

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2021/0432
Valid 01/07/2021

CHARLES KNOWLE FARM
CHARLES KNOWLE LANE
RUSHTON SPENCER

RENOVATION OF
FARMHOUSE AND
CONVERSION OF OUT
BUILDINGS TO ANCILLARY
RESIDENTIAL -
RETROSPECTIVE

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Whether the proposal comprises an exception to inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- Impact on the character and appearance of the existing building and the surrounding area.
- Impact on neighbouring amenity.
- Impact on highway safety.
- Impact on ecology.
- Impact on heritage.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The application site comprises a 19th century stone built farmhouse with attached stone built agricultural barns arranged in a Z-shape. The buildings are sited within the hamlet of Ryecroft Gate, in an elevated position to the east of the A523. The dwellinghouse was formerly accessed via a driveway directly onto the A523, whilst the agricultural barns were accessed via a driveway off Charles Knowle Lane to the north.

The farm is listed within the Historic Environment Records and is considered to comprise a non-designated heritage asset. The application site is located in the North Staffordshire Green Belt.

PROPOSAL

Full planning permission is sought for the renovation of the existing farmhouse and the conversion and alteration of the attached barns to additional living accommodation.

At the time of the Planning Officer's site visit, work had already commenced within the attached barns and the land to the north and east of the buildings had been cleared and hardcore had been laid. A static caravan was positioned to the east of the buildings on what was part of the adjacent field and a ramp had been created to access it.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Adopted Sept 2020)

SS1 Development Principles
1a Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
SS2 Settlement Hierarchy
SS10 Other Rural Areas Strategy
DC1 Design Considerations
DC2 The Historic Environment
T1 Development and Sustainable Transport
NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources

National Planning Policy Framework

Paragraph(s) 1 - 14
Section(s) 4, 12, 13, 15, 16

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD/1998/1028 Barn conversion to form dwelling
Refused

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 03/08/2021
Neighbour consultation period ends: 29/07/2021
Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments: None

Town / Parish Comments: Ruston Parish Council fully support this application.

Severn Trent Water: No objection to the proposals and do not require a drainage condition to be applied.

SCC Archaeology: Charles Knowle Farm is a probable linear plan farm located within the hamlet of Rycroft Gate. Later additions to the linear range give it a Z-plan appearance, and whilst the 1830s 1" Ordnance Survey appears to show a farmstead in this location, it was certainly extant by the late 19th century, and possibly by the 1830s. The other farmstead in this hamlet, Rycroft Farm, contains a Grade II listed farmhouse which may have been established by the late 17th century.

Taking the above into account and considering the nature of the proposals which involve the conversion of former agricultural buildings to residential and alterations to the existing farmhouse, it is advised that a programme of historic building recording should be carried out in advance of the conversion/alteration works commencing.

This work should be carried out by an appropriately experienced historic environment/archaeological professional working to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) Code of Conduct (or equivalent) and relevant Standard and Guidance. This historic building recording work is required to create a point-in-time record of this non-designated heritage asset in advance of a programme of works that will involve a great deal of change, and should be carried out to a level 2 standard as per Historic England's 'Understanding Historic Buildings' (2016) guidance. This recording work should particularly focus on the barn conversion element of the proposed development and can make use of existing architect's drawings which should be checked and annotated on site.

This approach is supported by National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 205 which states that Local Planning Authorities should *'require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible'*.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust:

First Response:

Holding objection, further information and amendments required. Required prior to determination:

1. Further information on any proposals to the surrounding grounds e.g. landscaping, drainage construction.
2. As per the bat activity report by Charnia Ecology (Final Issue [1] August 2021):
 - a. Amendments to the plans to show and detail bat mitigation, compensation and enhancement features. These are to follow details within sections 64, 65, 67, 68, and 69 in full.
 - b. Above plans to also include proposed lighting, implemented to avoid impacts on roosting features and commuting habitat. Please refer to sections 70 and 71.

Second Response (following the submission of amended/additional information):

We have no objection subject to conditions.

SMDC Conservation Officer: A good vernacular farmhouse and attached barn, standing prominently up on the bankside with a Listed Building nearby. I note that quite a lot of work has already been undertaken to lower ground levels at the back with some reconstruction at the far gable end.

This is a sensitive conversion scheme but I would offer some comments:

- Farmhouse door should be a traditional, domestic door (vertically-boarded with viewing pane), not clear glass.
- New pitch hole to front is acceptable.
- West elevation should retain the pair of doors rather than to create a wide, glazed opening.
- North elevation – a larger window has been introduced which is not shown on the plans. [Planning Officer comment: this window is actually on the east elevation]

- No objection to the new first floor window [in the north elevation].
- I'm concerned that the red edge could potentially define a large residential plot so care is needed to identify the domestic garden so that the agricultural setting of the building is not harmed.
- Retention of historic boundary walls.

