

Thorncroft Farm, Blackshaw Moor, Leek, ST13 8TR

Planning Statement

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PLANNING STATEMENT

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PLANNING STATEMENT

Introduction

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This planning statement has been prepared in support of a Detailed Planning application for land at Thorncroft Farm, Blackshaw Moor in Staffordshire Moorlands.

The statement considers the planning policies that are relevant to the consideration of the application and provides an overview of the context of the proposals and all relevant matters.

The statement should be read in the context of the wider plans and documents submitted as part of the overall planning application, and the documents should be taken together as a whole in considering the proposals.

1.1 CONTEXT & PLANNING HISTORY

The site is located 200m west of the A53 strategic road, as it passes through the small village of Blackshaw Moor in Staffordshire. The site, and village lies roughly 4km north-east of the market town of Leek. It lies to the south of a Blackshaw Lane, a rural lane, which does not have pedestrian facilities. The lane is subject to a 60mph speed limit at the access to the property. The A53 is subject to a 40mph limit through the village, but similarly has a rural character, with no footways in the vicinity of the lane that serves the site.

The site lies to the west of the Tittesworth Reservoir, which is an artificial reservoir, created by means of a dam at its southern end.

No public rights of way are shown to cross the site.

The site appears as a farmstead or agricultural smallholding in the Green Belt, with a single detached two-storey brick and tile house to the front of the site, facing the road, and agricultural buildings and barns set in a yard beyond it. The site is bounded to the south, east and west by fields, with these boundaries formed by hedgerows to a greater or lesser degree.

The frontage to Blackshaw Lane has a significant hedgerow and a post and rail fence, and a gated access at the western end of the frontage.

There are no planning applications lodged for the site itself, as far as we can determine. The Staffordshire Moorlands Council website and planning map do not show any planning history on the site. It is likely that the buildings on the site have been in place for many years, and so pre-date the register of planning. They do, therefore, represent a historic and established use.

1.2 DETAIL OF THE PROPOSALS

The proposed development comprises two detached houses – one being the rejuvenation of the existing farmhouse, which is unchanged in terms of its footprint or external appearance and the other comprising a newly built house that sits within the footprint of the previous agricultural outbuildings. This new house will require the demolition of the current agricultural buildings, and the delivery of the new house.

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The new house comprises a single storey dwelling, with a pitched roof that has rooflights and rooms within it. Hence, it has the appearance of a single storey dwelling, with a pitched roof, but takes advantage of efficient use of space to provide additional accommodation in the roof space. In terms of its form and mass it closely follows the existing agricultural buildings, which are either single or one and half storey structures with pitched roofs.

The proposals also include the provision of a new double garage for the new build house, which is built on the footprint of another of the agricultural outbuildings at the southern end of the site.

There is also a single garage which sits between the two houses. This will be oriented slightly differently to the section of agricultural building that it replaces, in order to accommodate the turning movement into the garage, but overall, it represents a reduction in the footprint of this part of the building.

The proposals also allow for the regularisation of the yard space compared to the existing use. At present, almost the entirety of the remaining land is used as either hardstanding or for storage, and so, with the exception of a small front garden to the existing house, the remainder of the land does not feature any vegetation, grass or open space. This will change with the proposed scheme, with driveways formed to provide access to the two properties and their garages, and an additional parking space for the existing house. The whole of the remainder of the site will be given over to private gardens for each of the houses respectively.

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2.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

This section of the planning statement reviews the planning policy context within which the proposals are being made, and provides an overview of their application to the site. The section is intentionally succinct, and does not replicate these policy documents, but makes appropriate reference to them where this is helpful to understanding the scheme.

2.1 THE PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

The relevant planning policy framework for consideration of this scheme is built around the National Planning Policy Framework, the most recent version of which was published by MHCLG (now DLUHC) in 2021, and the strategic planning policies that have been adopted by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. This includes all aspects of the development plan, and also the Leekfrith Parish Neighbourhood Plan.

