

PLANNING STATEMENT

APPLICATION PROPOSAL: ERECTION OF RURAL WORKERS DWELLING

**APPLICATION ADDRESS : CHEADLE EQUESTRIAN CENTRE, CHEADLE,
STAFFORDSHIRE, ST10 1RB**

APPLICANT : MISS J THOMPSON

DATE : SEPTEMBER 2021

JOB No. : 2021-2584

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Sammons Architectural Ltd have been retained by Miss J Thompson to prepare and submit a revised planning application to Staffordshire Moorlands District Council for the erection of a rural workers dwelling in association with the existing equestrian use of the site at Cheadle Equestrian Centre, Cheadle. The application is accompanied by drawing numbers 2021-2584-05A, 2021-2584-07, 2021-2584-08 and 2021-2584-09 which should be read in conjunction with this statement.

This application follows a similar scheme (SMD/2021/0296) which was considered by Planning Applications Committee on 12th August 2021. Following a fairly lengthy and protracted debate the application which was recommended for refusal on two grounds was refused. A refusal notice issued, on 13th August 2021, listed one reason for refusal which was:-

" 1. The design, scale, massing and position of the proposed dwelling, would make it a visually prominent feature that would be seen across several hundred metres of open countryside to the east of Cheadle. When seen with the existing equestrian buildings and Stable Cottage beyond, it would have an urbanising effect on the landscape that would detract from its character and appearance. This harm could not be mitigated through tree planting or landscaping, because, even once mature, it would not satisfactorily screen the dwelling in views from the west, where it would appear as an incongruous feature in the landscape. For these reasons, the proposed development would adversely affect the character and appearance of the area. It would therefore conflict with policies SS10 (other rural area strategy), DC1 (design) and DC3 (landscape and settlement setting) of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan September 2020 (SMLP) and with the NPPF, in this regard."

The business case and functional and financial justification for the proposed dwelling was presented to and accepted by Members at the previous committee meeting. The purpose of this statement and revised application is therefore to address the issues of size and scale and landscape harm as set out above.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Jennifer Thompson is the owner of Vecthom Sportshorses which breeds and trains sports horses for show jumping and dressage. The business which has been active for the past 11 years is

successful and has also recently established Vecthom Stud. Jennifer competes herself and sells horses to many professional equine riders.

Cheadle Equestrian Centre was purchased by the applicant in November 2018 to base the various facets from. Prior to this the business was run from a site in Blackshaw Moor, where the applicant lived on site. The centre has the stables, indoor arena and outdoor area providing a good basis from which to develop the equine business from.

The proposal is to build a dwelling for the owner of the business who needs to be on site on a permanent basis. The applicant has a number of reasons both in terms of expanding the existing business but primarily on animal welfare grounds.

The business currently employs one full time member of staff and 1 part time worker and if the application is allowed will be looking to employ more people at Cheadle. The business is basically a breeding, importing and exporting business of top sporthorses. Showjumpers, Dressage and Eventing. The applicant has sold all over the world and have many clients who are Olympic gold medallist horses.

The horses for this business range from foals, yearlings and up to top international showjumpers. These horses' range in price from £6,000 to £200k. The applicant also owns her own horses which she competes upon being a show jumper herself. One of these horses is a very famous horse who jumped for Great Britain and is a course record holder. The horse in question is priced at around £350,000 and as he is older and in substantial work, he needs round the clock care and nightly checks through the night.

At this level of sports horses security is paramount. Not only for being stolen but also for being tampered with such as being drugged which would be detrimental to the rider and sport when competing for Great Britain. Along with the above the applicant also runs a breeding stud programme and currently owns 4 stallions all used to stud and licensed stallions. The breeding mares need to be checked throughout the night and with all equine practices people need to be on hand on a twenty-four-hour basis to be able to react immediately. From birth the foals will stay with the mares for around 5/6 months. It takes several years to produce good quality horses.

