DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2020/0490	**THE OLD ENGINE HOUSE**	**PROPOSED STABLES**
Valid 11/09/2020	**BIDDULPH ROAD**	
	MOW COP	**(FULL - MINOR)**

MAIN ISSUES

- Green belt
- Design
- Neighbour amenity

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The proposed building would be within an area of 'rough' land alongside The Old Engine House, a Grade II Listed Building. The property has been recently renovated along with some restoration re-building and converted to a dwelling. Associated land shown by blue edge in fig 1 below extends to some 1.5ha (c.4 acres) within which is the dwelling and defined amenity curtilage of c.1200m2 or 0.12ha.

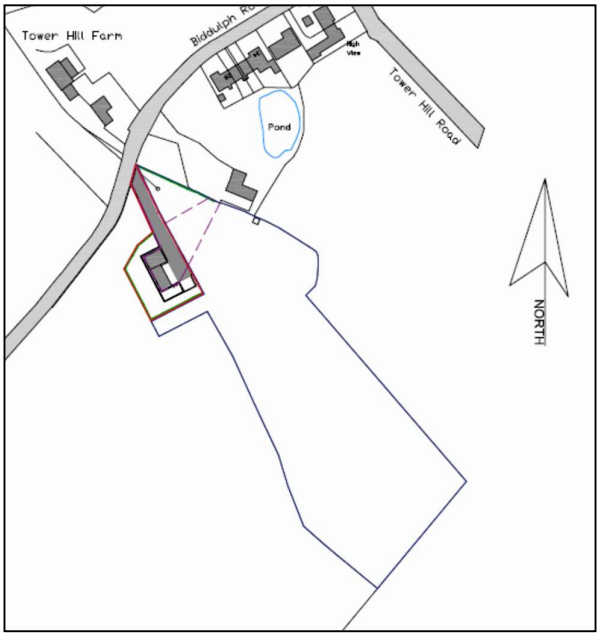


Fig. 1

PROPOSAL

On a second revised proposal drawing 1557-AL08F a significantly reduced building is put forward. This would be 7.8m x 13.6m with a dual pitched roof to ridge 4.4m with a 2.8m eaves height.

A visible block work or concrete panel wall to 0.75m would be over clad above that height with Plastisol coated metal profiled wall sheets or Preservative Treated

Timber boarding – the latter now specified in the final revised scheme. The building has three loose boxes for stabling each with a door opening to the outside (sw elevation). The building would also accommodate a moderate larger loosebox for alpacas and a fodder store and small harness and saddle room.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan (adopted 9th September 2020)
SS1 Development Principles
SS10 Other Rural Areas Area Strategy
DC1 Design Considerations
DC2 The Historic Environment
DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting
NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources
NE2 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

National Planning Policy Framework February 2019
Paragraph(s) 1 – 14;
Section(s) 4 – Decision making; 8 Promoting healthy and safe communities; 11 – Making effective use of land; 12 – Achieving well designed places; 13 – Protecting Green Belt Land; 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment; 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Adopted Supplementary Planning Documents/Guidance (SPD/G):
- Space About Dwellings SPG
- Design Principles SPG
- Design Guide SPD adopted 21st February 2018

Local Plan Supporting Evidence Documents:
- Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2008)

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS
83/11759/OLDDC – proposed conversion of old workshops to dwelling house – refused
12/00674/FUL – proposed conversion of the Old Engine House to dwelling approved
12/00680/LBC – proposed conversion of the Old Engine House to dwelling
SMD/2019/0037 – proposed change of use of land to allow re-location of domestic curtilage – withdrawn
SMD/2019/0038 – Listed Building Consent for proposed change of use of land to allow re-location of domestic curtilage – withdrawn
SMD/2019/0042 – proposed detached garage and patio – withdrawn
SMD/2019/0043 – Listed Building Consent for proposed detached garage and patio – withdrawn
SMD/2019/0523 – Proposed re-instatement of south eastern wing to the old engine house – approved – underway
SMD/2019/0523 – listed building consent for the same – approved

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity
Site Notice expiry date: 15.10.2020
Neighbour consultation period ends: 06.10.2020
Press Advert: 22.10.2020

Public Comments
None

Town / Parish Comments
Biddulph Town Council – agreed to recommend approval subject to greenbelt constraints; some concerns about the materials. [NB this was on the initial larger building plans.

SMDC Heritage Conservation Officer
Proposal for a large shed constructed in brick (or concrete panels) with metal-profiled sheeting upper walls and roof (or timber boarding to walls). Openings are proposed to each gable end.

There is no assessment of the historical significance of this site (adjacent to the Listed Engine Shed, site of Tower Hill Colliery and on the line of the Tower Hill Colliery Tramway) and impact on that significance.

The building proposed will be visible in views from Biddulph Road where the Engine Shed currently sits as an isolated monument of the industrial history of the area. The siting and scale of the structure, together with all the trappings of activity associated with stables, is likely to have a detrimental impact.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

Policy SS10 for the rural areas supports only development which meets an essential local need and supports rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas (or supports sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside).

In the rural areas outside of the development boundaries Policy SS10 is that strict control will continue to be exercised over inappropriate development within the Green Belt allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government Policy.

The NPPF states at paragraph 148 that: “When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt.”

The fundamental aim of the Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. The Government identifies five purposes of the Green Belt:

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

Inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances (NPPF 147). 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations (NPPF 148).

A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt (NPPF 149). There is provision at 149 (b) to allow appropriate facilities for outdoor sport / recreation and at 150 (e) to allow a material change of use of land in the Green Belt. Both provisions are subject to the scheme preserving the openness of the Green Belt and not being in conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt.