We also note that the site is very close to the boundary of the Peak District National Park Authority, who also deal with planning matters within their area. However, the National Park boundary lies on the northern side of Blackshaw Lane, and so neither the lane nor any part of the site lies within the National Park area, and so its policies will not apply.

2.2 NPPF POLICIES

The NPPF contains a range of over-arching policies that are applicable to development plan-making and the determination of individual planning applications. The essence of the NPPF is to promote the delivery of sustainable development, and this is highlighted in paragraph 11 which encourages the approval of proposals that accord with the development plan. This planning statement considers the requirements of the development plan, and sets out reasons why we consider that the proposed scheme is in accordance with the development plan.

The NPPF also highlights (para 47) that applications should be approved where they accord with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. It is therefore relevant to consider a range of broader technical issues to ensure that they do not create problems that would mean the proposals were in contravention of the requirements of the plan. This appraisal is set out in section 3 below.

It is important that planning conditions are utilised to ensure that development is made acceptable where it might otherwise not be (para 55). Therefore, we have outlined a series of issues where it may be appropriate to apply conditions to this scheme. This is set out only on the basis that the applicant recognises it may be helpful to set these out at this stage to assist the Council in determining the application – but always recognising that it is for the Council to determine the extent of any conditions that should be applied in any individual case.

2.3 REGIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffordshire County Council is the Minerals and Waste plan-making authority for this area.

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There are no mineral safeguarding zones in the area around Blackshaw Moor, and so there are no relevant policies that may apply to the site in this respect.

2.4 LOCAL PLANNING POLICIES

The local development plan for Staffordshire Moorlands is made up of the Local Plan 2014 - 2033 document and plans, which were adopted on 9th September 2020, a series of SPD's that have also been adopted and the Leekfrith Neighbourhood Plan that was made in June 2021. The Council does not have an adopted CIL Charging Strategy, but does have an adopted Developer Contributions SPD from 2004, and is working on a revised Developer Contributions SPD currently.

The Council has also published a residential development Design Guide SPD that, whilst not forming part of the development plan, is a material consideration with regard to applications for this land use.

2.4.1 The Local Plan Strategy

The adopted Local Plan (September 2020) has a number of relevant objectives and policies, that create a framework for development of sites such as this. The relevant policies, in our view, are considered as follows:

The Local Plan notes that accessibility in rural areas may be limited, and so it will be important for any application to highlight the proximity of local facilities. In this case, the site is close to Blackshaw Moor, where there is a pub and a primary school. There is also a farm shop nearby at Brooklyn Farm.

The "Vision for the Rural Areas" is helpful, as it states that:

The Rural Areas will have viable, attractive villages and smaller settlements which will continue to foster appropriate, sensitive growth and vitality to support rural living and work. The larger villages will be the rural centres for services, facilities and jobs acting to sustain the rural areas. Smaller village communities will also continue to thrive with a range of housing opportunities and improved access to community services.

Blackshaw Moor is designated as a smaller village (Policy SS9), and so we consider that these aspirations will apply. The vision recognises a need for modest growth even in smaller villages to support these communities going forward and create population that sustains the facilities and amenities that already exist. Modest growth, on brownfield sites such as this, acts against the decline of rural communities, and creates socio-economic opportunities for local services, facilities and employment.

Although there is some agricultural land between the site and the village, it is nevertheless very close to the key amenities. The pub is at the end of Blackshaw Lane, only some 200m away from the site (around 3 – 5 minutes walk), and the bus stops on the A53 are immediately to the south of the junction with the lane, so it is similarly close to public transport stops.

Blackshaw Moor CofE First School is on Buxton Road, a little under 400m from the site, or 6 – 10 minutes walk. There are wide verges on the A53 over this section, and a footpath on the eastern side of the road that leads to the school.

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The unusual layout of the village, with most of the development on the eastern side of the A53 creates this small open gap between the site and the village, but, as set out above, the site is much closer to many of the village amenities than other parts of the settlement that do not have open space between them and the A53. Therefore, we consider that due to this close and easily walkable proximity to key amenities in the village, that the site should properly be considered as being well connected to, and, arguably, part of, the village of Blackshaw Moor.

