

PLANNING STATEMENT

**LOWER OVERTON FARM
CONGLETON**

NOVEMBER 2021

Site Address:

Lower Overton Farm, Overton Road, Congleton, CW12 3QW

Applicant:

Mr. M. Hill & Ms. S. Hodge

Proposal:

Conversion of outbuilding to form residential annex

Planning Statement:

Date Issued: 8th November 2021

Job Reference: RDP/2021/112

Report Prepared By:

Rob Duncan BSc(Hons) MA MRTPI
Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd

Contact Details:

Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd.
70 Ferndale Road, Lichfield, Staffordshire, WS13
7DL Email

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Mr. M. Hill and Ms. S. Hodge to seek full planning permission for the conversion and alteration of an existing two storey former agricultural building at Lower Overton Farm, Overton Road, Nr. Congleton to form a residential annex.
- 1.2 The existing outbuilding is a two storey structure constructed from coursed stone with a Staffordshire Blue tiled roof and is used for ancillary domestic storage purposes. The applicant proposes to convert the building into a residential annex comprising of an open plan kitchen / dining room, utility / boot room, shower room, snug and storage room at ground floor with two ensuite bedrooms at first floor.
- 1.3 The annex will share the existing amenity space around the adjacent farmhouse (which the building abuts up to), as well as sharing its means of access, parking area and service connections. The annex is furthermore to be occupied by the applicant's elderly parents who are in their eighties, thus enabling the applicant to provide care and assistance to them whenever required.
- 1.4 The application is accompanied by the following documentation which should be read in conjunction with this Planning Statement:
- Heritage Statement (Philip Heath Heritage Consultant)
 - Structural Survey (Fairclough Consulting Structural Engineers)
 - Bat Survey (Elite Ecology)

2 Site & Surroundings

- 2.1 The application site is located within the North Staffordshire Green Belt and comprises a large, two storey former agricultural building that is constructed from coursed stone with a Staffordshire Blue tiled roof. The building lies to the northeast of a two storey Victorian farmhouse and abuts up to the existing domestic curtilage of that property which encloses its western gable end and wrapping around the north of the building. To the southwest of the building lies a large, gravelled courtyard area which provides parking and turning space for the existing farmhouse, and which is enclosed by the surrounding land to the east which sits at a higher level.
- 2.2 The site occupies an elevated position in relation to the surrounding road network, and benefits from a good degree of natural screening from the Overton Road owing to boundary vegetation. The site is more visible from the Tunstall Road to the northwest where views of the side elevation of the agricultural barn and the adjacent farmhouse are available.

3 Planning Policy

3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase 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 this area comprises the recently adopted Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020) of which the following policies are considered to be of relevance:

3.2 Policy SS1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Development Principles' and states that the Council will expect the development and use of land to contribute positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands in terms of delivering, in partnership with other agencies and services:

- *a mix of types and tenures of quality, affordable homes, including starter homes, to meet the needs and aspirations of the existing and future communities*
- *quality local services, including provision for education, healthcare, leisure, community, cultural and tourist facilities in response to anticipated population change and visitor numbers;*
- *easy access to jobs, shops and transport services by all sections of the community;*
- *increased economic prosperity and opportunities for employment and greater local capacity with an educated, skilled and flexible workforce;*

- *a healthy, safe, attractive, active, well-designed and well-maintained environment;*
- *development which maintains the locally distinctive character of the Staffordshire Moorlands, its individual towns and villages and their settings;*
- *development that is undertaken in a way that protects and enhances the natural and historic environment of the District and its surrounding areas, including the Peak District National Park, both now and for future generations.*
- *support development which secures high quality, sustainable environments, efficient and effective use of resources and contributes effectively to tackling climate change and reduced carbon emissions.*

3.3 Policy SS10 of the Local Plan relates to the 'Other Rural Areas Strategy' and states that these areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be located in the countryside, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism, or enhances the countryside. The Council will meet housing requirements by allowing the conversion or replacement of an existing rural building in accordance with policy H1 and allowing suitable development which would secure the future conservation of a heritage asset in accordance with policy H2. The policy goes on to state that strict control will continue to be exercised over inappropriate development in the Green Belt, allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government policy.