Equestrian pursuits can and do take place indoors but are first and foremost an outdoor sport or recreational activity. Under the option at NPPF 149(b) it is therefore possible for the LPA to consider supporting a stables development in the Green Belt on grounds of stables being an appropriate facility. The LPA must though be satisfied as to the caveat about openness and green belt purposes. The decision becomes a matter of judgement. Ultimately few developments may be entirely capable of preserving openness or avoiding encroachment. In strict terms therefore this can make the exemption provided for at 149(b) difficult to apply. It would though be consistent with this authority's approach in respect of stables to support a smaller scale development servicing a specific appropriate need.

Design

Assessment of the design appearance needs to take into account the site context. The site is within a disturbed and degraded area that continues to reflect traces of its industrial past as a former colliery site. Immediately adjacent to the proposed building in the neighbouring land is a breeze block and grey metal dual pitch-roofed building some 15m x 6m of similar height dimensions to the proposal building. A 2006 consent permitted a change of use of this neighbouring site to storage and light industry following numbers of years in varied seemingly non-permitted uses including as a coal yard. The proposal building would not be out of place in this position and is capable of having a better design appearance than the currently visible neighbouring building. The application is accompanied by proposals for a native species hedge to be planted on a line to the north west which would intercept views from the public road.

The roof covering is stated in the application as 'blue-grey' and subject to a condition to specify this as a dark slate blue/ anthracite or 'raven' such as colour BS18/B29.

This would achieve an appropriately 'recessive' finish. The proposed timber clad walls would be appropriate to the building's rural function and location.

Amenity
There would not seem likely to be any risk of adverse implications for neighbour amenity for this structure or its use at this scale. The nearest unrelated residential dwelling is at 28 Biddulph Road, 50m to the north.

Landscape
This is not an especially exposed or particularly prominent position either in the near or longer range. The greatest risk of intrusion would be in views into the site from the road on the north side. The proposed hedge planting would moderate this. Alternative locations within the land ownership would be more problematic and likely also to have greater adverse impact on the heritage setting as discussed below.

Heritage
As regards the Listed Building there is a statutory duty placed on the LPA, under section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, to consider the impact of the proposal on the special architectural and historic interest of the Listed Building affected, and its setting and "have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses".

An LPA can only discharge its duty if it has carried out a proper assessment of the impact on a Listed Building, is conscious of the duty and has demonstrably applied it in assessing the proposal. This assessment extends to setting, the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced.

Historic Environment Policy DC2 of the Local Plan is to give protection to designated heritage assets and their settings and non-designated heritage assets as set out in the NPPF.

NPPF paragraph 199 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, "great weight should be given to the asset's conservation".

Paragraph 200 goes on to say that: "any harm or loss [to a heritage asset] should require clear and convincing justification."

NPPF paragraph 202 states that: "Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use."

For a non-designated heritage asset the requirement is set at NPPF 203 which says that: "In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset."

The building would be some 30m to 40m NE of the Grade II Listed Old Engine House. The site is within an area noted on the Staffordshire Heritage Environment Record (HER) as a former colliery operating in the early 19th century but closed by c.1900. It appears from the HER that the building would stand on the route of a tramway built to serve the colliery activity in the early 19th century. The Conservation Officer has pointed out that no heritage assessment accompanies the application. The Conservation Officer was especially concerned by the implications of the scale of the proposal as first submitted as it would compete with the Listed Engine House. Part of the primary significance of the Old Engine House is found in how it stands in grand isolation. Encroachment of new buildings would harmfully erode this significance.

The lack of a Heritage Assessment has arguably made the LPA task in assessing this application more difficult. However, the site visit coupled with the on-line records and the input of the Council's own heritage specialist may be regarded as having sufficiently revealed the significant considerations relevant in relation to this proposal. NPPF 194 states that for a heritage assessment:

> The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary.

It is to be noted that immediately adjacent to the north east side of the proposal site is a triangle of land allocated in the approved planning consents as garden to the converted engine house. This is indicated by red dashed lines in Fig.1 above.

The proposed building position is reasonably well divorced from the Listed Building and at the amended reduced size should not 'compete' with it in its setting. By being positioned close alongside an existing neighbouring shed the proposal avoids creating a wholly new impact and arguably by being of more sympathetic material finishes will lessen the adverse impact of the existing neighbouring building. On this basis it could be considered that the proposal is neutral in its impacts on the Listed Building setting. If however there is found to be at least some harm which would also be a not unreasonable conclusion – albeit less than substantial harm there needs to be identifiable public benefit which could include securing optimum viable use.

Noting the approaching 4 acres of land at the property, beyond the dwelling and its curtilage, a hobby interest involving animals or livestock – in this case horses and alpacas – is not surprising. Enabling the owners to pursue their hobby and enjoy living in the property does help secure their custodianship of it and can therefore be regarded as a public benefit as set out in the NPPF. With the proposal as modified and taking account of the foregoing considerations an appropriate balance can be seen to have been struck between impact and justification. A similar balance of the issues in relation to the non-designated heritage asset of the route of the former tram line can also be reached. In this case the consideration is in whether it is necessary to keep the line of the route open. There is however seemingly no longer any sense of the route on the ground at this location although there are evident remnant signs in fields to the north and north west. With no designated protection and no extant

features present and with garden use approved adjacent to the north it may be judged more valuable on balance to keep the building to the edge of the land.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

It is worth noting that whilst not put forward as an agricultural building, the near 4 acres of land could justify a small scale animal shelter and / or associated field store and would not be regarded as inappropriate development in the Green Belt. On balance in consideration of the above detailed and careful assessment the application in its second modification – drawing 1557-AL08F – is recommended for approval.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : Approve

Case Officer: Arne Swithenbank

Recommendation Date: 30th September 2021

X B.J. Haywood

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council