

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2021/0568
Valid 25/08/2021

BRADLEY ELMS FARM
CHEADLE ROAD
ALTON

**FORMATION OF A SINGLE
DWELLING FROM THREE
DWELLINGS GRANTED
PLANNING PERMISSION
UNDER APPLICATION
SMD/2018/0524.**

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- The principle of the proposal
- The impact on the character and appearance of the rural area
- The impact on residential amenity
- The impact on the ecological value of the site
- The impact on highway safety

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site is in the open countryside about 3km to the east of the town centre of Cheadle and to the south of B5032 Cheadle Road which provides the access to the site via a long driveway. The site comprises former B&B brick-and-tile buildings around a courtyard which were originally barns before being converted. A farmhouse and garage building within the same property lies to the south. Open land surrounds the property including some woodland to the north of the site.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application to change the use of the two former B&B buildings into one dwelling via the provision of a glazed link (a flat-roofed conservatory with roof lantern) to connect the two buildings and also a small lean-to extension to the side of two-storey front projection on the north building which will become an entrance porch. All but one of the habitable rooms would be in the larger part-single/part two-storey north building with the other smaller building becoming a double-garage, bedroom and study. There would be a total of four bedrooms (and in addition to this, two “study’s”). The scheme would largely re-use all existing openings as new external windows and doors, some enlarged to create French windows/patio doors or garage doors but all windows and doors would be replaced. There would be two new rooflights placed on the two-storey height roof. All new and replacement windows and external doors would be finished with painted timber.

This is a revised scheme following the grant of planning permission in 2018 for the change of use of the buildings into three separate 2-bed dwellings which has not been implemented. The previous scheme did not replace the windows but inserted

two new external glazed doors into the north elevation. The new scheme replaces those with wider glazed French windows/patio doors/double doors. There would be the same number of rooflights (and in the same position as previous) but two small narrow windows would be placed in the side-facing east gable. There was no link or lean to extension with the previous scheme, working entirely within the confines of both buildings. The previous scheme also proposed the demolition of outbuildings to the north to create double garages and parking areas for two of the units whereas the new scheme shows those buildings demolished and the area turned into a garden with hedge boundaries (also used for the east curtilage boundaries) and with the parking area solely within the existing courtyard. There was also a narrower curtilage to the east of the south building where a large tree belt exists on an embankment/upward slope and with the tree belt proposed to be removed whereas the new scheme removes the tree belt and widens the curtilage, moving the red line application boundary further up a slope towards the east.

Amended plans were received to move the red line marking the north boundary moved closer to the buildings being converted and running much closer to the norther edge of the farm buildings to be removed. The east boundary has also been adjusted, moving it closer to the buildings and roughly in line with the top of the embankment.

The application includes the 2018 Ecology Report that was submitted with the previous application and also an updated 2021 Bat Report, a 2021 Tree Schedule, a 2021 Tree Plan and a Planning Statement.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffs Moorlands Local Plan (adopted September 2020)

SS10 – Other Rural Areas Strategy
H1 – New Housing
DC1 – Design Considerations
NE1 – Biodiversity
NE2 - Trees

NPPF (Revised July 2021)

Sections 5 (Housing), 12 (Design), 15 (Natural Environment).

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD/2015/0071: Conversion of B&B into dwellings. Refused.

SMD/2015/0453: Conversion of B&B into three dwellings. Refused.

SMD/2018/0524: Conversion of B&B into three dwellings. Approved. Not implemented.

SMD/2021/0464: Removal of Condition 1 to extend planning permission. Withdrawn.

SMD/2021/0598: Conversion of B&B into three dwellings (renewal of permission SMD 2018 0524). Pending.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 12/10/21.
Neighbour consultation period ends: 12/10/21.
Press Advert: N/A.

Public Comments

None.

Town / Parish Comments

No objection.

Local Highways Authority

No objection subject to parking condition.

Environmental Health

No objection subject to standard conditions.

Staffs Wildlife Trust

No objection. There were no bat roosts found in the buildings but there bat activity in the surrounding area in and around the trees to the east to be felled. A condition should be added requiring a Bat Methodology Statement for the tree works and also biodiversity enhancements in the form of a bat box to be inserted on the buildings or remaining trees along with a proposed native species planted landscaping scheme.

Trees/Landscape Officer

No objection subject to condition requiring a replacement tree planting scheme. The belt of trees to the east of the buildings ("Group G4") are the same trees recommended to be removed as part of the previous application SMD/2018/0524, to which I had no objection; several were identified then as being in poor condition, and others as being potentially weak. The same arboricultural consultancy company has now produced the report submitted with the current application, albeit authored by a different individual person, and these trees are now generally described as being in good physiological condition and with no particular structural condition issues noted other than the direct encroachment onto the building!

However, in the final analysis the trees forming group G4 alongside the application buildings are not visible from Alton Road nor Bradley Lane, and although partly

visible across fields from Public Footpath Alton 38 to the east of the site they are not considered to be of substantial amenity value and application tree report notwithstanding, they are not generally of high quality. I would therefore maintain my position of no objection.

That said, removal of these trees is not directly required in order to implement the proposed creation of a single dwelling, and it may be that the direct encroachment issue – possibly together with some improvement to the outlook from the rear elevation of the eastern-most building (mainly not primary living accommodation) – could be acceptably dealt with by a combination of pruning and/or selective felling of the poorest specimens rather than wholesale clearance, in order to retain a few trees in mutually supportive smaller groups.

