

PLANNING STATEMENT

THORNFIELDS FARM

FEBRUARY 2022

Site Address:

Thornfields Farm, Leek Road, Weston Coyney, ST3 5BE

Applicant:

Mr. A. Shuker

Proposal:

Change of use of former agricultural outbuilding to
form 4no. retail units (Use Class E)

Planning Statement:

Date Issued: 27th January 2022

Job Reference: RDP/2022/032

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: rob78duncan@gmail.com
Tel. 07779 783521

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Mr. A. Shuker to seek full planning permission for the change of use of a former agricultural building at Thornfields Farm, Leek Road, Weston Coyney to form 4no. individual retail units (Use Class E) as part of a further diversification of the applicant's agricultural holding. The application is part-retrospective.
- 1.2 The existing building lies to the west of the established farm shop and butchery, on the western side of an area of hardstanding and comprises a single storey building constructed from brickwork with a profiled metal clad roof. No external alterations are proposed to this building, the works to convert it having already been undertaken. Four individual retail units will be formed within the building comprising a total gross internal floor area of 152 square metres.
- 1.3 Externally it is proposed to create a new car parking on an existing area of hardstanding, for shared use between the proposed retail units and the existing retail units on the site. A total of 34 spaces will be provided, served via the existing vehicular accesses serving the site.

2 Site & Surroundings

- 2.1 The application site is located within the North Staffordshire Green Belt and lies on the western side of the Leek Road some 1.5km from Weston Coyney and 2km from Cellarhead. The site is currently in mixed use, comprising of two successful commercial uses (Shukers Pet and Country Stores and Shukers Farm Shop and Butchers), with the remaining buildings on the holding being in agricultural use.
- 2.2 The site benefits from an existing vehicular access that connects with the Leek Road in between an existing hay / straw storage building, and the existing shop. A previous planning consent to create a new exit from the site to the south of the shop has been implemented in accordance with SMD/2016/0140. To the north of the site lies an existing farmhouse and farmyard (Malt House Farm), whilst agricultural fields wrap around the site to the west and south, with the Leek Road enclosing the eastern site boundary.

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 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*

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. This will be achieved 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*
- *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*

- *Strict control will continue to be exercised over inappropriate development within the Green Belt allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government policy.*

3.4 Policy E1 of the Local Plan relates to 'New Employment Development' and states that new employment development will be assessed according to the extent to which it supports and improves the local economy in terms of providing for the needs and skills of the existing and future local resident workforce and meeting identified business needs. It goes on to state that in general the Council will endeavour to support the expansion of existing businesses and new businesses in the District. The policy furthermore states that schemes involving the re-use of rural buildings for commercial enterprise, including tourism uses, will be considered favourably where the proposed use does not harm the building's character and/or the character of its surroundings, and that to support the growth of the economy the Council will encourage provision for small-scale and start-up businesses.

3.5 Policy TCR3 of the Local Plan relates to 'Retailing and other Town Centre Uses outside Town Centres' and states that in determining proposals for retail and other town centre uses of 200m² or more (net sales for A1) on sites outside town centres and not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan a Sequential Assessment will be required. Preference will be given to town centre and then edge of centre sites. Where there are no sequentially preferable sites available, sites outside Leek, Biddulph and Cheadle in highly accessible locations that are well connected to the town centre will be considered. An Impact Assessment will be required on proposals for town centre uses of 200m² or more (net sales for A1) located outside of the town centres and not in accordance with the Local Plan. Developer contributions may be sought to mitigate identified impacts on defined centres where appropriate. Proposals with a significant adverse impact will be refused.