3.0 APPLICATION SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site comprises of a rectangular parcel of hard standing which extends to some 466 sq metres. It forms part of a larger parcel of land which forms Cheadle Equestrian Centre and

includes grass fields, an outdoor equestrian exercise area, an indoor equestrian arena, a stable block and various other buildings and storage areas associated with the equine use.

It lies approximately 300m to the south west of Eaves Lane, which forms an edge to the settlement of Cheadle town. The application site lies on a valley side which when viewed from the north-west, and the edge of Cheadle, the countryside rises to a hillside. The landscape is predominantly farmland, interspersed with hedgerows, narrow lanes, woodland and occasional buildings. The Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) describes the countryside that surrounds Cheadle as Ancient slope and valley farmlands and amongst its key characteristics are small scale mainly ancient irregular fields bounded by trees and hedgerows and isolated properties. The LCA also identifies a number of incongruous landscape features, which include localised industrial and residential development.

The site of the proposed dwelling would be on the southern edge of the applicant's land holding, to the west of the stable building, the indoor equestrian arena and other associated buildings. The nearest part of the proposed dwelling would be approximately 30 metres from the brick-faced building by the stable and several metres lower than it and the other main Equestrian Centre buildings.

The application site is accessed via a shared lime stone track that follows the route of Cheadle Parish public footpath which serves the Equestrian Centre and two further dwellings known as Plantation House and Plantation Farm which are 200metres to the east of the site whilst 'Stable Cottage' a dwelling provided as a stable conversion in 1982 as a living accommodation for an onsite riding instructor lies to the south west.

4.0 APPLICATION PROPOSAL

The proposed dwelling would have an 'L' shaped footprint formed by a two storey main axis with a single storey off shot at the rear. It would be constructed from facing brickwork under a Staffordshire Blue plain tile roof and would provide a modest level of accommodation comprising of an open plan kitchen, dining room and lounge, entrance hall, office, boot room and shower room at ground floor with 2 modest bedrooms and bathroom above.

The proposed dwelling would be positioned centrally within the plot with the ridge running in a north west to south east direction. It would be accessed directly off the existing track serving the Equestrian Centre with two off road parking spaces provided at the front. Private amenity space

would be provided at the side and rear of the dwelling and the curtilage would be defined by a post and rail timber fence supplemented with a native hedgerow.

5.0 SITE HISTORY

There is a fairly extensive history to the application site which is summarised below. The most notable application SMD/2019/0088 relating to the erection of a rural dwellinghouse for the equine business. This was refused by the council in April 2019 for the following reasons:

1. The proposed dwelling would be an isolated home in the countryside divorced and separate from the Town of Cheadle in a location where it will not relate to, enhance or maintain the vitality of any identifiable rural community, village or smaller settlement. The development of isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided and it is not considered that any of the exceptional circumstances set out at paragraph 79 of the National Planning Policy Framework apply in this case, particularly because the Local Planning Authority do not accept that there is an essential need for a rural worker to live permanently in this location. In these respects the development would conflict with the SMDC Core Strategies 'other rural area strategy' SS6c, 'Cheadle area strategy' SS5c, and 'rural housing' policy R2 which together would see the provision of housing, in a location such as this, restricted and directed away from the isolated countryside location and toward the urban area.

2. The proposed dwelling would, together with its garage, walled and gated enclosure, be a very large, exposed and non vernacular suburban building that would appear obtrusively in the middle of the landscape, obstructing and interrupting views across the countryside. It would not relate well to any rural vernacular that is traditional to the Moorlands or its immediate landscape setting. The development would therefore be significantly harmful to the character and appearance of the area, immediately observable by and harmful to the rural landscape amenity enjoyed by users of the public footpaths Cheadle 5, 6, 7 and 8 and the dwellings that have outlook toward the site from the edge of Cheadle.

