

PLANNING STATEMENT FOR THE CONVERSION OF A DISUSED RESERVOIR BUILDING TO A DWELLING AT WHITE ACRE, TROUGHSTONES ROAD, BIDDULPH. STAFFORDSHIRE.

Introduction.

This Statement has been prepared to accompany the planning application for the conversion of a disused reservoir building to a dwelling at White Acre, Troughstones Road, Biddulph for Mr.Yasser Heald.

Site.

The 0.40 hectare site lies on the south west side of Troughstones Road, 4 kms to the north east of Biddulph, and 7 kms south west of Congleton town centre. The site is located 75m from the junction of Troughstones Road and Biddulph Park Road. The access to the site is off Troughstones Road, and this has good visibility on to the little used Troughstones Road, and provides more than adequate off road parking adjacent to the semi submerged reservoir building.

The site extends from Troughstones Road in a southerly direction, and beyond the semi submerged reservoir building the land falls away. This part of the site is well wooded and provides a substantial screen for the site, whilst limiting views out from the reservoir building. To the west is dense woodland, and to the east mature trees provide a distinct boundary with the pasture land beyond. As such the site is well screened, and the semi submerged building is largely hidden from any public viewpoint.

The reservoir building is a very substantial structure, and is located in the central part of the site. It lies 7 metres from Troughstones Road, at 253.55 metre AOD. It is of the order of 21m square and was built and operated by Severn Trent Water to provide the water supply to the surrounding agricultural area. It was acquired by the applicant early in 2020. As well as the reservoir building there is a small single storey pump house in the south west corner of the site. This building is accessed via steps from the parking area provided off the main access to the site. It is 10 metres off the southern boundary of the site at a point 244 metres AOD.

The area occupied by the reservoir building is flat, and site well screened, so that the large semi submerged building is largely hidden from public view. In that respect it is a visually contained site.

Planning History.

There would appear to be no recent planning history relating to the site.

Planning Application.

The proposed development involves the conversion of the existing permanent and substantial disused semi submerged reservoir building into a single dwelling house.

No extensions are planned to the building, and the only change to the limited external parts of the structure, is the part exposure of the south facing façade, which will provide access down to the main entrance to the dwelling. There will also be a small external recessed amenity terrace extending from the south elevation.

The converted building will have one level of accommodation of 447 sq m.

Externally, other than the south elevation, the existing ground conditions will remain fundamentally unchanged.

The existing access off Troughstones Road will continue to be used as the main access to the site.

Supporting Information.

Topographical Survey **undertaken by Survey Systems** **August 2020.**

Structural Survey **undertaken by Northern Structural Services** **August 2020.**

This concluded that the structure is in a robust condition and has no signs of structural movement.

The proposed change of use will reduce loads on the structure.

Design needs to reflect current structural layout to create access and lightwell positions.

The structure is in a stable position and is fit for the proposed conversion works.

Arboricultural Impact Assessment **undertaken by Tree Heritage** **November 2020.**

Confirms that the site is well screened and visually contained.

No trees or their root protection areas are affected by the proposed conversion works.

Of the 64 trees which are mainly situated near the boundaries of the site, only one is proposed to be removed, on account of its poor physical condition. This is T59 a sycamore tree which lies adjacent to Troughstones Road.

Phase 1 Ecological Survey **undertaken by Elite Ecology** **March 2021.**

No designated sites were revealed from the Ecological Data Set on the site or directly adjacent to the site. Therefore, the proposed development will have no impact on any designated sites.

No habitats of conservation concern are located on the site, and therefore the proposed scheme of works will not impact any rare or valuable habitats.

There is scope to provide provisions during the construction phase, as well as site enhancements.

Design & Access Statement **undertaken by Design 21 Architecture** **April 2021.**

Planning Policy Context.

Section 38 (6) of the **Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004** indicates that any planning application determination should be made in accordance with the **Development Plan**, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The **National Planning Policy Framework (2019)** sets out the Government's planning policies for England. It also reiterates, in **paragraph 47** the provisions of the above Act. The NPPF is a material

consideration in relation to the appraisal of the submitted application. This is also complemented by the **National Planning Practice Guidance**, sections of which are being continuously updated.

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF sets out “a presumption in favour of sustainable development” and advises decision takers that they should approve development that accords with an up-to-date Development Plan without delay unless:

Any adverse impacts of doing would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework, taken as a whole, or specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted.

Section 13 of the NPPF is a key consideration as it updates Green Belt Policy. This focuses on the control of development in the Green Belt, and seeks to retain its **openness & permanence (para 133)**.

Paragraph 143 states that:

Inappropriate development, is by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Paragraph 144 states that:

When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. “Very special circumstances” will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

In **paragraph 146** the NPPF identifies other forms of development which are not inappropriate in the Green Belt, provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

These include (d):

The reuse of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction.

Paragraph 79 addresses the issue of isolated homes in the countryside. Normally these should be avoided, unless there are special circumstances, these include:

(c) The development would use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting.

Paragraph 88 requires local planning authorities to approach decision making in a positive and creative way, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible to foster the delivery of sustainable development.