Conditions

- Joinery details -painted wood and to match historic details, agree position in the opening (well recessed).
- Boundaries, hard and soft landscaping.
- Vents and ducts.
- Withdraw PD.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

Paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021) promotes a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. For decision takers this means (c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or (d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are more important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission, unless: i) the application of policies in the 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 the Framework taken as a whole.

Paragraph 8 of the NPPF (2021) identifies three dimensions to sustainable development as being economic, social and environmental. In accordance with policies SS1 and 1a of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan, the Council will expect all new development to make a positive contribution towards the sustainability of communities and to protecting, and where possible, enhancing the environment. When considering development proposals, the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the NPPF (2021).

The application site is located in the Open Countryside and Green Belt whereby policy SS10 of the Local Plan (2020) is applicable. Policy SS10 states that these rural areas will provide only for development that 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.

Part (1) of policy SS10 seeks to meet housing requirements and specific need by allowing extensions or additional domestic outbuildings to existing dwellings provided they are appropriate in scale and design and do not have a detrimental impact on the existing dwelling and the character of the rural area. The Council will assess schemes having regard to the original dwelling, in cases where cumulative change has occurred.

Although the proposal involves the conversion of agricultural buildings rather than the construction of a new extension, it will still involve the provision of additional living accommodation to meet the housing requirements of the applicants. The principle of the development is therefore considered acceptable as it will comply with policy SS10 of the Local Plan (2020).

Green Belt

The application site is located in the Green Belt whereby policy SS10 of the Local Plan (2020) and chapter 13 of the NPPF (2021) are applicable. Part (6) of policy SS10 states 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 proposal is for the renovation of the existing farmhouse and the conversion of the attached former agricultural barns into additional living accommodation. Paragraph 150 of the NPPF (2021) outlines that *'certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it'*. One such exception is:

(d) the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction.

The proposed conversion will utilise the existing buildings. A structural survey has been submitted with the planning application that concludes that *'the property is in a fairly good structural condition with no serious structural remediation required, only minor maintenance, replacement and strengthening works required'*. The Planning Officer concurs with this view following their inspection of the buildings during their site visit. This demonstrates that the building is of permanent and substantial construction.

The proposed development will be undertaken within the shell of both the existing farmhouse and the attached barns, with no extensions proposed. The openness of the Green Belt will be improved as the existing porch is to be demolished. Whilst a caravan is currently sited on the land, thereby reducing the openness of the Green Belt, this will only be sited for the duration of the conversion works as permitted development and will be removed from the land when the dwellinghouse is habitable. It is for these reasons that the proposed development will preserve the openness of the Green Belt.

Permitted development rights should be removed for extensions and alterations to the existing buildings, the laying of hardstanding and the erection of gates, walls and fences, in order for the Local Planning Authority to retain control over any future developments adversely affecting the openness of the Green Belt.

The former farmyard to the north has been cleared and covered in hardcore and the adjacent field has been encroached into. To overcome these issues, conditions can be attached in respect of landscaping and the demarcation of the residential boundary to ensure that the field is re-established and the area of hardcore is

significantly reduced in order to preserve the openness of the Green Belt and not result in encroachment. Subject to the imposition of such conditions, the development will not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt, as identified at paragraph 134 of the NPPF (2019).

It is for these reasons that the proposed development will meet an exception to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and it will comply with policy SS10 of the Local Plan (2020) and chapter 13 of the NPPF (2021).

Design

Policy DC1 refers to design and seeks to secure development of a high quality which is designed to add value to the area and to respect the site and its surroundings. New development should promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance.

Paragraph 130 of the NPPF (2021) requires the design of a development to add to the overall quality of an area, by being sympathetic to local character and by being visually attractive as a result of good architecture.

The Council's Design SPD outlines the Council's expectations in respect of design and states that the guiding principle behind the design of any conversion should be that the character of the original building and its setting be respected and retained. This means that in most cases the barn, mill or chapel should afterwards still look like a converted barn, mill or chapel, and not like a new house or a new block of flats.

The proposed development will result in the existing farmhouse being renovated and the attached barns converted from agricultural use to additional living accommodation. The farmhouse and attached barns will comprise 1no. 4 bedroom detached dwellinghouse. No extensions are proposed to the existing buildings, with the development solely utilising the existing shell. An unsympathetic porch positioned across the front door of the farmhouse will be demolished.