3.4 Policy H1 of the Local Plan relates to 'New Housing Development' and states that in the rural areas, only the following forms of housing development will be permitted:

- a) Affordable housing which cannot be met elsewhere, in accordance with Policy H3.*
- b) A new dwelling that meets an essential local need, such as accommodation for an agricultural, forestry or other rural enterprise worker, where the need for such accommodation has been satisfactorily demonstrated and that need cannot be met elsewhere.*
- c) Proposals for replacement dwellings, provided they do not have a significantly greater detrimental impact on the existing character of the rural area than the original dwelling or result in the loss of a building which is intrinsic to the character of the area.*
- d) The conversion of rural buildings for residential use where the building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion; or where such development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets.*
- e) Proposals to redevelop previously developed land provided it is not of high environmental value.*
- f) The subdivision of an existing residential dwelling provided it is not in an isolated location.*

3.5 Policy DC1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Design Considerations' and 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:

- 1. be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area;*
- 2. 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;*
- 3. create, where appropriate, attractive, active, functional, accessible and safe public and private environments which incorporate public spaces, green infrastructure including making provision for networks of multi-functional new and existing green space (both public and private), landscaping, public art, 'designing out crime' initiatives and the principles of Active Design;*
- 4. incorporate sustainable construction techniques and design concepts for buildings and their layouts to reduce the impact of the development;*
- 5. protect the amenity of the area, including creation of healthy active environments and residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, overbearing development, sunlight, outlook, privacy, soft landscaping as well as noise, odour and light pollution;*
- 6. promote the maintenance, enhancement, restoration and re-creation of biodiversity and geological heritage, where appropriate;*

7. *provide for safe and satisfactory access and make a contribution to meeting the parking requirement arising from necessary car use;*
8. *require new developments to be well integrated for car, pedestrian and cycle use as well as other sustainable transport links;*
9. *ensure that existing drainage, waste water and sewerage infrastructure capacity is available, and where necessary enhanced, to enable the development to proceed;*
10. *ensure, where appropriate, equality of access and use for all sections of the community;*
11. *be served by high speed broadband (>30mbps) unless it can be demonstrated through consultation with Next Generation Access Network providers that this would not be possible, practical or economically viable. In all circumstances during construction of the site sufficient and suitable ducting should be provided within the site and to the property to facilitate ease of installation at a future date.*

3.6 Policy DC2 of the Local Plan relates to 'The Historic Environment' and states that:

1. *The Council will conserve and where possible enhance heritage assets, including their setting in a manner appropriate to their significance. This will take into account the desirability of maintaining and enhancing their significance and will ensure that development proposals contribute positively to the character of the built and historic environment.*

2. *Protection will be given to designated heritage assets and their settings and non-designated heritage assets as set out in the NPPF.*
 3. *All applications likely to affect heritage assets will require the submission of a heritage statement, including a qualitative visual assessment where appropriate.*
 4. *Where development is likely to affect archaeology, both designated and undesignated, the Council requires the submission of a desk based assessment, and where appropriate, field surveys and trench evaluation by a qualified professional.*
 5. *Where the loss of significance is unavoidable, recording should take place and this should be added to the Historic Environment Record as a minimum, held by Staffordshire County Council.*
 6. *The Council will continue its proactive approach to heritage assets at risk and welcomes development proposals which would result in the sympathetic reuse of these assets in line with NPPF policy.*
 7. *The Council will promote development which sustains, respects or enhances buildings and features which contribute to the character or heritage of an area and those interests of acknowledged importance through the use of Conservation Area Appraisals, Design Guidance and Statements, Archaeological Assessments, Characterisation Studies and Masterplanning.*
- 3.7 Policy NE1 of the Local Plan relates to “Biodiversity and Geological Resources’ and states that the biodiversity and geological resources of the District and neighbouring areas will be conserved and enhanced by positive management
-

and strict control of development (and having regard to relevant ecological evidence) by (amongst other measures):

- *Conserving, and enhancing regional and locally designated sites. The Council will not permit any development proposal which would directly or indirectly result in significant harm to geological and biodiversity conservation interests, unless it can be demonstrated that:*
 - a) here is no appropriate alternative site available; and*
 - b) all statutory and regulatory requirements relating to any such proposal have been satisfied; and*
 - c) appropriate conservation and mitigation measures are provided; or if it is demonstrated that this is not possible*
 - d) the need for, and benefit of, the development is demonstrated to clearly outweigh the need to safeguard the intrinsic nature conservation value of the site and compensatory measures are implemented.*
- *Expecting all development where possible seeks to deliver a net gain in biodiversity proportionate to the size and scale of the development. In circumstances where adverse impacts are demonstrated to be unavoidable, developers will be required to ensure that impacts are appropriately mitigated, with suitable compensation measures towards loss of habitat used only as a last resort where there is no alternative. Where any mitigation and compensation measures are required, they should be appropriately scheduled and managed according to the nature, size and scale of the development so as to minimise impacts that may disturb protected or important habitats and species.*