3.6 Policy DC1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Design Considerations' and states that all development should 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 SPD. It goes on to state that new development should (amongst others):

- *be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area*
- *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*
- *protect the amenity of the area, including creation of healthy active environments and residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, sunlight, outlook, privacy and soft landscaping, as well as noise, odour and light pollution.*
- *provide for safe and satisfactory access and make a contribution to meeting the parking requirement arising from necessary car use.*

3.7 Policy T1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Development and Sustainable Transport' and states that the Council will promote and support development which reduces reliance on the private car for travel journeys, reduces the need to travel generally and accommodates residual development traffic in line with the Integrated Transport Strategy. This will be achieved by:

1. *Ensuring that all new development is located where the highway network can satisfactorily accommodate traffic generated by the development or can be improved as part of the development.*
2. *Ensuring that major development is located in areas that are accessible by sustainable travel modes or can be made accessible as part of the proposal.*
3. *Considering appropriate parking provision on a case by case basis with recourse to the parking guidance set out in Appendix 2.*
4. *Where appropriate all new development shall facilitate walking and cycling within neighbourhoods and town centres, and link with or extend identified walking or cycling routes. In addition applicants should also consider how their schemes can enhance the existing path network in line with the Staffordshire County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan and also give consideration to the protection of non-definitive public footpath routes in addition to definitive routes.*

4 Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework seeks to secure the delivery of sustainable development and set out policies, inter-alia, in respect of supporting a prosperous rural economy, safeguarding the Green Belt and maintaining highway safety. The content of the NPPF has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

Staffordshire Moorlands Growth Strategy

- 4.2 The Growth Strategy identifies lower than average business start-up rates within the Staffordshire Moorlands, and a perception of rural areas being unsuitable and unwelcoming for business growth. It goes on to confirm that employment growth is a key political priority within the Moorlands.

5 Planning Assessment

Green Belt

- 5.1 The application site lies within the Green Belt, wherein policy SS10 confirms that strict control will be exercised over inappropriate development, allowing only exceptions as defined by Government policy. Paragraph 150 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) allows for the reuse of existing buildings within the Green Belt provided that they are of a permanent and substantial construction. Paragraph 150 also allows for material changes in the use of land. In both cases the development must preserve the openness of the Green Belt and not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.
- 5.2 The application proposes the change of use of former agricultural building to retail use, along with the formation of a new parking area to serve those units, along with the existing commercial uses on the site. The building is constructed from brickwork with a profiled metal roof and has been present on the site for a considerable number of years. It is a robust structure and can readily be concluded to be of a permanent and substantial construction.
- 5.3 The reuse of this building for retail purposes will not derive any harm to the openness of the Green Belt, nor will it give rise to any conflict with the five purposes of including land within it, as the use will be confined to within the building itself. The proposed change of use of the building to retail use therefore amounts to an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt, in accordance with paragraph 150 of the NPPF.
- 5.4 The formation of the proposed car park amounts to a change of use of the land from its existing agricultural use and will make use of an existing area of hardstanding that is located centrally amongst a range of existing buildings.

The existing farm shop and butchery lies to the east, existing cattle buildings associated with Malt House Farm lie to the north, with the application building enclosing the western side of the parking area. An open sided portal framed agricultural building is located to the south. By resultant effect the parking area is well screened within the locality, such that the parking of vehicles will not have a material adverse impact on the openness of the Green Belt or derive any material conflict with the five purposes of including land within it. The proposed car parking area therefore also amounts to an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt, in accordance with paragraph 150 of the NPPF.

Rural Economy

5.5 Paragraph 81 of the NPPF states that:

“Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future. This is particularly important where Britain can be a global leader in driving innovation, and in areas with high levels of productivity, which should be able to capitalise on their performance and potential”

5.6 Paragraph 84 of the NPPF goes on to state that planning policies and decisions should enable:

“the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings”

And

“the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses”