The existing openings within both the farmhouse and the barns will be utilised, with the following changes proposed:

- A new first floor window is proposed within the northern elevation of the barn;
- A new first floor window is proposed within the southern elevation of the barn; and
- 2no. door openings within the western elevation of the barn will be replaced with one large opening. The width of the opening will be no greater than the existing doors, but it will result in the removal of the brickwork in-between.

The Conservation Officer assessed the planning application and on the whole she was generally supportive of the scheme. However, she did seek some minor amendments. Revised drawings were therefore submitted that overcame the concerns that she raised with the exception of the retention of the 2no. existing doors within the western elevation rather than the introduction of a larger opening.

In respect of the larger opening, whilst it would be preferable for the existing 2no. single door openings to be retained, given the limited number of changes that are

proposed to the external appearance of the buildings and the siting of the opening within the courtyard of the site with limited ability to view it from public vantage points, it is considered that on balance, it is acceptable.

Subject to the imposition of conditions, the proposed development is considered to comply with policy DC1 of the Local Plan (2020), the Design Guide SPD and the NPPF (2021) in respect of design.

Heritage

Policy DC2 of the Local Plan (2020) states that the Council will safeguard and where possible, enhance the historic environment by resisting development which would harm or be detrimental to the special character and historic heritage of the District's towns and villages and those interests of acknowledged importance; promoting development which sustains, respects or enhances buildings and features which contribute to the character or heritage of an area; and preventing the loss of buildings and features which make a positive contribution to the character or heritage of an area through appropriate re-use and sensitive development.

Paragraph 203 of the NPPF (2021) states that *'the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. 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.'*

A Heritage Impact Statement was submitted to accompany the planning application due to the building being a non-designated heritage asset. As detailed in the 'Design' section above, the Conservation Officer has raised no objection to the proposed development subject to some minor amendments and the imposition of conditions. The County Archaeologist was also consulted in respect of the application and raised no objection subject to a condition requiring a historic building record to be undertaken.

The alterations to both the farmhouse and the attached barns are considered to have been sympathetically designed with minimal alterations to the external appearance of the existing buildings. The only harm identified to the building is the creation of a larger opening within the western elevation of the barn. This is considered minor when compared to the overall scheme. Given that the proposed works will ensure the longevity of the non-designated heritage asset and the majority of the scheme has been sensitively designed, it is considered that the inclusion of the larger opening will not drastically affect the significance of the non-designated heritage asset.

Permitted development rights should be removed for works involving the extension or alteration of the existing buildings in order to prevent unsympathetic extensions and alterations from being undertaken.

It is for these reasons that it is considered that the proposed development will comply with policy DC2 of the Local Plan (2020) and the NPPF (2021).

Amenity

Policy DC1 and paragraph 130(f) of the NPPF (2021) seek to secure development that protects amenity, including residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, sunlight, outlook, privacy and soft landscaping.

The application site has an elevated position, above the A523 to the west. No dwellinghouses are located to the north or east of the application site, whilst the dwellinghouse to the west ('Hanging Gate') is located on a substantially lower ground level and therefore will not be adversely affected by the proposed development. The dwellinghouse to the south ('Ryecroft Barn') is sited approximately 40 metres from the application site, is separated by a field and is also located on a lower ground level. The proposed development will therefore not adversely affect the amenity of this property due to the separation distance and difference in levels.

It is for these reasons that the proposed development will comply with policy DC1 of the Local Plan (2020) and the NPPF (2021) in respect of amenity.

Highway Safety

Policies DC1 and T1 seek to achieve a level of parking and an access that is appropriate to the development it serves.

The existing farmhouse has two accesses; one directly onto the A523 and one onto Charles Knowle Road. The proposed development will not result in an increase in the number of dwellings on the site and will likely result in a reduction in vehicle trips due to the conversion of the agricultural barns to residential use removing the requirement for farm vehicles to utilise the site and accesses.

The proposed development will increase the number of bedrooms at the property from two to four. Appendix 2 of the Local Plan (2020) requires a 4-bedroom dwellinghouse to have three off-street parking spaces. The proposed site plan indicates that both pedestrian and vehicle access will be taken from the existing access off Charles Knowle Road. The land to the north of the barns has been cleared and laid with hardcore and therefore a large area is available for the parking and turning of vehicles. As previously indicated, this area should be reduced in scale and appropriately landscaped. However, sufficient space would still be available for the parking and turning of three vehicles.

It is therefore not considered that the proposed development will have a detrimental effect on highway safety and it will comply with policies DC1 and T1 of the Local Plan (2020) and the NPPF (2021).

Ecology

Policy NE1 outlines that the biodiversity of the District will be conserved and enhancement by positive management and the strict control of development by (1) protecting and enhancing habitats and species of principal importance for

conservation; (2) ensuring development produces a net gain in biodiversity and; (3) any unavoidable impacts are mitigated.

