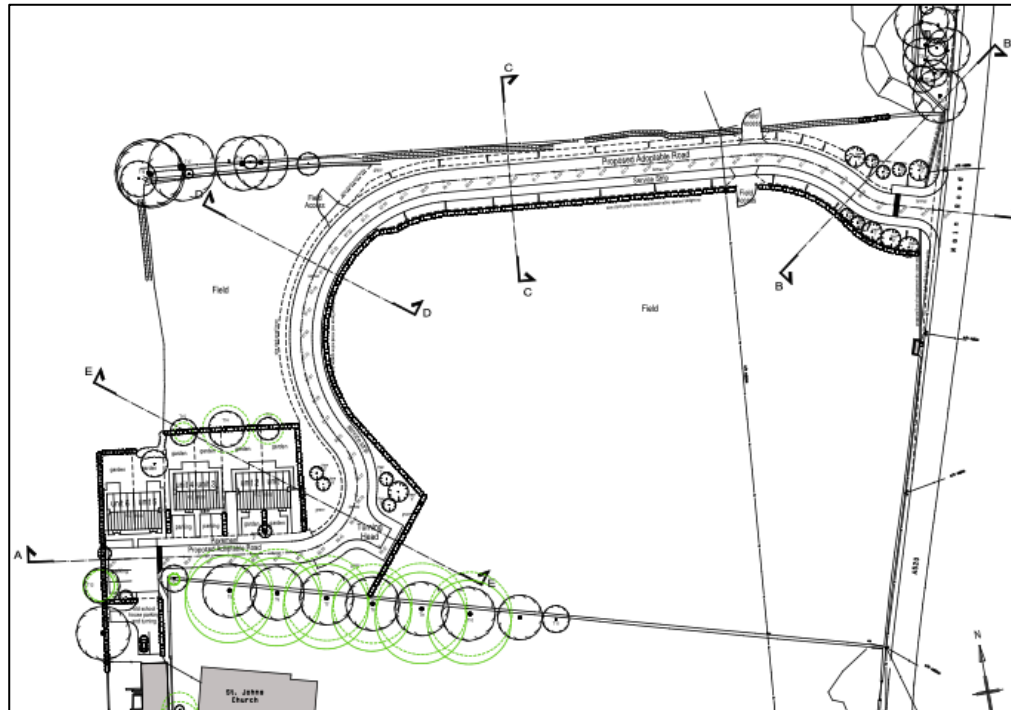
5.7 The committee report went on to comment:

“That said there is also some logic in the track following the perimeter of the field and making use of an existing base. Moreover, there is some merit in the argument that in approving the road going through the middle of the field, it was more intrusive than going around the edge, whereas the current proposals would allow it to be screened at least on one side by the hedgerow field boundary. This would be particularly the case when approaching from the south along the Main Road. Furthermore, the applicant is proposing to provide a matching stone wall along the other side of the road so that from the Main Road at least the view across the field to a hedgerow (with the access road hidden behind) would be similar to that which already existed”.

5.8 The Local Authority went on to conclude that the proposal was acceptable in the Green Belt and was not harmful from a visual impact perspective, having also concluded likewise when approving the precursor application for an

access across the same field, which the above scheme was replacing. An extract of the approved site plan is shown in Figure 2 overleaf.

Figure 2 – Extract of Approved Site Plan (SMD/2019/0451)



- 5.9 The Local Authority's conclusions in determining application SMD/2020/0265 are also relevant to the assessment of this application. That application proposed the retention of an 85 metre long vehicular access that the applicant has installed within the Green Belt to serve his existing dwellinghouse. In granting consent the Local Authority concluded that:

"The access and track are types of development that could be provided for by the list of exceptions at paragraph 146, provided they preserve openness and do not conflict with any of the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. Three of those purposes include a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one

another; c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment”.