- 5.7 This guidance is enshrined within policy SS10 of the Local Plan which confirms that the Council will enable the limited expansion or development of business for employment uses where a rural location can be justified and will support the diversification of existing farm enterprises. Policy E1 of the Local Plan furthermore confirms that the Council will support the expansion of existing businesses and new businesses in the District, and that schemes involving the re-use of rural buildings for commercial enterprise, including tourism uses, will be considered favourably where the proposed use does not harm the building’s character and/or the character of its surroundings. Policy E1 goes on to state that to support the growth of the economy the Council will encourage provision for small-scale and start-up businesses.
- 5.8 The Local Authority’s Growth Strategy reflects the above policy provisions and confirms that the Staffordshire Moorlands has lower than average business start-up rates and a perception of the rural areas being unsuitable and unwelcoming for business growth. The application proposes the change of use of a redundant agricultural building on the site to form 4no. individual retail units. In doing so it represents a further diversification of the applicant’s agricultural holding. Each of the proposed units is modest in floor area and is well suited to start-up businesses. The breakdown of each unit is set out below:

- Unit 1 – 44 square metres GIA
- Unit 2 – 44 square metres GIA
- Unit 3 – 43 square metres GIA
- Unit 4 – 23 square metres GIA

5.9 The small scale nature of the proposed commercial units will help to support and facilitate the creation of new start-up businesses in a location that is already established as a popular and successful commercial location, with potential for linked trips by customers visiting the site for the existing shop, farm shop, butchery and café. The total number of jobs created on the site could range from 4 full time posts (based on 1 job per unit) up to 8 full time jobs (based on 2 jobs per unit).

5.10 In terms of retail impact considerations policy TCR3 of the Local Plan states that a sequential assessment and impact assessment will be required for all retail uses of 200 square metres or more on sites outside town centres. The policy reflects the provisions of paragraph 89 of the NPPF which states that the sequential approach should be applied to applications for small scale rural offices or other small scale rural development.

5.11 The submitted proposal entails a cumulative gross floor area of 152 square metres and therefore does not invoke the need for a sequential assessment or impact assessment to be carried out. The proposal therefore derives no conflict with the provisions of policy TCR3 of the Local Plan or paragraph 89 of the NPPF.

5.12 The economic benefits associated with this proposal accord with the objectives of the Local Authority's Growth Strategy, as well as the provisions of policies SS10 and E1 of the Local Plan and guidance contained within the NPPF, and as such weigh heavily in favour of the proposed development.

Design & Layout

- 5.13 The works to convert the existing building to retail use is not considered to be controversial. The proposal makes beneficial reuse of existing openings and proposes no other alterations to the exterior appearance of the building (the roof having already been installed).
- 5.14 The proposed car parking area is located on an existing area of hardstanding and is enclosed on all four sides by existing buildings. Its use for the parking of vehicles will not result in any material harm to the character and appearance of the area and will give the site a more appropriately located parking area compared to the one that currently exists. The proposed development is consequently in accordance with the requirements of policy DC1 of the Local Plan.

Highway Safety

- 5.15 The site benefits from two existing vehicular access points off the Leek Road. The northernmost access is where vehicles will enter the site, with vehicles then exiting via the southernmost vehicular access. The accesses both benefit from good visibility in both directions on egress and their continued use for commercial and agricultural purposes is not considered to be harmful to highway safety.
- 5.16 In terms of parking provision, consent was granted previously by the Local Authority for the parking of 12 vehicles on the parcel of hardstanding located to the south of the existing shop. The site has grown in popularity, and a demand for additional parking has been identified. The proposed car park will provide an additional 33 car parking spaces to serve the existing commercial units and the proposed retail units. This represents a more than appropriate level of provision to meet the existing and potential future need of the site, in accordance with policy T1 of the Local Plan.

6 Conclusion

6.1 The submitted proposal constitutes a sustainable form of development having regard to the following conclusions:

- The proposed entails the reuse of an existing building that is of a permanent and substantial construction, along with the change of use of the adjacent land, and neither element will give rise to harm to the openness of the Green Belt or conflict with the five purposes of including land within it.
- The proposal represents diversification of the applicant's established agricultural holding and will support the creation of new start-up businesses within the District and generate additional employment.
- The proposal will not result in harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
- The proposal is acceptable from a highway safety perspective and provides sufficient parking to meet the needs of the proposed retail uses.

6.2 The proposed development is therefore in accordance with policies SS1, SS10, E1, TCR3, DC1 and T1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan, and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.