The planning application is accompanied by a Bat & Bird Activity Report. The planning application was assessed by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust who, after receiving additional/revised information, raised no objection to the proposed development, subject to conditions. The ecologist from the Wildlife Trust stated:

Biodiversity Net Gain

Providing the bat and bird enhancements are followed in full, the development of the building itself should result in a net gain.

Based on the updated information received we have no further concerns regarding landscaping/drainage, as they are to remain mostly the same. We would however encourage enhancements such as the inclusion of wildlife friendly planting in planters, climbers, using a short flowery lawn mix, and planting native hedgerows in place of fencing for any new boundaries.

Bats

Results: As per section 52 of the Bat and Bird Activity Report by Charnia Ecology (August 2021), a common pipistrelle bat roost (6-8 individuals) was recorded within the building proposed for development.

Impacts and Mitigation: As per sections 57, 58 and 59 of the bat report, the development will result in a high impact at the local level without adequate mitigation, compensation and enhancement. Due to this, a European Protected Species (EPS) licence from Natural England will be required. Planning permission is required prior to applying for an EPS licence.

To compensate and enhance the site for bats a number of features have been proposed. Updated plans have been submitted (CKF-03B, 04B, and 05B) that include the bat loft and bat access ridge tiles. We are happy that these meet the requirements at this stage.

Details of proposed lighting must also be included alongside these to ensure no negative impacts occur. Please refer to sections 64 - 71 of the bat report. Updated plan CKF-03B Site Plan states that 'All artificial lighting in accordance with Bat and Conservation Trust's GN8/18 (2014)'. We are happy for a lighting plan following principles within the above guidance note (GN8/18:2014) to be secured via condition.

In addition to the licence, a bat method statement detailing all mitigation steps will be required – including but not limited to: timing of works, receptor bat box being installed prior to commencement, contractor bat induction, supervised soft demolition by a licensed bat ecologist. Secure via condition.

The applicant should consult with their ecologist for further advice.

Birds

A number of bird enhancements are proposed within sections 73, 74, 75 and 77 of the Bat and Bird Activity Report. To ensure a biodiversity net gain, these must be followed in full and shown with updated plans. To be secured via condition.

As per section 72 of the bat and bird report, timing of works must avoid the nesting season. There is some overlap for the timing of works with bats, however they are not the same. Alternatively, a nesting bird check by an ecologist could be performed prior to works commencing. To be secured via condition.

The EC Habitats Directive 1992 requires the UK to maintain a system of strict protection for protected species and their habitats. The Directive only allows disturbance, or deterioration or destruction of breeding sites or resting places:

- (a) in the interests of public health and public safety, or for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment; and provided that there is:
- (b) no satisfactory alternative; and
- (c) no detriment to the maintenance of the species population at favourable conservation status in their natural range.

Natural England's standing advice is that, if a (conditioned) development appears to fail the three tests in the Habitats Directive, then LPAs should consider whether Natural England is likely to grant a licence: if unlikely, then the LPA should refuse permission: if likely, then the LPA can conclude that no impediment to planning permission arises under the Directive and Regulations.

Whilst the development will result in disruption to an existing bat roost within the roof of the building to be converted, the works will be undertaken when bats are least likely to be present and features will be incorporated into the roof to ensure that the roof space can be utilised by bats after the work has concluded.

The re-roofing of the building is required to ensure that the building remains water-tight. The building is a non-designated heritage asset and the proposed development will ensure that the heritage asset will not deteriorate. This will preserve the building for future generations and is considered to be a reason of overriding public interest.

There is no satisfactory alternative to the proposed works. Without the works to the roof of the building, the non-designated heritage asset will deteriorate. The proposed new roof has been designed with features to enable bats to re-colonise the roof space of the existing building once the works to the roof have been completed. This should hopefully ensure that the bats re-roost within the building.

The bat survey identified the building as being used by a small number (6-8) common pipistrelle bats. Given the low numbers present and the type of bat using the roof of the building, it is considered that the development will not be detrimental

to the maintenance of the species population at favourable conservation status in their natural range.

On this basis, it is considered that the development will meet the 'three tests' in the Habitats Directive and therefore it is likely that Natural England will grant a license for the required works.

Subject to the imposition of a condition requiring the development to be undertaken in accordance with the updated Bat & Bird Activity Report, it is considered that the proposed development will comply with policy NE1 of the Local Plan (2020) and the NPPF (2021).

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

For the reasons outlined above, the proposed development is considered to accord with the relevant policies contained in the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020) and the NPPF (2021). As such the application is recommended for approval.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE subject to Conditions

Case Officer: Ailsa Berry

Recommendation Date: 18/11/2021

X 

Signed by: Jane Colley Signature

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council