3. The Local Planning Authority can not demonstrate a 5 year supply of deliverable housing sites. There would be a small social benefit in the provision of a housing unit and economic advantages would arise from the construction and occupation of a new house and the proposal would make a very modest contribution towards housing numbers. The applicant also claims there would be benefits to the recently purchased riding school business. However, the harm that the proposed development would cause to the character and appearance of the rural area would be both significant and lasting. This adverse impact significantly and demonstrably outweighs the very

modest benefits that would be derived from the development and the business circumstances that the applicant says are associated with the proposal.

A subsequent appeal (ref: APP/B3438/W19/3227624) was dismissed on 18th September 2019. The main issues considered by the Inspector were:

- The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area
- The effect of the proposal on land stability
- Whether the proposal would be an isolated dwelling in the countryside and, if so, whether there is an essential need for a dwelling to accommodate rural worker(s)
- Whether the adverse effects of the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (the Framework).

The following consents are also recorded on the site but essentially relate to ancillary development/uses:-

SMD/1992/0371 Ancillary buildings to equestrian centre feedstore, foaling box covered standings, caterings and toilets.

SMD/1991/1060 Erection of pony stalls, tack rooms and office.

85/14412/OLDDC Full conversion to permanent instructor's accommodation.

84/13666/OLDDC Instructor's living accommodation, renewed temporary permission for 5 years.

SMD/1984/0295 Extension to stable block to a one stable and two hay stalls.

83/011853/OLDDC Line of 8 stables adjacent to indoor riding arena to provide for the limit of 20 working horses.

SMD/1983/0475 Extension to the covered riding area building to form viewing area

SMD/1982/0177 Conversion of existing stable block into instructors living accommodation for temporary two year period.

81/09881/OLDDC Covered riding arena and stables to be provided inside arena building for 20 working horses

78/05665/OLDDC Alterations to farm building to form stables and tack room with loft.

6.0 POLICY

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory 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 the area consists of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020). The most relevant policies are considered to be:-

SS1 Development Principles

SS2 Settlement Hierarchy

SS10 Other Rural Areas Strategy

SD1 Sustainable Use of Resources

H1 New Housing Development

DC1 Design Considerations

DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting

NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources

T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

Adopted Supplementary Planning Documents are also a material consideration in the assessment and determination of this application. These comprise of:-

Design Guide SPD (2018)

Design Principles SPD (1998)

Space About Dwellings SPD (1996)

The National Planning Policy Framework, as updated in July 2021, sets out the Government's planning policies for England, and how it is expected that these will be applied. It establishes a framework within which local people and planning authorities can produce their own local and neighbourhood plans and is a material consideration in planning decisions.

The heart of the NPPF embodies, in Section 2 paragraph 11 a presumption in favour of sustainable development and states that development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved without delay.

Paragraph 11d states:-

"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"

The most relevant sections are 2 (Achieving Sustainable Development), 5 (Delivering a Sufficient Supply of Homes), 6 (Building a Strong, Competitive Economy), 9 (Promoting Sustainable Transport) , 11 (Making Effective Use of Land) , 12 (Achieving Well Designed Places) 13 (Protecting Green Belt land) and 15 Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment. Again these are not reproduced in full here but referred to below where appropriate.

