
WAYFIELDS FARM

ECM GROUP HOLDINGS LTD

CHANGE OF USE TO CLASS E/B8 USE - PLANNING STATEMENT

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PREPARED BY: APRIL KEEFE *MPLAN*

REVIEWED BY: BEN BEN KETTLE *BSC (HONS) MSC MCD MRTPI*

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1 INTRODUCTION AND SITE CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

1.1 This planning statement has been prepared on behalf of ECM Group Holdings. It accompanies an application for the change of use of three agricultural buildings for commercial, business and service (E use) and storage (B8 use). The application site is Wayfields Farm, Rownall Road, Wetley Rocks, Stoke-on-Trent, ST9 0BP.

1.2 Wayfields Farm is located approximately 1 km north of the outer edge of Werrington and approximately 3.5km east of Hanley as shown in the image below.

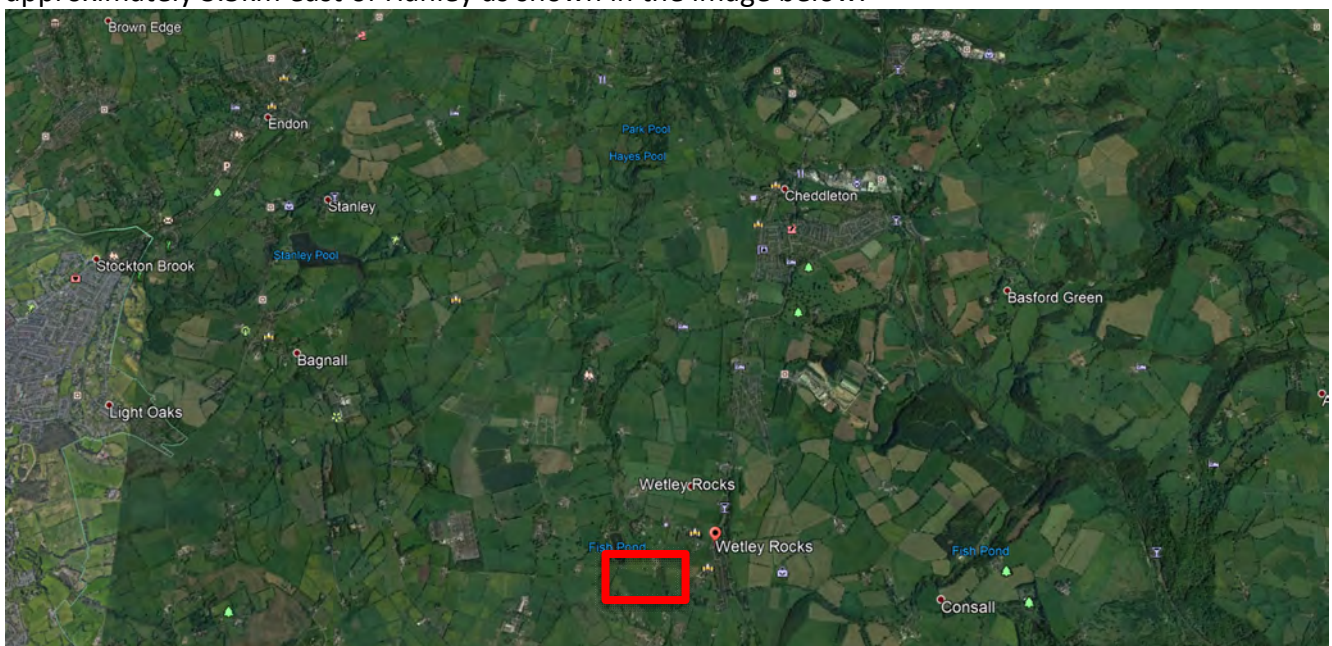


Figure 1: Site Location

1.3 The farm was previously owned by John Pointon and Sons who were a farming family best known for their successful animal by-product and protein business. However, this business was developed alongside its traditional farming activities. The protein arm of the company was sold to ABP Food Group in early 2020.

1.4 The estate is made up of several holdings, with the vast majority being owner-occupied. In more recent years, the land associated with the farms has been split into different ownership, meaning many buildings are no longer related to surrounding agricultural land. The existing agricultural buildings at Wayfields Farm are now redundant and no longer needed for agricultural purposes. Due to a change in ownership, the longstanding landholding around the buildings has been severed.