4 Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.1 The recently revised National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021) seeks to secure the delivery of sustainable development and sets out policies, *inter-alia*, in respect of safeguarding the Green Belt, securing the sustainable reuse of buildings, securing high quality design, safeguarding highway safety and heritage assets, and ensuring a net gain to biodiversity. The content of the NPPF has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

SMDC Design Guide SPD

- 4.2 The adopted Design Guide SPD provides advice aimed at securing the delivery of high-quality built development within the District and provides therein specific guidance in respect of conversion schemes. The content of the NPPF has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

SMDC Space About Dwellings SPG

- 4.3 The adopted Space About Dwellings SPG sets out minimum space standards that new development should seek to achieve in the interests of ensuring a satisfactory level of residential amenity. The content of this document has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

5 Planning Assessment

Principle of Development

- 5.1 The application proposes the conversion and reuse of a former agricultural building within the Green Belt to form a residential annex. Whilst this proposal does not propose the conversion of the building to a dwelling in its own right, policies SS10 and H1 of the Local Plan are nevertheless supportive of proposals to convert existing buildings to residential use provided that the building is worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion. Policy SS10 furthermore confirms that strict control will continue to be exercised over inappropriate development, allowing only for exceptions as defined by government policy.
- 5.2 Paragraph 150 of the National Planning Policy Framework confirms that the reuse of buildings can be considered appropriate in the Green Belt provided that the building is of a permanent and substantial construction and that the development does not give rise to harm to the openness of the Green Belt or conflict with the purposes of including land within it. The accompanying Structural Survey serves to demonstrate that the building is capable of conversion to a residential annex with only modest rebuilding works to the bowed part of the elevation (front elevation left hand side and central), with restraint straps applied to all elevations as part of the conversion works. The building has furthermore existed on the site for over 100 years, it appearing on the 1883 edition of the Ordnance Survey. The building is therefore of a permanent and substantial construction. The building is also unquestionably worthy in architectural and character terms for conversion, comprising an attractive vernacular building that amounts to a non-designated heritage asset.

- 5.3 The conversion of this building to an annex will furthermore not give rise to any harm to the openness of the Green Belt as the works will not involve the creation of any new areas of parking or residential amenity space, as occupants of the annex will share the existing parking and garden areas of the farmhouse. The conversion of the building to a residential annex therefore amounts to an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt in accordance with paragraph 150 of the NPPF and policies SS10 and H1 of the Local Plan.

Design and Layout

- 5.4 The adopted Design Guide SPD states that:

“The guiding principle behind the design of any conversion should be that the character of the original building and its setting should be respected and retained. This means that that in most cases the barn, mill or chapel should afterwards look like a converted barn, mill or chapel, and not like a new house or a new block of flats. When converting traditional buildings, new uses should not normally require the construction of extensions or ancillary buildings. However, if alterations are necessary and approached carefully, it may be possible to bring about a new understanding of historic buildings by making a clear distinction between what is old and what is new”.

- 5.5 The submitted proposal embraces the above philosophy and adopts a sensitive approach to the conversion and alteration of the building, taking the opportunity to make beneficial reuse of existing openings, whilst avoiding the need for an extensions or outbuildings. The front elevation of the building, which dominates views when approaching along the existing driveway from Overton Road, will have no new openings proposed, with existing openings

reused to serve the accommodation within. The existing large timber doorway will be changed to glazing, but the size of the opening will be unaltered.

- 5.6 On the rear elevation a number of new openings are proposed in the interests of optimising the amount of natural daylight to the upstairs accommodation and informed by the recommendations of the applicant's Heritage Consultant (see accompanying Heritage Statement). The new openings comprise of four standard conservation style rooflights, a bank of four conjoined conservation style rooflights located centrally within the roof, and at either end a split rooflight which will provide an outlook from the bedrooms within. The rear elevation is not particularly conspicuous within the surrounding area and the introduction of these openings will not materially detract from the original agrarian appearance of the building, which will maintain a high solid to void ratio.
- 5.7 In consideration of this matter, I draw attention to the recent approval of consent on an adjacent barn to the southwest (SMD/2017/0628) which incorporates within the approved scheme a large, glazed panel either side of the ridgeline which equates to the size of 12no. rooflights along with two further rooflights. That scheme was found to be acceptable, both to the planning officer and the Conservation Officer and was approved. The number of rooflights proposed in this current application will have no greater impact on the character of the building than that which found to be acceptable on the nearby barn and reinforces the conclusion that the design and layout of the proposed development will not derive material harm to the character and appearance of the existing building or the surrounding area. The proposal consequently accords with the objectives of policies SS1 and DC1 of the Local Plan and the adopted Design Guide SPD.

