

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2021/0291
Valid 23/04/2021

WILLOWSHAW FARM
CLOUDSIDE
CONGLETON

**CHANGE OF USE OF
REDUNDANT BARN TO FORM
SINGLE DWELLING WITH
ASSOCIATED PARKING AND
AMENITY SPACE**

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Whether or not the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt
- The principle of the development
- 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 Green Belt and is within the open countryside between Rushton Spencer, a couple of miles to the east and Congleton to the west and is a short distance to the south-east of “The Cloud” hill and a short distance to the north of Beat Lane, the main country road connecting the village to Congleton. It comprises a complex of buildings forming part of a current working cattle farm. Willowshaw Farm and these lie adjacent to the fairly narrow country lane known as Cloudside which connects to Beat Lane a short distance to the south. The farm is on the east side of the lane and on land which slopes downwards towards the east. The south part of the farm comprises old traditional stone barns with modern blockwork pitched roof barns to the rear and a traditional stone farmhouse which directly faces the road. To the north side of the traditional stone barn lie large portal-framed modern farm storage buildings with corrugated fibre cement sheet walls and roof above concrete blockwork walls. The complex of farm buildings is surrounded by open land.

PROPOSAL

This a full application for the conversion of an L-shaped stone barn between the farmhouse and the modern portal framed buildings to the north also an adjacent, more modern blockwork building to the rear, with pitched roof, into a 4-bedroom dwelling. The application also includes the conversion of another attached modern blockwork building to the rear into a double garage to provide domestic garaging for the existing farmhouse. New stone boundary walls would be built to the front of the building and also to the side to define the proposed new residential “curtilage” and these would enclose proposed rear and side garden areas. In addition an existing

yard space to the rear of the building would also be enclosed by existing buildings and a shorter section of stone wall to form a private outdoor amenity space.

The scheme re-uses all the existing openings as doors and windows. The only new openings would be a large floor to ceiling window on the side elevation of the modern blockwork building, to match the existing cart opening next to it and also the insertion of a couple of black Conservation-style rooflights. Both the traditional and modern barns have existing tiles roofs which would be retained. A cream colour render would be applied to the walls of the modern blockwork building.

The application includes a Planning Statement, Structural Survey Report, Bat Activity Survey Report and updated/revised Bat Report received in June 2021.

The application is part of an overall scheme which also includes the proposed conversion of all the other farm buildings into four further dwellings and the extension of the farmhouse under separate planning applications. The agent explains that if the proposals are approved then farming at the property will cease and the livestock transferred to another holding.

Revised plans have been received showing the means off access and parking (without reference to the adjacent DET site) and a new skin of brickwork to one elevation of the existing modern building, which is currently blockwork.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan (Adopted September 2020)

SS10 Other Rural Areas Strategy
H1 New Housing
DC1 Design Considerations
NE1 Biodiversity
T1 Transport

National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019)

Sections 5 (Housing), 12 (Design), 13 (Green Belts) and 15 (Natural Environment).

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD/2021/0292: Concurrent application to extend the farmhouse. Pending.

DET/2021/0019: Application under Class Q of the GPDO to convert the modern portal-framed storage buildings into four dwellings. Refused.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 27.5.21
Neighbour consultation period ends: 27.5.21
Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None.

Town / Parish Comments

Concerns are raised regarding the overall scheme leading to overdevelopment of the site in a rural area of a single-track road and which would result in six dwellings in total together as part of the overall scheme. Concerns are also raised regarding the on-site parking provision and impact on trees to the north of the site. The Council would not raise an objection if the traditional barn was converted into additional floorspace for the farmhouse.

Local Highways Authority

SCC Highways objected to the overall scheme original plans due to concerns over visibility at the proposed access and two new accesses to separate parking areas adding to further highway safety concerns. However, no objection was raised to the amended scheme subject to conditions.

Environmental Health Section

No objection subject to standard conditions but also an additional condition requiring sound insulation for the proposed dwelling if any part of the overall property was to remain in agricultural use with farm operations continuing.

Conservation Officer

No objection subject to conditions and advises the retention of cow-shed doors and window shutters.

Staffs Wildlife Trust

Initially a Holding Objection was issued due to the impacts on common pipistrelle and brown long-eared bat roosts that were found within the barn and also the potential impacts from the proposed new drainage scheme to a LWS and priority habitats.

However, in response to a revised Ecology Report (June 2021) outlining mitigation and protection measures, the objection was removed subject to conditions to secure the measures.