We also note that the parish boundary runs along the A53, and hence the site is not in the same parish as the majority of Blackshaw Moor – however, it could be argued that the parish boundary is an administrative rather than a planning designation. The local people wouldn't recognise this boundary in the way they live their daily lives, and residents of the site will be most closely associated with Blackshaw Moor.

Policy SS 1 defines the general development principles. In our view, there is a balance to be struck with regard to the site and the objectives of this policy.

The policy requires development to provide easy access to jobs, shops and transport services. The proposed development achieves this by its close proximity to the main A53, which provides good accessibility by both public transport (with its proximity to the bus stops) and by road. As discussed, there are also local amenities which are within easy walking distance.

It also requires development to be 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. The site is just beyond the boundary of the Park rather than within it, but we would contend that the conversion from the current agricultural and semi-light industrial uses to wholly residential use would be more consistent with the National Park aspirations. The site would have a reduced traffic generation, for example, and the nature of any traffic would be light vehicles – mainly private cars, rather than larger vehicles and agricultural plant that could use the site at present.

Finally, the policy requires new development to make effective use of land and the best use of previously developed land and buildings. The proposal meets this aspiration, as the social, economic and environmental benefits of residential development in this location, designed not to increase the footprint of built development over the existing situation constitutes an effective and efficient use of land. The current land use is no longer commercially viable, as small agricultural properties such as this cannot create sufficient activity to be self-sustaining, and so the proposal also represents the best use of the site, reducing the likely impacts but maintaining the built footprint for beneficial use.

The proposed change of use will reduce traffic impacts, noise and pollution issues, and result in an increase in green space on the site and improve and enhance the hedgerows on the site boundaries with native planting. As the site is previously developed but the new footprint of building is no greater than current and some areas of hard standing will be removed, the proposal reduces the impacts of the site overall. This makes best use of the previously developed land.

The new house design will be low carbon and energy efficient to further meet the climate change requirements of this policy.

Policy SS2 addresses the planning approach to smaller villages (of which Blackshaw Moor is one) and is flagged as being relevant to proposals in the Green Belt. It recognises that some facilities will be

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available in these locations, but it may be necessary for local residents to travel outside the village for some of their daily needs. The principle of development on a large scale would be unsustainable in these villages, as it would generate a disproportionate number of additional journeys outside the village and may undermine the spatial strategy. Nevertheless, it is recognised that these settlements have a role in meeting the development requirements for the District in a way that can assist in maintaining the vitality of the smaller villages. These settlements are not defined by a Development Boundary and only limited development of an appropriate nature will be allowed.

The proposal represents a small increase in development in Blackshaw Moor (a net increase of one house) and so will make a small contribution to the vitality of the village in our view, and could be considered as appropriate and sustainable development on its merits.

Policy SS 4 deals with Strategic Housing and Employment Land Supply Housing Land Supply. It identifies that the Leekfrith Neighbourhood Plan provides for a housing provision of 2-4 houses in the plan period. The Neighbourhood Plan provisions are minimum requirements, so do not represent a cap on development. However, the site can help to meet this need, through the provision of one new house.

We would also comment that, although the site lies within the Leekfrith Neighbourhood Plan area, it is so close to Blackshaw Moor that consideration of its contribution to housing need should be in the context of the village, rather than the wider Neighbourhood Plan area of which it is, at least, administratively a part. In this respect, it makes a positive contribution to supporting the economic and social life of Blackshaw Moor.

Policy SS 9 defines the policy framework for smaller villages, including Blackshaw Moor. It says that the Council will seek to meet community, social or economic need by: “Enabling limited new housing development, including small infill schemes in accordance with Policy H1”.

This policy confirms Blackshaw Moor as a smaller village and allows for limited new housing and infill. The site could not be described as an infill scheme, but it is notable that the policy does not limit development to infill, and as this is a previously developed site, with a proposal that does not increase the overall developed footprint, the scheme can be considered to make housing provision on the limited basis envisaged.

