

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2021/0571
Valid 27/09/2021

LEA HOUSE FARM
BOND HOUSE LANE
HORTON

RETENTION OF
HARDSTANDING

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Green Belt
- Character and appearance

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

Field gateway by the roadside at a dip in slope by stone road bridge over tree lined stream, hedges to field boundary in part. A very fine Alder tree stands just off the south west corner of the site. A rectangular fenced enclosure c.12m x 8.5m has been formed and within the enclosure the ground has been overlain with limestone chippings. The site is set in isolation from any nearby existing development. The house at Lea House Farm is some 60m to the north east and not readily seen in conjunction with views of the application site.

PROPOSAL

As in the heading – retention of the hardstanding. A planning statement accompanies the application.

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

Within the same field and directly adjacent: 88/00090/OLD – site for bungalow – refused

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 14th Dec 2021

Neighbour consultation period ends: 27th Sept

Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None

Town / Parish Comments

Horton Parish Council – No objection to this planning application provided that the hardstanding is for agricultural purposes only.

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Site visit 09/09/2021 Bond House Lane, is a C classified road (C202) with a speed limit of 60 mph. It is a rural, single track lane serving mainly farms and residential properties.

The area of hardstanding is located to the rear of the existing field gate.

It was noted that visibility when egressing the site is restricted to the north east and south west; visibility could be improved by cutting back vegetation. It is considered the proposal will not have a detrimental impact on the highway and therefore I have no objection (application number SMD/2021/0571).

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

Policy SS10 for the rural areas is 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 and its partners will achieve this through the following actions: [inter alia]

SS10(2) Sustain the rural economy by:

- *Enabling the limited expansion or development of business for employment uses where a rural location can be justified*
- *Supporting the diversification of existing farm enterprises*

Policy SS10 (3) Enhance and conserve the quality of the countryside by:
“Giving priority to the need to protect the quality and character of the area and requiring all development proposals to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape;”

For this site, which is within the North Staffordshire Green Belt, Policy SS10(6) applies saying:

“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 (NPPF 137) 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 (NPPF 138):

- 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.

Government policy is that a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt (NPPF paragraph 149). Exceptions to this are then listed (a) to (g) and notably these include at 149 (b) “buildings for agriculture and forestry”. However, this application does not involve a building. NPPF paragraph 150 says 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.” These are then set out in a closed list which includes, of relevance to this application at paragraph 150(b), “engineering operations”.

The applicant's planning agent has referred to NPPF paragraph 150 in the submitted statement and says:

The formation of the hardstanding on this site amounts to an engineering operation, but owing to its open and flat nature, does not derive any material impact to the openness of the Green Belt, nor any conflict with the five purposes of including land within it.

The statement adds:

The applicant's land holding extends to some 8 acres, and he currently keeps 17 sheep. That number will be increasing in the coming months. The

hardstanding has been provided in order to reduce poaching of the land by animals and to reduce its disturbance by vehicles passing over it when accessing the field. The hardstanding also provides the applicant with a safe and secure area within which shearing of the sheep can be undertaken.

Treating the development as an engineering operation and taking into account that the surfacing which has been undertaken is said to be for the support of vehicles on passing visits to the land (rather than being constantly stationed), and to limit poaching of the land by livestock, the LPA can accept that the work can be regarded as not affecting openness or conflicting with any of the five Green Belt purposes and that therefore it can be regarded as being not inappropriate in the Green Belt.

As regards the fencing, this amounts to Permitted Development being, "The erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure" permitted under Class A of Part 2 of Schedule 2 to the GPDO(2015).

The LPA notes that SCC Highways refer to the gate as an existing field gate and indeed the entrance can be seen on a street view image dated to May 2011.

In terms of character and appearance there has been some change to the location by loss of continuity to the green vegetation cover as a result of the hard standing. However a penning area with surfacing is not a wholly exceptional occurrence in the farmed countryside and the stated purpose is reasoned and can be accepted as justification in accordance with SS10, DC1, and DC3. The development is mainly seen only at short range. In the approach from the north east it is screened by the field boundary hedge. There is greater visibility from the south west. The access is existing and despite the below standard visibility splays (as noted by the Highway Authority), this application does not seek consent for the access and therefore this matter cannot be addressed by the this application.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

In consideration of the above it can be concluded that the development can be accepted as an engineering operation that does not affect openness or Green Belt purposes and its impact on character and appearance can be accepted given its rural purpose in support of a farming venture. It is important as part of this conclusion that the stated intended function and purpose is not for continuous stationing of vehicles or other items and structures and a condition should be attached that it be kept free from use for storage or vehicle / trailer storage as this would interfere with openness and be of significantly greater harm to character and appearance.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : **Approve subject to conditions**

Case Officer: Arne Swithenbank

Recommendation Date: 15th Dec 2021

X *J. Colley*

Signed by: Jane Colley Signature

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council