

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2021/0725
Valid 15/11/2021

LOWER OVERTON FARM
OVERTON ROAD
CONGLETON

CONVERSION OF
OUTBUILDING TO FORM
RESIDENTIAL ANNEX

(FULL - HOUSEHOLDER)

MAIN ISSUES

- Impact on the Green Belt and compatibility with the Local Plan 'other rural area' strategy SS10.
- Impact on the character and appearance of the building and area (with consideration for historic environment)
- Impact on ecology, primarily the confirmed roosting bats

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

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.

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.

PROPOSAL

Seeks full planning permission for the conversion and alteration of an existing two storey former agricultural building at Lower Overton Farm. 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.

The annex would 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 when required.

The application is accompanied by:

- Heritage Statement (Philip Heath Heritage Consultant)
- Structural Survey (Fairclough Consulting Structural Engineers)
- Bat Survey (Elite Ecology)

Amended plans have been received to reduce the number of rooflights and improve their arrangement on the rear elevation. Omitting a central 4 quarter light window and two split lights that intersecting the eaves.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan Development Plan Document (Adopted 2020)

S01 Spatial Objectives
SS1 Development Principles
SS10 Other Rural Area Strategy
DC1 Design Considerations
DC2 Historic Environment
NE1 Biological Importance

SMDC Design Guide

National Planning Policy Framework

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SM.2442-71 Alterations and enlargements of dwellinghouse. Approved.
SMD/2021/0726 Single storey additions to dwellinghouse. Pending.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 31/12/2021
Neighbour consultation period ends: 31/12/2021
Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None

Town / Parish Comments

Biddulph Town Council: Concern that there would be contravention of Green Belt policy.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Impact on Green Belt and compatibility with 'other rural area' strategy

The site is in the Green Belt where development is inappropriate and harmful unless it is provided for by one of the exceptions that appear in the closed lists at paras. 149 and 150. Para 149 c) provides for alterations of a building provided it does not result

in disproportionate additions; and para 150 d) provides for the re-use of buildings provided they are of permanent and substantial construction.

The application proposes here some alteration to the building, that would not enlarge it, so that the permanent and substantially constructed stone farm building can be re used in the manner proposed (as ancillary accommodation). The development would not therefore be inappropriate development and there would be no harm to the Green Belt.

The Local Plan strategy SS10 for the 'other rural areas' and housing supply policy H1 do make provision for the provision of a new house in exceptional circumstances – re use and conversion of a building subject to criteria, dwelling for a rural worker, village infill, and affordable housing to meet identified need in accordance with development plan policy. However, the applicant confirms and clarifies that they do not propose the provision of an independent or separate dwelling on the site, and it is not necessary to consider the merits of the proposal against those policy provisions. The applicant describes the new accommodation proposed as an ancillary annexe for a relative. The accommodation would make use of and share existing areas of parking and amenity and occupy part of what can be readily observed as the residential planning unit belonging to that of the applicant's single dwelling at Lower Overton. In these regards, there is reason to consider that, actually, the proposed use would not result in material change of use.

Design and Impact on Character and Appearance

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"

The proposed alterations and works necessary to convert the building would be limited and have minimal impact on the external appearance of the building. The building is a substantial, well maintained, stone and tile building with existing openings that lend themselves to internal accommodation. The works and alterations would take a sensitive approach to the conversion, taking the opportunity to make beneficial reuse of existing openings, whilst avoiding the need for 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.

Amended plans have reduced the number and simplified the arrangement of roof lights on the rear elevation. With the revision, roof lights would be all aligned. A four quarter light window and two split section windows have been omitted.

The proposal consequently accords with the objectives of policies SS1 and DC1 of the Local Plan and the adopted Design Guide SPD.

Heritage Impacts

The building does not constitute a statutorily listed building, nor does it lie within a Conservation Area. It is, however, an original building within a grouping that is listed

on the County register as a 19th Century 'historic farmstead'. The building is recognised therefore as a non-designated heritage asset. The building is also within proximity of the Grade II listed Overton Hall and its two detached barns.

A Heritage Statement has been submitted with the application, to comply with policy DC2 of the Local Plan and paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The Heritage Statement suggests that a stripped out interior and a modern internal fabric has limited some of the building's heritage value. Nevertheless, the building's external stone walls remain and it retains grouping and arrangement with the farmhouse and nearby buildings. The proposal would not disrupt or disturb heritage value in those regards.

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. 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 comments and conclusions of the heritage report are largely accepted and 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.

Impact on Ecology

An ecology survey and report has been produced by Elite Ecology Sep 2021 and submitted with the application. From the numerous survey visits undertaken at the site it has been identified that day roosts of brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*) and soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*) bats are present within the surveyed structure. Additionally foraging and commuting bats are present on the survey site. From the survey visit undertaken on the site, it can be concluded that the surveyed structure contains no bird's nests. However, the surrounding landscape provides all of the necessary habitat elements that birds require, and their presence can be assumed. The ecological value of the buildings has been deemed as high to bats, due to the presence of a bat roost. The ecological value of the buildings to birds has been deemed negligible due to the absence of birds' nests.

Due to this a Natural England Development Licence is necessary to legally carry out the works. A 'Grampian' style condition could be attached to any planning permission requiring a license to be obtained before any work commences.

Other recommendations, that might be secured with appropriate conditions include: Incorporate a sensitive lighting plan around the site.

- Adhere to the mitigation requirements outlined in section 5 during the works.
- All tree and shrub removal should be undertaken outside of the bird breeding season (March to August, inclusive). If vegetation is required to be removed during the bird breeding season, then a further inspection by a suitably qualified ecologist is required no more than 24 hours before this vegetation is removed.
- Optional: Install at least one Eco Bat Box to enhance the site for the local bat populations.

- Optional: Incorporate a bat friendly planting scheme within the scheme of works.
- Optional: Install a variety of bird boxes around the site post development to enhance the site for the local bird populations.

The applicant confirms and includes in the proposal, to mitigate the impact, the provision of 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 would be served by six further bat access tiles. One bat box would be installed on a nearby tree, or onto the building itself.

Impact on Amenity

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.

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 north-eastern 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

No new issues are raised here. The existing dwelling is served by an existing access and has parking and turning area within the central yard area, the use of the building would operate and form as part of the one singular dwelling and household.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The development would not have an adverse impact on the Green Belt or cause conflict with the 'other rural' area strategy of the Local Plan. The alterations and works to be carried out to the building would be sensitive, respecting its character, form and appearance. There would be no adverse impacts on neighbour's amenity or highway safety; and with mitigation and a bat license ecology can be appropriately provided for. Compliant with the development plan policies listed above.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Ben Hurst

Recommendation Date: 2nd March 2022

X *B.S. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council