The supporting text to policy SS10, related to the wider rural areas is also relevant:

6.61 Where development in the open countryside is justified, the preference will be for the re-use or redevelopment of existing buildings. All development in these areas will be strictly controlled, both in terms of its scale and type in order to ensure that the character and role of the countryside and the green belt is not undermined.

The scale of development proposed is appropriate, on the basis that the footprint of the buildings is no greater, and some of the hardstanding areas will be removed and more of the site given over to garden and non-surfaced areas. Although the proposal involves demolition of the current agricultural buildings and their replacement with new, this is considered appropriate to ensure that the best possible climate change and energy efficiency standards can be achieved for the new house.

The supporting text also states that all applications for planning permission for new dwellings in the countryside need to avoid the development of new isolated homes unless there are special circumstances. We consider that it is important to recognise that the site is not an isolated site in the

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countryside. Rather, it is within 200m of local facilities and public transport stops on a main road. The principle being applied is one of the re-use of redundant or disused buildings, albeit that one of the house will be re-used, whilst the other will be replaced on the same footprint with one that will be significantly more energy efficient.

Policy SS10 is also referenced with regard to the Green Belt parts of the District, and permits the meeting of housing requirements by allowing the conversion or replacement of an existing rural building in accordance with Policy H1.

Policy H1 has a range of design parameters that need to be achieved – including, at 3d that all new dwellings should aim to provide flexible accommodation which is capable of future adaptation by seeking to achieve adequate internal space for the intended number of occupants. The existing house is not to be significantly changed as part of the proposals, but the new house is proposed as a replacement for the existing agricultural buildings in order to ensure that it will meet reasonable future expectations for flexibility.

Policy H1- 4 relates to sites where development is not specifically allocated. It requires that for land outside of development boundaries (like this one) they will be supported if they comprise limited infill residential development of an appropriate scale and character for the Spatial Strategy, provided either that they adjoin the boundary of a larger village or it is well related to the existing pattern of development of a smaller village and will not create or extend ribbon development or lead to sporadic pattern of development.

This policy can be considered to be met, as the scheme follows exactly the existing pattern of development and does not create a risk of or precedent for other similar housing development in this area, because it takes as its starting point the limitations of the existing built footprint.

The policy goes on to require that development will not lead to a prominent intrusion into the countryside or have a significant adverse impact on the character and appearance of the countryside. Again, it can be argued that this is the case, as the proposals follow existing built development and so cannot be considered to be any more intrusive than the current position.

Subsection “e” of the policy provides for development to be approved where the site is a previously used site, but is not of high environmental value. The site meets both of these criteria, and can therefore be considered acceptable in respect to this policy.

2.4.2 Leekfrith Neighbourhood Plan

The Neighbourhood Plan sets out a series of policies related to development in the parish, but none of them are applicable to the site. There is a policy that relates to the development of land at Upper Hulme Mill, which is some distance from the proposed site, and then policies that relate to the rental of holiday cottages, and two policies related to parking within the parish.

Although the site does not relate to any of the policies in the Neighbourhood Plan, we would comment that we do not consider that the development proposed would have any detrimental effect on the policies in the Neighbourhood Plan or the vision and aspirations that it contains.

We do not believe that anything in the Neighbourhood Plan constitutes a clear reason to reject these development proposals.

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3.0 TECHNICAL APPRAISAL

The following sections provide supporting information regarding the key technical aspects that may impact on the proposed development of the site. In order to demonstrate that a comprehensive review has been undertaken, we have retained the topic headings of all of the issues that we have considered in preparing the development proposals, but have noted where this issue is not likely to be a constraint or require a response in respect of this development.

The sections identify if additional supporting information in the form of detailed technical reports or evidence has been submitted with the application, and in this case, cross-reference is made to the relevant technical report. Otherwise, technical issues are dealt with in overview within the Planning Statement, as follows:

3.1 AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The small scale nature of the site, with only two houses proposed, one of which is existing, falls below the threshold for the provision of Affordable Housing, and so this issue is not relevant to the proposed scheme.