The Development Plan.

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (September 2020).

The SMLP was adopted by the Council on the 9th September 2020. This sets out the vision and strategy for the District until 2033. It identifies the priorities and the policies and sites for the future development of Staffordshire Moorlands.

The relevant policies within the Local Plan are listed below:

Policy SS2 Settlement Hierarchy.

A 4 fold classification is identified.

- 1) Towns 2) Rural Areas (Larger Towns) 3) Rural Areas (Smaller Towns) and 4) Other Rural Areas.**

The Other Rural Areas

This comprises the open countryside, where development is normally unacceptable and Green Belt where further development is generally inappropriate. Within these areas there are some groups of houses and hamlets which are identified as “smaller villages” because of their predominantly open character and loose knit nature. They also contain major development areas which may be suitable for appropriate development or redevelopment.

Policy SS10 Other Rural Areas.

Outside the towns, and the larger and smaller villages lie the residual parts of the District, Other Rural Areas.

These areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be allocated in the countryside, supports rural diversification and sustainability of rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside. The Council & its partners will achieve this through the following actions:

Allowing the conversion or replacement of an existing rural building in accordance with Policy H1.

Policy H1 New Housing Development.

Requirements include:

3e all new dwellings should be of a sufficient size to provide satisfactory levels of amenity.

4c “In all cases development will not lead to a prominent intrusion into the countryside or have a significant adverse impact on the character and appearance of the countryside.

5 In the Other Rural Areas in the open countryside only the following forms of development will be permitted:

5d The conversion of rural buildings for residential use, where the building is suitable & worthy in physical, architectural & character terms for conversion.

6 When development is located in the Green Belt, national Green Belt Policy will apply.

Policy DC1 Design Considerations.

All development should be well designed and reinforce local distinctiveness, in line with the Council’s Design Guide. In particular, new development should meet 11 requirements.

Policy DC3 Landscape & Settlement Setting.

The Council will protect & where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements in Staffordshire Moorlands by resisting development which would lead to prominent intrusion into the countryside.

Planning Policy Appraisal.

This Planning Policy Appraisal appraises the proposed development in the light of the relevant policies in the **Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020), which is the Development Plan**. In addition, consideration is given to the relevant guidance in the **National Planning Policy Framework (2019)** and the **National Planning Practice Guidance**, which are other material considerations in the decision-making process.

In terms of the proposed development the **key planning considerations** are:

- **The principle of Development in the Green Belt & the Effect on Openness.**
- **The Design of the New House.**
- **The Issue of Isolated Residential Development**

Principle of Development in the Green Belt and the Effect on Openness.

The main consideration is whether the proposed development amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt, having regard to the Development Plan policies and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Paragraph 146 of the NPPF sets out the considerations which need to be addressed to enable the reuse of an existing building in the Green Belt to be “not inappropriate”. These are:

- **Is the building of permanent and substantial construction?**
- **Does the development preserve the openness of the Green Belt?**
- **Would the development conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt?**

Policy H1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Sept 2020) confirms that:

6. When development is located in the Green Belt, National Green Belt Policy will apply.

It is therefore important to consider whether the proposed conversion complies with the criteria in **paragraph 146** of the NPPF?

Is the building of permanent and substantial construction?

The building was constructed for the former Severn Trent Water Authority as a water storage tank. The roof of the water tank is constructed of concrete or a concrete screed. Internally the tank has concrete walls, concrete roof beams and a regular grid of concrete columns. The wall is of rendered concrete, 700mm thick.

Northern Structural Services in their report, concluded that the structure is in a robust condition, and showing no signs of structural movement. The proposed change of use will have the overall effect of reducing loads to the structure. As such the structure is fit for conversion and is in a stable condition.

The full report, together with photographs, is submitted as one of the Supporting Documents, and addresses the structural condition of the building.

In summary the building is of a permanent and substantial construction.

Does the building preserve the openness of the Green Belt?

The building has existed for over years, and is underground. Its conversion involves the opening up of the south facing side of the building, but no extensions are proposed to it. There is therefore no increase in the footprint or floorspace of the building.

The proposals to convert the building would therefore not prejudice the openness of the Green Belt.

Would the development conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt?

The **5 purposes** of including land in the Green Belt are listed in **paragraph 134 of the NPPF**.

The proposed development's impact on each of these purposes is:

- (1) There is no extension proposed to the building, and the building is largely underground. The site lies midway between the towns of Congleton and Leek, at a distance of 4 miles from them. Neither of them can be regarded as large built-up areas, or the land between them and the site one of "unrestricted sprawl". **There is therefore no increase in the "unrestricted sprawl" of a large built-up area resulting from the proposed development.**
- (2) The distance between Congleton & Leek means that the **proposed conversion of an underground building will not contribute to the merging of the 2 towns.**
- (3) The proposed development is totally contained within an underground building, within the confines of a well screened site, as the photographs in the Supporting Documents clearly illustrate. **As such there would be no encroachment of the countryside.**
- (4) The nearest town with some historic value is Leek, at a distance of 4 miles. **There would be no impact on the setting and special character of Leek,** if it was considered to fall within the definition of a historic town.
- (5) **The proposed conversion of an underground water tank represents a unique venture, and would have no impact on urban regeneration.**

In summary, the comprehensive assessment of the impact of the proposed development clearly shows that there is no conflict with any of the 5 purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

In terms of addressing the issue of appropriate development in the Green Belt as set out in paragraph 146, the proposed conversion of the redundant water storage tank involves a permanent and substantial building, the conversion of which preserves the openness of the Green Belt, and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

As such the proposed development comprises appropriate development within the Green Belt.

