

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2021/0230
Valid 14/06/2021

ROCK END STABLES NEW
STREET
BIDDULPH MOOR

RETROSPECTIVE
PERMISSION FOR A
POLYTUNNEL CREATED AT
THE STABLES.

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

Impact on the Green Belt and the Character and Appearance of the Area

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

A long narrow grazing parcel of 0.4ha that runs parallel to the New Street roadside, the other side of a dense hawthorne hedge, to the rear of the highway verge. The land is below the gritstone edge of Wicken Stones at the bottom of its steep eastern slope (the applicant owns three times that area, their ownership includes the top of the edge and land on the western slope at the other side).

The land includes a small stable block that has access from the roadside.

PROPOSAL

The application seeks permission for development already carried out. The applicant has erected a moderately sized poly tunnel 10m x 20m. Its long side edge is parallel to the road and it sits close to the inside edge of the hedgerow. The structure has a steel hooped frame sunken and fixed into concrete at each end. Polythene sheet is stretched across the hoops.

On inspection, there were fruits, most notably tomatoes, and vegetables in large tubs growing inside. The applicant says that some of the tubs were grown by her, others were grown by near neighbours.

The applicant has planted rows of tree saplings on the land to the front or southern end of the polytunnel. She also keeps and grazes goats on the slopes above the polytunnel.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan Development Plan Document (Adopted 2020)

S01 Spatial Objectives
SS1 Development Principles
SS10 Other Rural Area Strategy
DC1 Design Considerations
DC3 Landscape Character
T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

National Planning Policy Framework
NPPF July 2021

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS
86/00938/OLD Erection of stables for two ponies. Approved.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 23.07.2021
Neighbour consultation period ends: 23.07.2021
Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

4 Objections have been received. Comments raised are summarised below:

- Polytunnel is tatty looking, it appears out of place against the natural landscape, it is too large for the site and, erected in front of Wicken Stone outcrop and Stone Cottage, it obscures views of the rocks.
- The polytunnel is directly in front of our house and from every window it blocks every view of the open countryside.
- The hedge only partially hides the structure, out of season when the hedge is less leafy the polytunnel is in plain sight.
- Parking is limited and New Street is dangerous and the applicant appears to encourage others to grow in her polytunnel

2 responses have been marked as neither objection or support:

- An area of driveway parking shown in one of the photographs does not belong to the applicant.
- Not in keeping with the Green Belt and this place of outstanding beauty. The land is in a disgraceful state.

5 supporting responses have been received.

- Sustainable growing reducing carbon footprint enjoyable place for all community spirit, produce donated to elderly, there are no allotments in Biddulph Moor.

Town / Parish Comments

No Objection - "In favour". subject to no contravention of the green belt and any valid neighbour planning concerns.

Environmental Health

Severn Trent Water

No Objection. Minimal impact on the public sewerage system, no objections to the proposals and do not require a drainage condition to be applied.

We have apparatus in the area of the planned development, the developer will need to contact Severn Trent Water, New Connections team as detailed below to assess their proposed plans for diversion requirements.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Impact on the Green Belt

Development in the green belt is inappropriate and, by definition, harmful to the green belt unless it is provided for by one of the exceptions on the closed list at paragraph 149 of the NPPF. One of those exceptions is the construction of a building for agriculture.

Clearly the polytunnel is used to grow fruit and vegetables in raised tubs for consumption. The design, function and appearance of the proposed building is obviously relatable to that purpose, which would be agriculture as meant by the Act, confirmed at s.336. The building is therefore, for agriculture and is exceptionally provided for by para. 149 of the NPPF and not inappropriate in the Green Belt.

Other Rural Area Strategy

The strategy at SS10 of the Local Plan only provides for development (that does not promote sustainable tourism or enhance the countryside) which has an essential need to be located in the countryside or supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas. It sets a positive list of actions that the authority will take to achieve and deliver on the strategy. The list is not read as being closed or providing an exhaustive set of exceptions, which means that there may be other forms of development, not mentioned in the list, but which essentially need to be located in the countryside and would, broadly, deliver or fit within the strategy.