7.0 ASSESSMENT

Principle

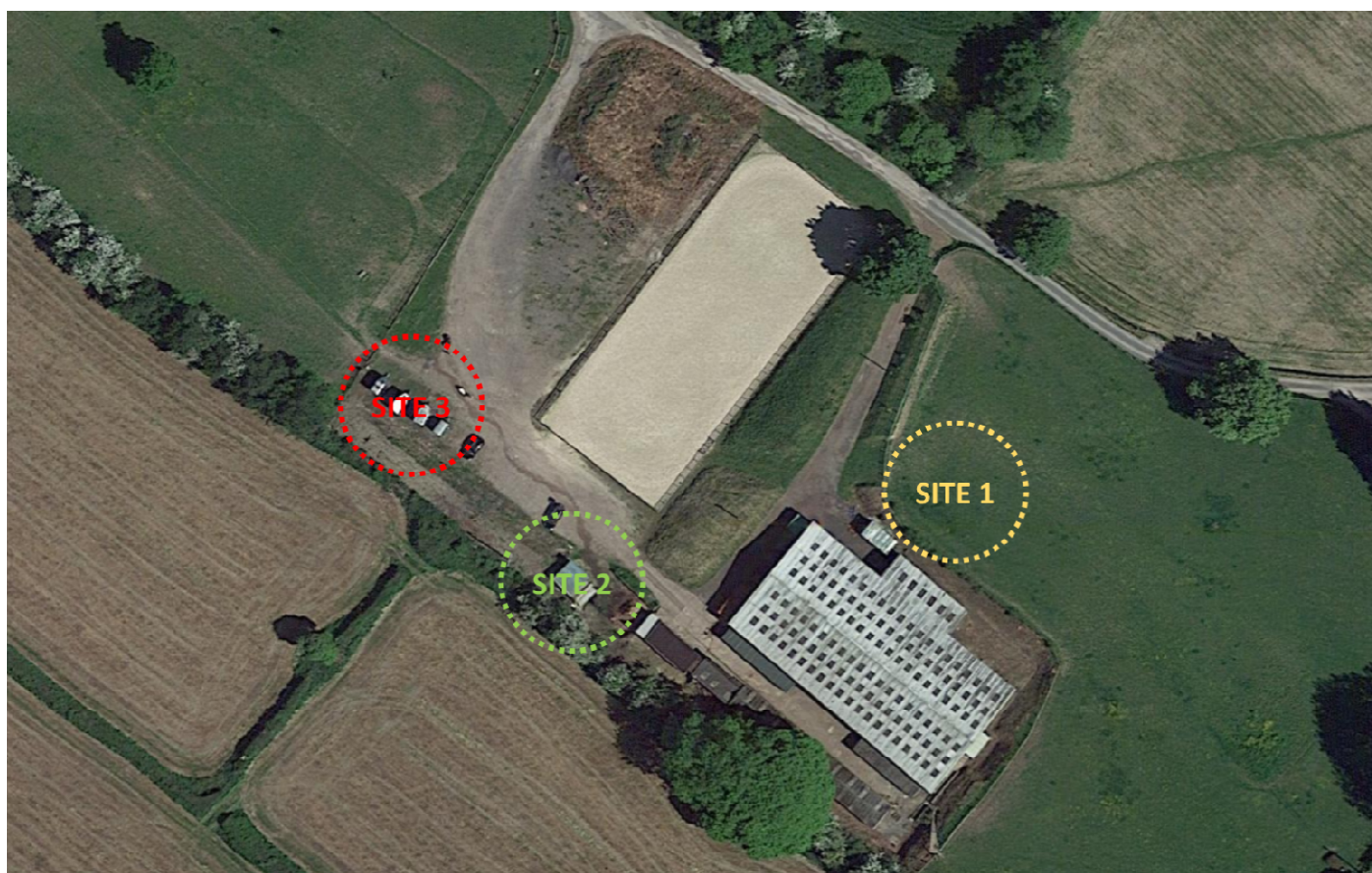
The principle of a rural workers dwelling was discussed at some length by the Planning Applications Committee and accepted earlier this year (August 2021). It is not therefore the intention of this statement to replicate the argument here other than to state that both national and local planning policies would support the provision of a rural workers dwelling in this location subject to specific design and landscape policies. These are discussed in more detail below.

The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area

LP Policy SS1 sets out a number of development principles with the aim that development and uses of land contribute positively to the social economic and environmental improvement of the Staffs Moorlands, supporting development that maintains the locally distinctive character of the Staffs Moorlands, its individual towns and villages and their settings. LP Policy DC1 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 be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area; and 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.