Waste Collection Services

No issues.

OFFICER COMMENTS

The site is in the Green Belt and Policy SS10 requires strict control over inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Paras 149 and 150 of the NPPF list the forms of development which are not inappropriate in the Green Belt and the change of use of buildings, providing they are permanent and substantial, is listed. Therefore, the proposal to change the use of a solid traditional stone barn into a dwelling is not inappropriate development and would also by definition not be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt. The Structural Survey Report considers the stone barn to be in a good condition and capable of conversion into a residential use without significant works or modifications and just some relatively minor roof repairs are needed.

The building is still in use for farming purposes as the property is still a working cattle farm. The building comprises a milking parlour and former cattle shed (now used for agricultural storage) and a replacement cattle shed in the modern blockwork building to the rear. Despite the site being part of a continued working farm, the Local Plan policies support the conversion of appropriate rural buildings into other uses such as dwellings and there are no planning policies resisting the loss of operational farming floorspace. Policy SS10 supports such conversions providing the building is physically and architecturally worthy and in keeping with the rural surroundings. As a solid and stable traditional stone barn with a form and design in keeping with the traditional rural character of the area (and which potentially could be regarded as a non-designated heritage asset), the proposal complies with the policy.

The scheme retains the rural barn character and appearance of the building as it re-uses all the existing openings and restricts new openings to Conservation-type rooflights in the old part of the building and a more modern and large new floor to ceiling window in the side elevation of the modern block behind it, screened from the road and in any case matching the new window next to it which is a re-used cattle door opening. A condition can be added requiring the retention of the cattle doors and details of their treatment and glazing into a domestic window, in response to the comments of the Conservation Officer. The revised plans show a section of the side elevation of the modern building to be faced with brick which will ensure that its appearance reflects the wider character of the older buildings.

The other works, comprising a new access (re-using an existing farm vehicle access) and stone boundary walls, would not harm the character and appearance of the area. Permitted development rights which would otherwise allow new further windows, extensions, other alterations or outbuildings without planning permission can be removed by way of a condition in order to protect the traditional rural character and appearance of the area from the development.

With regard to residential amenity, the only nearby dwelling is the farmhouse and the proposed new windows would not directly overlook any of the primary windows of the farmhouse or the proposed extension to it (part of a separate planning application which is still pending).

With regard to the living conditions of the future occupants, there would be no harmful overlooking from the farmhouse (including from windows proposed for the extension which is also would not cause any overshadowing or loss of light affecting the proposed primary windows of the barn). Although the openings are small, there

are several of them per main room and the additional modern block window and rooflights would supplement light provision. The barn is a suitable size for a family dwelling and would meet the thresholds in the government's Nationally Described Space Standards. There would also be an outdoor private amenity area in a yard of significant size in addition to new garden areas. The Environmental Health Section recommend a Noise Insulation Scheme to protect the occupants from noise arising from farming operations. As neighbouring buildings could potentially continue to be used for farming (an application to convert them into dwellings has been refused), I consider a condition requiring noise insulation for the converted dwelling to be necessary.

With regard to highway safety, the revised access and parking scheme for the overall larger scheme was deemed acceptable. However, only two off-street spaces were shown for the barn conversion and the Council's parking standards require three spaces for a 4-bed dwelling. However, there is sufficient space within the property to create a third space and this can be achieved via a planning condition requiring further information and implementation.

Finally, with regard to the impact on the ecological value of the site, bat roosts were discovered in the roof of the barn (and the farmhouse roof). Bats are a protected species so any conversion scheme must not harm them via the imposition of protection and mitigation measures. A swallow was also found to be nesting at the site. Staffs Wildlife Trust approves of the protection and mitigation measures for the bats (as outlined in the June 2021 report) and recommends further measures via tree planting and details to be submitted for approval of methodologies during construction to protect swallows, nesting birds (including a replacement swallow nest) and also great crested newts (as there is a pond nearby). I consider all of these conditions are necessary to ensure that the level of ecology at the site is both protected and enhanced as required under Policy NE1 and the NPPF (Section 15).

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The proposal would not amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and the barn is suitable for the conversion into a dwelling in principle. The scheme would not harm the visual or residential amenities of the area and would not lead to any other environmental harms including biodiversity and the level of highway safety in the area, with the safeguard of conditions. The proposal would comply with the Council's Local Plan and the government planning guidance contained in the NPPF.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Chris Johnston

Recommendation Date: 16.7.21

X *J Colley*

Signed by: Jane Colley Signature

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council