Policy H1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020) paragraph 6 states that

When development is located in the Green Belt, National Green Policy will apply.

As the proposed development represents appropriate development in the Green Belt, the proposed development also **complies with the Development Plan.**

The uncovering and exposure of the southern façade of the building provides for the main access to the proposed dwelling, adjacent to which is a small external amenity area. This elevation and the amenity area are at a lower level than Troughstone Road, and are well screened by the wooded slope to the south, and Biddulph Town 91 Public Footpath.

Other external alterations include open light wells in the roof for natural light and ventilation.

The external alterations to the building are minimal in terms of making the converted building habitable.

Details of these are shown on the submitted plans and addressed in the **Design & Access Statement**.

These alterations to the building comply with the exception in **paragraph 145, category (c)**, in that they do not represent disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. The water storage building also represents previously developed land, and the proposed alterations fully comply with **paragraph 145, category (g) of the NPPF**.

The Design of the New House.

The design of the converted house has been heavily constrained by the fact that the converted building lies largely underground, and is of rectangular shape with a prevailing structural grid. The tank is 21 metres square with a regular grid of concrete columns and exposed beams. Its internal height is of the order of 2.6 m.

The house is designed round a central open courtyard with an elliptical lightwell open in the roof. The south façade is to be uncovered to provide the main entrance to the house, and outside the entrance it is proposed to have a small amenity area.

Internally the house is designed as an open plan living space.

No extensions are proposed to the building, and any external alterations are essential to provide a habitable dwelling.

The existing flat roof is proposed to be waterproofed, insulated and overlaid with a green roof.

More details regarding more detailed aspects of the design and appearance are covered in the **Design & Access Statement**.

As such the proposed development complies with the Design Considerations in Policy DC1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020), and the Council's Design Guide.

The Issue of Isolated Residential Development.

The site is isolated from the nearest villages, and is located in open countryside characterised by upland farms, and sporadic development.

There is a small group of dwellings and Biddulph Park Methodist Church at the junction of Biddulph Park Road and Troughstones Road. Biddulph Hall lies due west of the site, and the Talbot public house at 1 km.

The proposed development of the site for the conversion of a building to residential use can be appropriately described as isolated residential development.

Paragraph 79 of the NPPF provides advice regarding **isolated development**.

This states that normally isolated development should be avoided, unless there are special circumstances, which include the reuse of redundant or disused buildings. Such development needs to lead to an enhancement to the immediate setting of the building.

The conversion of the redundant water storage tank will make a positive contribution to bringing back an unattractive and utilitarian building back into a viable use. In doing so it will significantly enhance the building, and its setting.

As such the development fully accords with the guidance in paragraph 79 of the NPPF.

Other Planning Considerations:

Access, residential amenity, trees, protected species. sustainability.

The **access** to the site is safe with good visibility onto the little used Troughstones Road. Within the site there is adequate space for parking and turning vehicles.

There is no impact on the **residential amenities** of the nearest residential property which is at some distance from the site. In addition, the site is well screened, and there no exposed elevations in the direction of the nearest property.

The site is very **well screened** on all boundaries, including those which can viewed from Troughstones Road and Biddulph Town 91 Public Footpath.

The preliminary ecological appraisal revealed **no habitats of protected species potential**.

As the building is of a permanent and substantial construction its conversion represents an appropriate and **sustainable form of development**, which will provide local trades people with employment during the conversion phase. It will also bring in additional household expenditure for local services and facilities. The conversion involves an energy efficient development.

Conclusion.

The proposed conversion of the permanent and substantial redundant water storage building, complies with all the considerations set out in **paragraph 146 (d)** of the **National Planning Policy Framework (2019)**. As such its re-use for a dwelling is regarded as a form of development which is not inappropriate in the Green Belt.

As appropriate development in the Green Belt, the appraisal of the submitted planning application rests on the detailed aspects of the proposed development.

The design of the converted building is heavily constrained by its largely underground position, and rectangular shape and structural grid. Only the south façade is exposed, in order to provide the entrance to the proposed dwelling, and access to a small private amenity area. No extensions are proposed to the building.

As a building converted to residential use it meets the special circumstances required for isolated development in **paragraph 79 of the NPPF**.

Access to the site is safe, with adequate space on site for car parking. There are no nearby properties, and the site is well screened on all its boundaries. No habitats of protected species potential have been found on the site. As a permanent and substantial building its conversion represents a sustainable form of development.

In the light of the above Statement, the proposed conversion of the building is considered as appropriate development within the Green Belt, which fully accords with the **Development Plan**, and the **National Planning Policy Framework**, and as such should receive a positive decision.

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