SITE CONTEXT

1.5 Three existing agricultural buildings are present on site; building A, B and C. These can be seen in figure 2.

1.6 The buildings lie to the north of a range of traditional properties which line Rownall Road with Round Meadows Racing Stables being to the south. Some residential properties neighbour the site, most are large detached homes set back from the road.

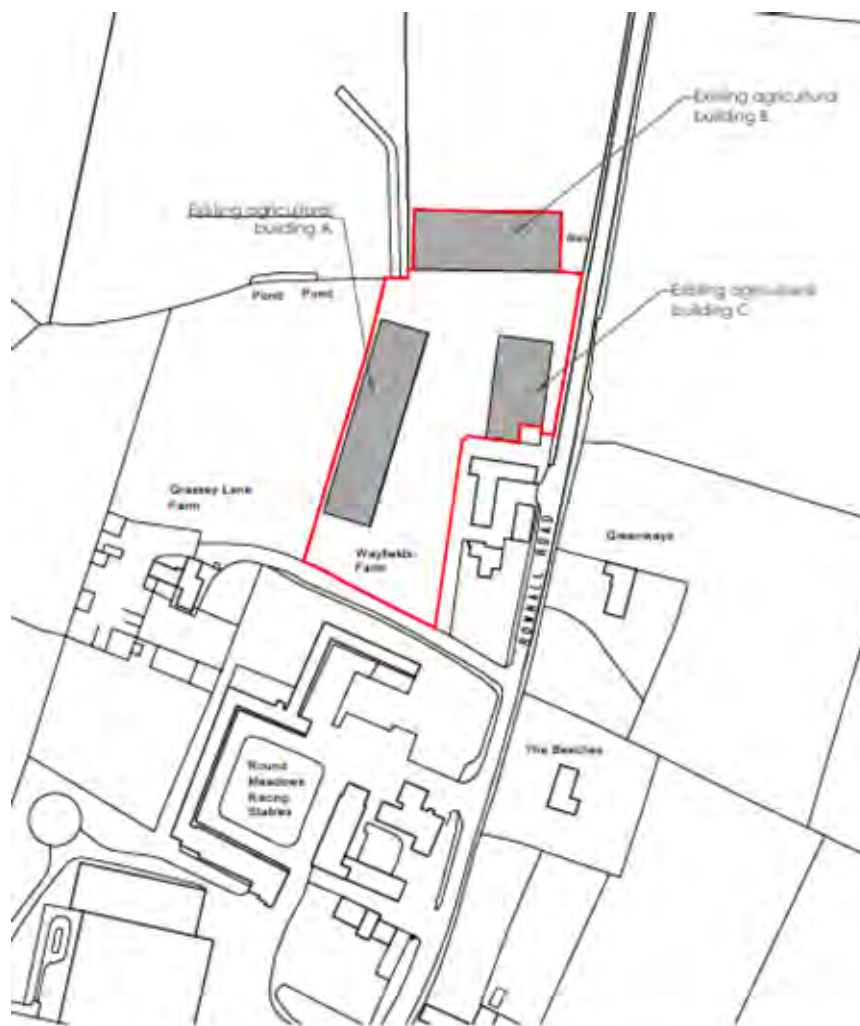


Figure 2: Site context

2 STATUTORY LAW

USE CLASSES ORDER

2.1 The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended) sets out Class E (Commercial, Business and Service) development as:

Class E. Commercial, Business and Service Use, or part use, for all or any of the following purposes—

(a) for the display or retail sale of goods, other than hot food, principally to visiting members of the public,

(b) for the sale of food and drink principally to visiting members of the public where consumption of that food and drink is mostly undertaken on the premises,

(c) for the provision of the following kinds of services principally to visiting members of the public—

(i) financial services,

(ii) professional services (other than health or medical services), or

(iii) any other services which it is appropriate to provide in a commercial, business or service locality,

(d) for indoor sport, recreation or fitness, not involving motorised vehicles or firearms or use as a swimming pool or skating rink, principally to visiting members of the public,

(e) for the provision of medical or health services, principally to visiting members of the public, except the use of premises attached to the residence of the consultant or practitioner,

(f) for a creche, day nursery or day centre, not including a residential use, principally to visiting members of the public,

(g) for—

(i) an office to carry out any operational or administrative functions,

(ii) the research and development of products or processes, or

(iii) any industrial process, being a use, which can be carried out in any residential area without detriment to the amenity of that area by reason of noise, vibration, smell, fumes, smoke, soot, ash, dust or grit