Rural Diversification is defined in the Local Plan glossary, in its simplest terms, as meaning: *the establishment of new enterprises in rural locations. This can mean existing businesses entering into new areas of activity or the creation of entirely new enterprises. These enterprises may be an extension of the existing farm business but equally the new activity can be unrelated to agriculture but should be relevant to the rural area and support the rural economy.*

It is not clear to what extent the produce is grown as part of a business or enterprise, on the scale evident during inspection it is most likely the fruit and veg is produced for own consumption, with perhaps some sold or given away. The applicant says that she allows half of the space to be used by some local residents to grow their own fruit and veg for £40 a year – more of a community sharing project than that of a business or enterprise, the space is limited and that rental income low. The intent purpose and motivation is about diversifying the use of the land to produce organically and sustainably, fresh fruit and vegetables for the land owner and a small community of locals – eliminating supply chain and importation journeys and packaging etc. The building provided for purposes, described by the applicant, supports rural sustainability, the development has some merit in those regards. Not directly relatable

to the development, the applicant has also planted a considerable number of saplings as part of a rewilding project.

A polytunnel of this size, to efficiently grow fruit and vegetable produce, 'essentially' requires open space free from the building shade of any surrounding built form, such a location is only realistically to be found in the countryside. Also, the development would support the sustainability of the rural area, in that it involves the establishment of small scale community enterprise based on certain sustainable principles, as discussed above. In these regards whilst the proposal would not be explicitly supported by SS10, it is not considered to be at odds with the general thrust of the policy. Moreover, this is a modest structure related to a very small scale enterprise, which, although permanent, is not of a particularly substantial nature, (being a steel hooped frame sunken and fixed into concrete at each end with an earth floor) and could easily be removed and the land restored to it's former condition in the event that it became surplus to requirements. These are important material considerations.

Impact on Character and Appearance

I note those objections raising concern over the development's impact on the character and appearance of the area, particularly in respect of the way it appears in the landscape and affects views of the Wicken Stones behind and above. I am alert to the sensitivities of this unique high quality landscape, the large prominent rocks and boulders within the gritstone edge, iconic to local distinctiveness, giving the hamlet of Rock End its name.

Firstly, there is no evidence of the land being in a poor, untidy, or unmaintained condition; or that would support any reasonable assertion that the land is in a "disgraceful state". The land is tidy and well maintained, wire sheep netting conventionally providing grazing enclosures, and occasional small moveable shelters for goats. Rows of tree saplings have been planted to the front (south) and rear (north) of the building.

The proposed development would be contrary development plan policy if it has led to prominent intrusion into the countryside or has a significant adverse impact on the character or the setting of a settlement (DC3).

The polytunnel has been tucked to the bottom edge of the land against the mature hawthorn hedge. It has a relatively low profile with a maximum height of 3.5 m at the crest of the hooped shape, where the height and mass of the building slope away either side – the roadside hedge is greater than that. The rocky outcrops of the gritstone edge that give the landscape its unique quality and interest, appear at a much greater height above the polytunnel. The hedgerow cover along the roadside does, from many perspectives, along the road, largely conceal the structure and it can not be reasonably said that the structure blocks or obscures views of the landscape behind. While the structure can be seen from certain aspects and positions along the roadside, particularly if the hedge thins in the winter, the polytunnel sits comfortably and unintrusively within the landscape, particularly as it is of an obviously agricultural character and appearance that would not be out of keeping on a small scale agricultural field parcel in a rural area. It is not considered that the development has led to a prominent intrusion in the countryside, has a significant adverse impact, or is

otherwise harmful to the character and appearance of the area. There is no conflict with local plan policies SS10 or DC3 in these regards.



Other Considerations

Some of the objections raise concern about highway safety and parking provision, particularly because the applicant shares her space with a small number of other growers within the nearby community. However, the site does have an existing long standing access and area of parking that serves the existing stable building which otherwise generates traffic movements, the development should not significantly increase movements and parking demands above that of the pre existing use. Any aim to benefit the community, is perhaps laudable, but it is not a matter that has been given particular weight in these considerations or is necessary for the development to be acceptable. If others visit and make use of the polytunnel or land for agricultural purposes there would be no material change of use that requires planning permission, even if there is a small income relative to this element of the use, the land use would remain agricultural and it is not a matter which requires specific consideration.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The development is not inappropriate in the Green Belt and compatible with the other rural area strategy (SS10) of the Local Plan because it has sustainability merits and is a very small scale proposal and the structure itself is of lightweight construction and could easily be removed should the enterprise cease to operate. The development has not resulted in prominent intrusion into the countryside or a significant adverse impact on settlement setting to the extent that there would be unreasonable or significant harm to the character and appearance of the area or conflict with policies SS10 and DC3 in those regards. There is no conflict with the policies of the local plan listed above and planning permission should be granted.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Ben Hurst

Recommendation Date: 11th August 2021

X *B.S. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council