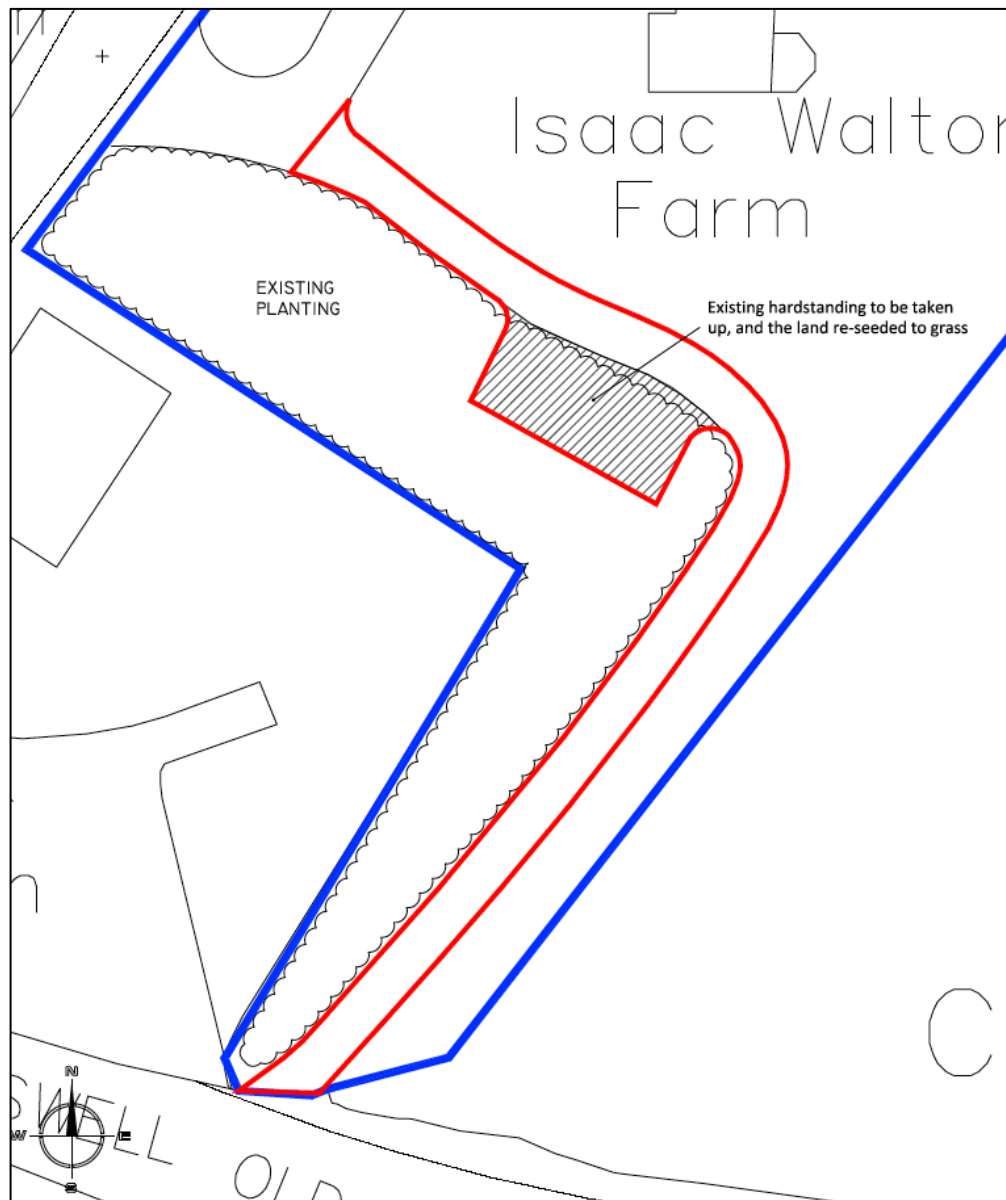
5.10 The Local Authority went on to comment that:

“The private way provides parallel wheel tracks each side of a grassed centre linking an access with Old Cresswell Road with the curtilage of the dwelling, crossing an intervening field for a short distance of about 50m. The vehicles that use the track are transient and pass briefly through the open land, associated only with the residential use of the dwellinghouse, the movements are relatively occasional. Providing the vehicles do not stop and park in groups for prolonged period of times, as they might if the parking area were retained, the openness of the Green Belt should be preserved”.

5.11 Such considerations led the Local Authority to conclude that the proposal did not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt, and that the proposal was therefore not inappropriate development. An extract of the approved plans are shown in Figure 3 overleaf.

5.12 I respectfully submit that this current proposal commands similar conclusions to the above applications. It is also open in nature like the two schemes mentioned, the passage of traffic over it will be transient in nature, and it amounts to an access that is much shorter in length (circa 60 metres) and consequently has a much lesser degree of encroachment which are circa 85m and 205m respectively.