2.2 The order sets out Class B8 (Storage and distribution) development as:

Use for storage or as a distribution centre

3 THE PROPOSAL

CHANGE OF USE

3.1 The application seeks the change of use of the three buildings for commercial, business and service (E use) and storage (B8 use). The intention of the site is to provide small businesses with space appropriate to their needs. The tenants of the buildings are likely to fall within Class E(g)(i)(ii)(iii) and Class B8. It would allow the following types of uses:

- Workshops and light industrial, such as joinery, product assembly, low impact manufacturing
- Storage, i.e. for e-commerce retailers, or businesses with inadequate on site storage.
- Residential storage units
- Vehicle storage

OPERATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN

3.2 All three buildings are capable of the proposed change of use. Building A and B proposals include minor material alterations to the external appearance. Two new doors are provided to facilitate the change of use; one door in building A and one in building B. The two aluminium roller shutters proposed are in keeping with the existing design and front elevation. The existing design of these entrances are shown below and use materials that are typical of a portal frame agricultural building.



Figure 3: Existing Door

LAYOUT

3.3 The operational layout of the site makes use of the existing yard areas and land immediately surrounding the buildings. The existing entrance provides access to the highway network. The three existing agricultural buildings are to be split into seven units in total.

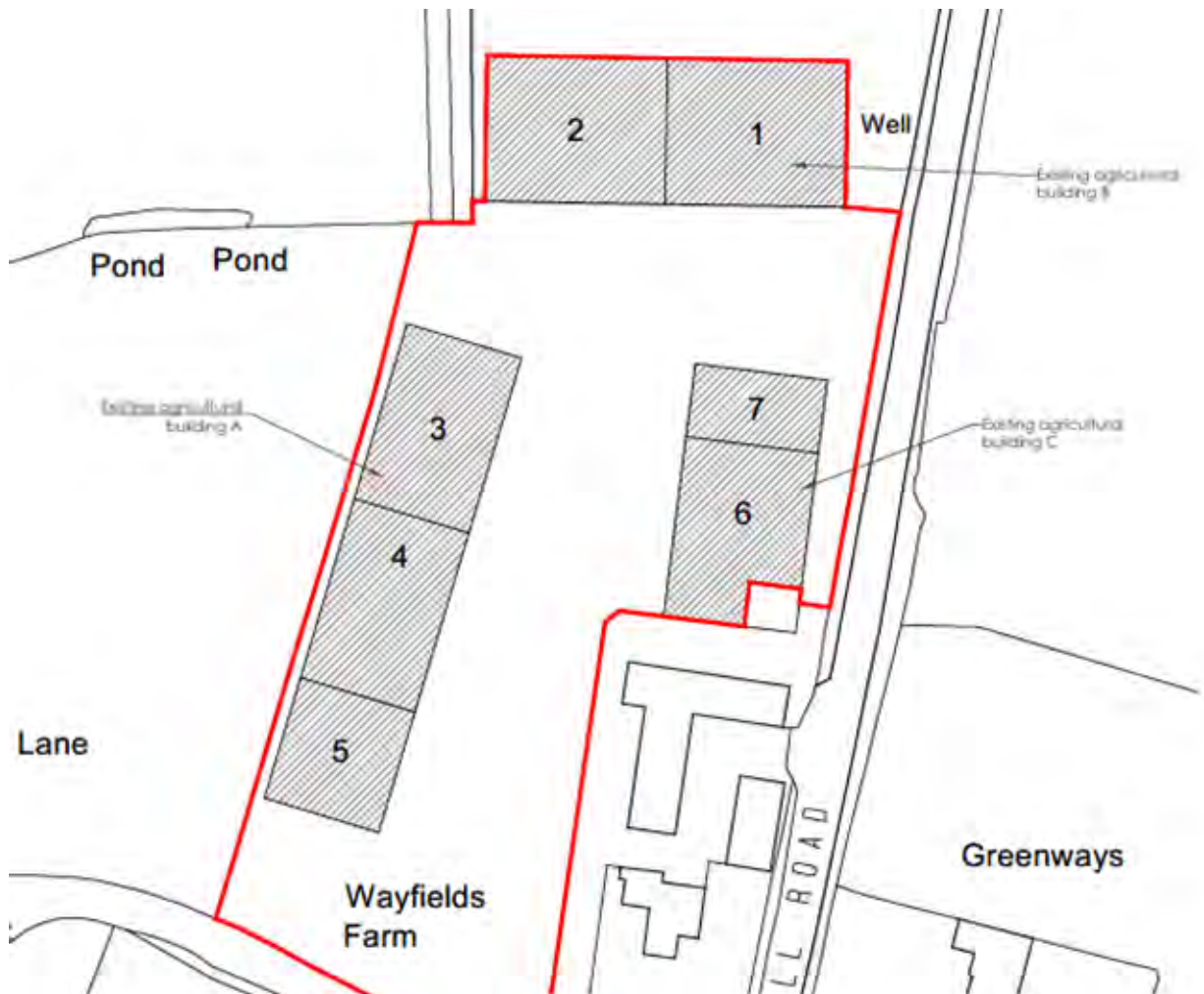


Figure 4: Site Plan

ACCESS AND PARKING

3.4 The site provides ample space for vehicle manoeuvres. Formal parking is not considered to be required due to the proposed uses with availability for several vehicles in front of each unit for parking and unloading.

3.5 The site entrance does not confront any neighbouring properties and consequently keeps disruption at a minimum as shown in figure 5. The site offers direct access onto Rownall Road which connects to the A52 toward the south.



Figure 5: Existing Access

4 PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

4.1 Wayfields Farm lies within the Staffordshire Moorlands Council area. The Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan was adopted on 9 September 2020 and sets out the councils vision and strategy for the district until 2033. The adopted Local Plan has replaced the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy 2014.

4.2 The site is located in the Green Belt, as shown on the image below from the 2020 adopted Local Plan map. The relevant policies are considered below:



Figure 6: Local Plan proposals map

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS LOCAL PLAN 2014 - 2033

4.3 The Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan was submitted for examination on the 28 June 2018, and adopted on 9 September 2020. It contains the strategic policies for the development plan area. The relevant policies are set out below:

VISION FOR THE RURAL AREAS

4.4 The vision for the rural areas includes support for the agricultural sector. It states:

*There will be a more **vibrant and diverse rural economy** which will provide a range of local job opportunities and **support a thriving agricultural sector**.*

*Redundant sites in the countryside will have been **redeveloped for new users**, improving the environment and **diversifying the rural economy**.*

POLICY E1

4.5 Policy E1 sets out the Council's approach to new employment development. It endeavours to support the expansion of existing businesses and new businesses by a number of provisions, including:

Schemes involving the re-use of rural buildings for commercial enterprise, including tourism uses, will be considered favourably where the proposed use does not harm the building's character and/or the character of its surroundings

And;

Encourage provision for small-scale and start-up businesses

POLICY SS 8

4.6 Policy SS 8 identifies the development strategy for larger village areas such as Wetley Rocks. The policy is supportive of the redevelopment of rural land by:

Meeting limited employment needs by enabling small scale new employment development

POLICY SS 10

4.7 Policy SS 10 identifies the development strategy for development in the rural area. The policy is supportive of sustaining the rural economy by:

Enabling the limited expansion or development of business for employment users

Supporting the diversification of existing farm enterprises

4.8 Development in the Green Belt defers to the national policy:

Strict control will continue to be exercised over inappropriate development within the Green Belt, allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government policy.

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK 2021

4.9 The National Planning Policy Framework 2021 replaced the 2019 edition which in turn replaced the 2018 Framework. The framework is a material consideration in the determination of this application. The relevant paragraphs relating to the proposal and conditions include:

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4.10 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF describes the economic, social and environmental roles of planning in meeting the three dimensions of sustainable development.

4.11 Paragraph 9 of the Framework advises that the framework as a whole constitutes sustainable development:

These objectives should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of the policies in this framework; they are not criteria against which every decision can or should be judged. Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.

4.12 Paragraph 11 of the NPPF sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development:

Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

... For decision-taking this means:

c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or

d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

- i. the application of policies in this framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or*
- ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this framework taken as a whole.*

ECONOMIC GROWTH

4.13 The framework gives significant weight to economic growth stating at paragraph 81:

Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future. This is particularly important where Britain can be a global leader in driving innovation, and in areas with high levels of productivity, which should be able to capitalise on their performance and potential.

4.14 Specifically relating to supporting a prosperous rural economy, paragraph 84 states:

Planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*
- b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*

GREEN BELT

4.15 Section 13 of the NPPF details Green Belt policy, paragraph 137 sets out the overarching aim of Green Belt:

The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

4.16 Paragraph 138 details the purposes of Green Belt:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.*

4.17 Paragraph 150 sets out additional forms of development that are not inappropriate. It includes point d) which states:

the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction

SECTION 14 – MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, FLOODING AND COASTAL CHANGE

4.18 Paragraph 152 of the framework provides further evidence of the desire to re-use existing buildings to contribute towards tackling climate change:

*The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change. It should help to shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; **encourage the re-use of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings;** and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.*

5 APPRAISAL

PRINCIPLE

5.1 Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan policy E 1 states schemes involving the re-use of rural buildings for commercial enterprise, including tourism uses, will be considered favourably. The policy has a positive slant towards *'economic purposes'*, encouraging economic and commercial enterprise within rural communities. Further support for economic purposes is seen within policy E 1 in which the council aim to *'encourage the provision for small-scale and start-up businesses'*.