Heritage Impacts

- 5.8 Whilst the existing building does not constitute a statutorily listed building, nor does it lie within a Conservation Area, it is recognised that the building is likely to be deemed by the Local Authority to constitute a non-designated heritage asset. The building is also noted to lie in relative close proximity to a number of statutorily designated heritage assets (Overton Hall and its two detached barn – all Grade II Listed). To this end a Heritage Statement has been prepared to accompany the application, in accordance with the requirements of policy DC2 of the Local Plan and paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 5.9 The Heritage Statement comments that the building is of limited heritage value having been comprehensively stripped out over the course of its history, such that most of its fabric (the external walls aside) are modern. The grouping of the building with the farmhouse and the nearby barn under separate ownership was nevertheless acknowledged. The Heritage Statement notes that the absence of openings at first floor may require more openings and comments that one or two windows under the eaves of the rear elevation may be acceptable. It is also commented that any additional rooflights should be on the rear roof slope to limit their public visibility. It is also commented that conjoined rooflights could also be utilised to avoid a proliferation of openings elsewhere. These recommendations have been taken into account in preparing the submitted proposals.
- 5.10 The Heritage Statement concludes that the site has very little visual association with Overton Hall Farm and that the conversion would be imperceptible from it, particularly if any new rooflights are confined to the rear (as is the case). The ancillary nature of the proposal, with no requirement to provide amenity space, means the character and appearance of the barn would be very little different from the current state. The proposed development is therefore

acceptable from a heritage perspective and meets the requirements of policy DC2 of the Local Plan and the relevant provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Residential Amenity

- 5.11 The nearest existing neighbouring residential occupier to this site (Overton Hall) lies approximately 40 metres to the south of the site but has no direct intervisibility with the front or rear elevations of the building owing to the change in levels between the two. No adverse harm to the amenity of the occupiers of that property will consequently ensue.
- 5.12 Consent has been granted nearby for the conversion of a former agricultural building to a dwelling (SMD/2017/0628 refers) which will have two windows in its northeastern elevation serving bedrooms 2 and 3. Those windows however will lie some 35 metres distant from the front elevation of the barn, and thus comfortably exceed the recommended interface distance of 22 metres set out within the Space About Dwellings SPG. The proposed development will therefore not derive any adverse impact to neighbouring residential amenity and meets the requirements of policies SS1 and DC1 of the Local Plan.

Highway Safety

- 5.13 The application site is served by an existing vehicular access that leads up from Overton Lane to the southwest. The access serves an existing gravelled courtyard which is utilised by the applicant for the parking and turning of their vehicles, and which will be unaltered by the proposed development. There is parking space for at least four vehicles. The ancillary nature of the proposed annex means there will be no material intensification of the use of the access, and as such no harm to highway safety will ensue as a consequence. The

proposed development is therefore in accordance with the requirements of paragraph 111 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Ecology

- 5.14 The application is accompanied by a Bat and Bird Survey prepared by Elite Ecology. The survey identified a number of potential ingress / egress points for bats, as well as a number of roosting opportunities and consequently a number of bat activity surveys were carried out. The bat activity surveys confirmed that the building is being used as a day roost for brown long-eared bats and soprano pipistrelle bats. As a consequence, a licence from Natural England will be required to carry out the conversion works.
- 5.15 To mitigate the impact of the development it is recommended that three bat access tiles be incorporated into the roof of the building, along with the incorporation of a bat loft. The enclosed section drawings demonstrate that the required bat loft of 6.235m (length) x 3.05m (width) x 1.3m (height) can be accommodated and will be served by six further bat access tiles. It is also recommended that one bat box be installed on a nearby tree, or onto the building itself. Such mitigation measures can be secured by way of a suitably worded planning condition, and in doing so will ensure that no harm to protected species will arise as a consequence of the development. The proposal is therefore in accordance with policy NE1 of the Local Plan and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The proposed conversion and alteration of the existing building to a residential annex amounts to an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt and accords with the Local Authority's housing policies in that it involves the reuse of a building that is worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion. The proposal adopts a sympathetic approach to the conversion of the building and will not give rise to any adverse impact to nearby heritage assets or to neighbouring residential amenity. The proposal is also acceptable from a highway safety perspective.
- 6.2 The proposed development is therefore in accordance with policies SS1, SS10, H1, DC1, DC2 and NE1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020), the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework, and guidance contained within the Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide SPD and Space About Dwellings SPG.