Figure 3 – Extract of Approved Scheme SMD/2020/0265



- 5.13 The application site furthermore benefits from good vegetative enclosure along its NE, SW and SE site boundaries, which will serve to reduce the impact of the development on the openness of the Green Belt. Replacement hedgerow planting is also proposed to frame the access on either side thereby further softening the impact of the development. The proposed access is therefore considered to constitute an appropriate form of development within

the Green Belt that accords with paragraph 146(b) and 146(e) of the National Planning Policy Framework.

5.14 Notwithstanding the above considerations, and without prejudice to the applicant's case, if the Local Authority were to conclude that the proposal gives rise to harm the openness of the Green Belt and/or conflicts with the five purposes of including land within it, and by resultant effect amounts to inappropriate development, it is submitted that very special circumstances would exist to clearly outweigh the totality of harm to the Green Belt (paragraphs 143 and 144 of the NPPF refer).

5.15 The haulage depot on the site currently operates via the existing vehicular access that runs to the immediate south of the existing dwellinghouse. Its egress onto the Leek Road has very poor visibility, with no radius kerbs, and is considered less than ideal for the established haulage depot on the site. Lorries are compelled to cross over onto the far side carriageway in order to complete their manoeuvres and have no visibility of oncoming traffic before doing so.

5.16 Such conclusions are reinforced by the comments of the Local Highway Authority in its assessment of application SMD/2020/0101 where it was acknowledged that:

"Reduction in the intensity of the use of the existing access will be a benefit, as visibility is restricted".

5.17 The applicant proposes to cease the use of this access by commercial vehicles, blocking it off so that it is only used by the residential dwelling. In doing so the existing slow moving, heavy commercial vehicles exiting the site will no longer use this substandard access. The new, purpose built vehicular access, is to be created to the northeast of the existing access and will benefit from good

visibility in both directions on egress, and which will also be provided with radius kerbs on either side. Secure gates are proposed, but these will be set back 20m from the carriageway edge to enable lorries to pull clear of the carriageway. The new access will lead directly into the approved yard area where turning and parking facilities are available.

- 5.18 Policy T1 of the Local Plan states that the Council will ensure that all new development is located where the highway network can satisfactorily accommodate traffic generated by the development or **can be improved as part of the development**. It is respectfully submitted that the consequential betterment to highway safety that would ensue as a result of this proposal amounts to very special circumstances to outweigh the totality of harm to the Green Belt.

Character of the Area

- 5.19 The creation of the proposed vehicular access will serve to remove an existing stretch of mature hedgerow that encloses the SE site boundary. The Local Authority has previously expressed concerns about the consequential visual impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area. To offset the visual impact of the development, the applicant proposes to plant new hedgerows either side of the proposed vehicular access, and these hedgerows will extend inwards, flanking either side of the access. In doing so the impact of the access on the character of the area will be softened.
- 5.20 The applicant would furthermore be agreeable to carrying out additional hedgerow planting along the remainder of the vehicular access up to where it meets the yard area if the Local Authority deemed it necessary. By resultant effect the proposal will not have a significant impact on the character and appearance of the area and will provide a net increase in planting across the site, thereby ensuring accordance with policies DC1 and NE2 of the Local Plan.

6 Conclusion

6.1 It is concluded that the submitted proposal represents a sustainable form of development having regard to the following conclusions:

- *The proposed formation of the vehicular access constitutes an engineering operation and change of use of the land that will not give rise to harm to the openness of the Green Belt or conflict with the five purposes of including land within it.*
- *The proposal will derive betterment to highway safety by providing a new, purpose built vehicular access to serve the haulage depot.*
- *The proposed development will not have a material adverse impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, and will be softened by the proposed hedgerow planting that is to be undertaken on the site.*

6.2 The proposed development is therefore considered to accord with the provisions of policies SS10, DC1, NE1 and T1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

6.3 Notwithstanding the above, and without prejudice to the applicant's case, if the Local Authority were to conclude that the proposal amounts to an inappropriate form of development within the Green Belt, it is considered that the betterment to highway safety that would ensue, would serve to clearly outweigh the totality of harm to the Green Belt, and thus would render the scheme acceptable in the context of paragraphs 143 and 144 of the National Planning Policy Framework.