5.2 Furthermore, Policy SS 10 reinforces this affirming that the council want to sustain the rural economy by enabling the limited expansion or development for employment uses and support the diversification of existing farm enterprises. The proposed use replaces the previous agricultural uses, which are now redundant with another economic benefit in the countryside within existing buildings of a suitable size and setting.

5.3 The National Planning Policy Framework supports the expansion and development of the rural economy. Paragraph 81 of the Framework advises that *'significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development'*. Furthermore, the proposal is supported by core planning principles that recognise the importance of re-using land and buildings.

5.4 Paragraph 84 of the Framework encourages the conversion of existing buildings to enable growth and expansion within the rural area. The efficient use of land is welcomed by paragraph 120, which specifically outlines that policies and decisions should support the development of under-utilised land and buildings. Further backing for re-using buildings continues through paragraph 152, where it considers that the conversion of existing buildings can help transition to a low carbon future.

5.5 One of the challenges Staffordshire Moorlands Council have highlighted is the need to tackle economic decline in the rural areas. It is stated that economic development needs to recognise the contribution which the rural areas make to the District's economy. There is often limited scope to accommodate significant new development in the rural areas due to the sustainability of sites. There is now a *'need to exploit opportunities arising from the closure of developed areas in the countryside'*.

5.6 The proposed development is considered to be acceptable in principle. Further assessment of other matters is carried out below.

GREEN BELT

5.7 Policy SS 10 advises that areas of the countryside within the Green Belt will be subject to additional restrictions and defers to the National Planning Policy Framework. Paragraph 150 of the Framework allows certain forms of development, *'provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt'*. The types of development include *'the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction.'*

5.8 The buildings have been in their current format for a significant amount of time and could not be described as anything other than permanent construction. Minimal physical work is proposed to change their use. Therefore, as minimal external and internal development work is needed, it would comply with the requirements of the planning policy.

5.9 The development proposed would fall within the exceptions provided within SS 10 of the development plan and paragraph 150 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The proposed use of the buildings is confined to the existing building envelopes. Therefore, it is considered that the re-use of the buildings at the site would not conflict with the purposes of the green belt and would preserve the openness due to being an alternative use confined within the same buildings.

5.10 The principle of the development within the Green Belt is considered to be acceptable, in accordance with SS 10 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan and National Planning Policy Framework.

HIGHWAYS

5.11 Vehicular access into the site is provided via the existing access road off Rownall Road. The lawful use of the site would allow uncontrolled movements of small and large vehicles at any time of the day and night. Given the proposed land-uses, traffic levels are likely to be negligible. The site has good visibility in both directions so would not give rise to highway safety impacts. Therefore, it is considered that the proposed development would be acceptable in highway terms.

RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

5.12 There are a handful of residential properties in proximity to the application site. The proposed use of the buildings is not considered to attract significant movements or generate noise. The proposed uses fall within use Class B8 (storage) and E uses classes. The E uses classes are broadly those that can be carried out in any residential area without detriment to the amenity of that area. The impacts of the proposed use need to be balanced against the existing lawful agricultural use of the land where access and the use of large machinery and noisy operations can take place without restriction. The use of the application buildings for the proposed uses is not considered to be intrusive to residential amenity and can be controlled by planning conditions where necessary.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 ECM Group Holdings Ltd are the owners and occupiers of Wayfields Farm. The existing modern buildings within the application site are no longer required for agriculture; the grant of planning approval will allow the buildings to continue to be used for an alternative economic use that is compatible with the surrounding development. The buildings are considered to be appropriate for the proposed commercial and storage use.

6.2 The principle of the re-use of buildings within the countryside and Green Belt attracts significant support throughout the national and local policy. The buildings can be re-used with only two minor external alterations. The application site provides suitable access and safeguards residential amenity.

6.3 The proposal is considered to be a sustainable form of development that is consistent with the policies in the development plan and the framework. It is, therefore, respectfully requested that the application is approved without delay.