LP Policy DC3 refers to Landscape Character and states that the Council will protect and where possible enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements in the Staffs Moorlands by supporting development which respects or enhances the setting of the settlement and conversely resisting development which would lead to a prominent intrusion into the countryside or have a significant adverse impact on the character of the landscape. The Staffs Moorlands Design Principles SPD and more recently adopted Design Guide SPD provides further useful guidance for development in the rural areas. Paragraph 127 of the NPPF states amongst other things that decisions should ensure that developments will add to the overall quality of the area; are visually attractive as a result of good architecture; and are sympathetic to the surrounding built environment.

Prior to pursuing this scheme, various siting options were explored around the site. These options are annotated on the plan below:-



Site 1 - Whilst closely located to the existing building group and access track this site is exposed and would be located on one of the highest points on the site meaning that any dwelling would be more visually prominent, especially when viewed in views from the town to the west and especially from the adjacent public footpath which would pass in close proximity of the dwelling. Also there would be no natural surveillance of the stable block as this would be blocked by the large adjacent

indoor riding arena. It would also result in the loss of premium grazing land which is a valuable and essential asset for the business.

Site 2 - Whilst this site would be more closely related to the wider building group it would hinder access to the buildings within the site and again due to rising ground levels appear more prominent in the wider landscape. Notwithstanding the access issues there is also a significant concern that the close proximity of the dwelling proposed dwelling in this location would provide a poor standard of amenity for any future occupiers.

Site 3 - Whilst it is accepted that the proposed dwelling would be sited in the same location as that previously refused it is considered that is the most suitable location on this landholding for a rural workers dwelling having regard to the location of the existing stable block and the animals contained therein as this site allows the occupier to be both within sight and sound of the livestock. The topography of the land here also allows the dwelling to sit low in the landscape and be read against the backdrop of the existing built development. Furthermore the massing of the buildings to the east, which are located on higher ground, will ensure that a dwelling would not be prominent in the landscape. This site also benefits from some natural boundary screening to the side and rear and provides a clear view of stable block. It would also prevent or at least minimise rural crime due to being located at the entrance of the site. It also requires no new access or other infrastructure to be provided which obviously minimises the landscape impact of the proposal and its close proximity to the main building group means that the function of the proposed dwelling is clear.

Again these factors were discussed in some length by the Planning Applications Committee and the siting of the new dwelling accepted by the Members. The sole criticism of the previous scheme was the size of the proposed dwelling. Whilst this had been significantly reduced from the 5 bedroom three storey property previously proposed at appeal stage Members still considered the provision of a 3 bedroom dwelling to be excessive.

The current scheme has considered the Members comments and reduced the proposal further. The overall length of the main two storey section of the proposed dwelling has been reduced from 11.9m to 9.66 metres. The depth of the single storey outrigger at the rear has also been truncated both in terms of its width (1.1m less) and its length which has been reduced by 1.5m and the overall ridge and eaves height have been reduced further to just 6.7m and 4.4m respectively.

The scheme, now proposed, essentially comprises of a very modest two bedroomed unit which would have an overall footprint of just 79 sq metres and a floorarea of 120 sq metres. Room sizes are not excessive with the largest bedroom measuring 3.2m x 5.68m internally and the

ground floor office being just 3.2m x 2.9m. For ease of comparison the footprint, floor area, volume, ridge and eaves height of the appeal scheme , previous scheme and current scheme are provided below.

	Appeal Scheme	Previous Scheme	Current Scheme
Footprint	149 sq metres	106 sq metres	79.3 sq metres
Floor Area	236 sq metres	156 sq metres	120 sq metres
Volume	821 cu metres	532 cu metres	405 cu metres
Ridge Height	8.6m	7.1m	6.7m
Eaves Height	5.4m	4.8m	4.4m

Overall the changes to the design, reduction in the size, scale, bulk and massing and positioning of the proposed dwelling would result in a considerably smaller building which would be considerably less conspicuous within the landscape. The proposed dwelling would have a relatively traditional symmetrical design and its overall appearance would be in keeping with the rural character and appearance of the area. The use of good quality traditional materials would also ensure that it is quickly assimilated into the landscape.