As the site abuts open fields, and appears likely to involve the loss of some trees, it would be appropriate from various points of view (landscape, biodiversity, action for climate change) that the development provides some suitable replacement planting as compensation – this would most obviously be addressed by provision of a new mixed native species hedgerow incorporating several standard hedgerow trees along the eastern boundary of the application site, and should be secured by a landscaping condition.

Waste Collection Services

No issues

Severn Trent Water

No objection.

OFFICER COMMENTS

The principle of the change of use to residential was accepted in 2018. The buildings had not been used as a B&B for 15 years. However, the Local Plan at the time (the “Core Strategy”) still prioritised commercial uses over residential uses in rural building conversions under the former Policy R1 (Rural Diversification) and Policy R2 (Rural Housing) which have now been deleted from the Development Plan by the replacement with the September 2020 Local Plan. Although planning policies still encourage holiday let or tourist accommodation uses in the rural areas in the interests of the local economy, it was considered that no commercial or tourist accommodation uses had been lost due to the amount of time the buildings were vacant and signifying that those uses were possibly no longer viable. The new Local Plan does not require a Viability test for proposed conversions of rural buildings into dwellings or marketing exercises or any other demonstration that commercial uses would not be practical in rural buildings. The application would currently be determined under the rural areas strategy which allows the conversion of rural buildings into other uses and in the case of residential uses, Policy H1 would need to be complied with. This allows conversions of rural buildings into dwelling where the buildings are physically, architecturally and in character terms, worthy. Although the buildings have no real historic merit being largely in the form of brick stables rather than traditional barns, they are nevertheless physically solid and stable with retained

brick walls and tiled roofs and also of a traditional brick and tiled form which is architecturally sound and also with a form that is in keeping with the wider rural area. I consider a residential conversion would in fact be more compliant with the current planning policies in place than the previous planning policies set out in the former Core Strategy that the 2018 previous proposal was determined against.

In terms of sustainability as the site is in a rural area and not particularly well connected to shops, services and public transport, the new proposal resulting in one dwelling could be deemed to be more sustainable than the three-dwelling scheme of the previous proposal and would result in less vehicle movements than the previous scheme.

Due to the long-term use of the buildings as a B&B the buildings have become more domesticated in form and appearance and not entirely rural. The new proposed fenestration alterations I consider to be more in keeping with the rural qualities of the area than the current windows which were also to be retained as part of the previous approval. The new windows have more of a traditional rural cottage character and would be finished with painted timber. I do not consider the proposed patio doors on the rear elevation of the main building would appear more “domestic” in character than the single glazed doors of the previous scheme. Although the infill conservatory and porch lean-to are “domestic features” they are well designed, with the porch being timber framed and acting as a “catslide” which is not out of keeping in the rural parts of the District and the although the conservatory is a far more modern feature, its small, low, subservient and infill form would ensure that it would not be visible from public roads or footpaths (the nearest of which is a considerable distance to the east and where views of the building are blocked by the embankment) or prominent from neighbouring properties (including the farmhouse to the south) for that matter and the porch would also be pushed against an elevation which is not prominent outside of the courtyard.

The red line marking the boundaries for the proposed dwelling and therefore the residential curtilage, has been amended by moving the boundaries close to the buildings. The east boundary reflects that previously approved and is drawn along the top and through the embankment (whereas part of it stretched beyond the top into an open field) and the north boundary has been redrawn more tightly around the farm buildings to the north which would be demolished. These changes were deemed necessary because the former boundaries allowed for a very large garden area and part of a field within the curtilage which would potentially have led to a spread of outbuildings and domestic paraphernalia harming the open and rural character and appearance of the surrounding countryside.

A belt of trees to the east of the buildings next to the embankment was approved to be removed previously and this is again proposed, possibly to allow adequate light into the east elevation of the dwelling already affected by the embankment. An updated Tree Survey Report was submitted. The trees are regarded as having limited quality and contribution to the appearance of the area but their complete removal is not considered to be entirely necessary. It is appropriate that some replanting is secured via a landscaping scheme condition which would also include hedges to mark the northern garden boundary in the interests of the overall appearance of the property.

The residential amenities of the farmhouse would not be affected as a farm building lies between the site and the farmhouse blocking views towards the farmhouse. The next nearest residential properties are a considerable distance away.

With regard to highway safety, the scheme would lead to less vehicle movements than the previous scheme and there is ample on-site parking so therefore no detriment to highway safety would arise. No objection has been raised by the local highways authority.

Finally with regard to the ecological value of the site, an updated Ecology Survey Report was submitted especially in view of bats, a protected species, which are found to use the site but not the buildings. The trees proposed to be removed are considered to be used by the bats but no harm would result providing a Bat Methodology Statement is submitted and approved. There is also a requirement to enhance the ecological value of the site via development in accordance with Policy NE1. This can be achieved via a condition requiring a bat box installed on the buildings or trees and also native planting in the landscaping scheme required.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The proposal is an amendment to a scheme of three dwellings approved in 2018. It remains acceptable along the further minor changes and with the safeguard of conditions would not harm the visual and residential amenities of the area or the ecological value of the site. The revised alternative conversion scheme would therefore comply with the Council's Local Plan (adopted September 2020) and is in line with the government planning guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Chris Johnston

Recommendation Date: 4.11.21

X *B.S. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council