As such it is considered that with appropriate tree planting and landscaping, both of which can be secured via a suitably worded planning condition the proposed dwelling would not be unduly harmful to the character and appearance of the application site or the valued characteristics of the wider landscape. For these reasons it is considered that the application proposal would comply with Local Plan policies DC1 and DC3 and with more general national guidance within the Framework.

The effect of the proposal on land stability

The application site falls within a Development High Risk Area according to the Coal Authority (CA). A Coal Mining Risk Assessment which has been undertaken by EnvironSolution Ltd (Oct 2019) was submitted in support of the previous scheme . This document clearly provides an assessment of the risks to proposed new development on the site and concludes that the risk associated with coal mining related issues is significant. The principal risks to the development are considered to arise from the potential presence of unrecorded shallow mine workings associated with a coal seam of workable thickness beneath the site and the potential for unrecorded mine entries. It has therefore been recommended that 3 rotary boreholes are advanced to a minimum depth of 20m across the site. The scope of works for the investigation will need to be submitted and approved by the LPA prior to commencement of any intrusive

ground works. The Coal Authority concurs with the recommendations of the CMRA and the investigative works proposed. Such work can be secured via a suitably worded planning condition and on that basis it is therefore considered that the proposed development would not be at an unacceptable risk from land instability and would not therefore conflict with paragraphs 170, 178 and 179 of the Framework.

Whether the proposal would be an isolated dwelling in the countryside and, if so, whether there is an essential need for a dwelling to accommodate rural worker(s)

The guidance that the NPPF replaced, in relation to rural workers accommodation was PPS7 and in particular its Annex A. This set out a detailed approach to the assessment of proposals for agricultural, forestry and other occupational dwellings with different approaches set out for new and emerging businesses (involving temporary accommodation in the first instance) and established enterprises. Specifically the guidance set out a framework for assessing the need for rural worker accommodation by means of functional and financial tests.

Following the publication of the NPPF and the withdrawal of PPS7 there has been a tendency for practitioners, both planning authorities and inspectors alike, to place some reliance upon the former guidance, due largely to the absence of more detailed guidance on what "essential need" referenced within the NPPF may comprise.

A measure of caution needs to be applied to this approach. The new, rationalised succinct guidance was published for a reason and the withdrawal of the more detailed guidance was clearly done for a reason. Whilst some consideration may be given to the broad rationale behind the former guidance it would be inappropriate to base post NPPF decision making upon a detailed interpretation of withdrawn policy guidance.

Functional & Financial Need

The functional and financial need for a rural workers dwelling was clearly set out in the previous application. This was considered in detail and accepted by members at the recent committee hearing in August 2021. In the interests of brevity it is not therefore intended to repeat the functional and financial need here in any detail other than to confirm that all trading accounts, business testimonials and accompanying information submitted in support of the previous application have been resubmitted as part of this proposal.

Other Technical Considerations

No objections to the previous scheme were raised in terms of highway safety, biodiversity or residential amenity. It is not considered that there are therefore any technical objections which

would warrant withholding permission for the erection of a rural workers dwelling in association with the established equine business.

8.0 CONCLUSION

This proposal is considered essential to allow a genuine and established equestrian business to continue to expand and remain as a sustainable entity. Furthermore, as the business is financially sound it contributes to a sustainable economy whilst at the same time fulfilling an important social role as part of a thriving rural community. In addition by its very nature it also fulfils a key environmental role. Each of these three factors is a key component of any sustainable development.

The application proposes a very modest sized dwelling which is traditional in terms of its character and appearance and building materials. It has been sited sensitively within the holding and relates well to the existing building group. It is considered that the proposal would comply with Local Plan Policies D1 and D3 in this regard. The submitted CMRA adequately demonstrates that any risk can be mitigated for and there are no other technical objections which would prevent approval of the application. The proposed development accords with national planning policy guidance for the provision of accommodation in connection with an appropriate rural activity and the Local Planning Authority are therefore respectfully requested to grant consent without delay.