3.2 AIR QUALITY

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council has declared only one AQMA within the District, located in Leek to the south. Therefore, the site is not affected by any AQMA.

We do not consider that there are any air quality issues that stand in the way of the approval of the proposals.

3.3 CONTAMINATED LAND

The site is previously developed land, and has been used for agricultural activities and the storage of agriculture machinery and the like for many years. As a result there is a small likelihood of the site being subject to localised pockets of contamination related to drips and spillages of fuel and oil, for example, from machinery.

There are no reasons to suspect that there is any significant and extensive contamination that would preclude development altogether. Therefore we consider that to properly manage and minimise any risks in this respect it would be possible for the planning authority to impose a condition to the effect that if contamination was discovered during the course of works on the site that work must stop and an agreed approach to its removal or treatment must be determined with the planning authority before work can re-commence.

3.4 DESIGN QUALITY

Following a survey of the site, a 3D representational model of the existing built forms was created. This included the existing house, three barns and a garden shed. It was realised that best practice would be to keep any proposed structures within the current volume of the existing structures. Using existing volumes to determine the scale and geometry of the proposed architecture sets out a clear guideline to begin the design process.

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In accordance with the existing volumes, it was clear that the house would be one-storey on the South elevation and one and half storey on the North elevation, creating both restrictions and opportunities for the design.

Alongside experimenting with massing and arrangement of geometries, the aim was to take advantage of the potential views. The site offers a panoramic view over the North, East and South of the land. An understanding of the desired views and orientation helps to drive the spatial arrangement of the proposed house.

The next stage of the design process involved experimenting with internal arrangement of space. By strategically positioning specific internal spaces in order to take advantage of potential views, it is possible to grasp a clear understanding of how the house will be organised. The predetermined levels have been utilised through a large roof terrace area above one-storey side of the building, which can be accessed through the first floor landing and bedroom.

Finally, the materials were also dictated by the existing built form. Brick has been chosen to compliment the existing house and the metal roof profile is reminiscent of the metal used on the roofs of the existing barns.

There are specific considerations in respect of design, that need to be incorporated into any plan for the site as set out in Policy DC-1 of the Local Plan. In addition, Staffordshire Moorlands has an adopted Design Guide that schemes should follow.

The particularly relevant aspects of policy DC-1 for this site are as follows:

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;*
- 4. incorporate sustainable construction techniques and design concepts for buildings and their layouts to reduce the impact of the development;*
- 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;*

The design response of the site follows the requirements of the policy and the Design Guide.

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3.5 ECOLOGY & BIODIVERSITY

The site currently comprises a farmhouse and agricultural yard and buildings, with very little green space, and hence with limited scope for significant habitat or ecological assets. The boundaries do have some hedgerows and established trees which may be a suitable habitat for insects, small mammals and garden birds predominantly.

However – the northern boundary, to Blackshaw Lane and the front garden of the existing house will be retained unchanged compared to now, and so any habitat that exists will not be affected by the development of the site. The remaining boundaries would not need to be altered as part of the development, but would be reinforced and enhanced with additional native planting to both screen and secure the site, but also to add habitat and vegetation to the site.

The site does not lie close to any national or local nature reserves, RAMSAR sites, SSSI sites or their Impact Risk Zones (although some are nearby, the site is outside of them) or SPA areas.

3.6 FLOOD RISK & SURFACE WATER DRAINAGE

The entirety of the site is shown in Flood Zone 1, with no risk of fluvial flooding. The River Churnet runs east-west to the north of the rural lane and the site, and this is shown to have a potential Flood Zone 3 corridor running along it, but this is some distance from the site. The river flows into the nearby Reservoir, and it is thought that this would provide a good deal of protection to any extension of the flood zone anyway.

The proximity to the Reservoir could be a concern, as generally development sites within 2km of a reservoir are considered to be potentially at risk of failure of the reservoir. However, as the Reservoir is dammed at the southern end, and the site is on land that is considerably higher than the reservoir the risk of inundation in the event of a dam failure is not considered to be a risk in reality.

There are no watercourses or water bodies within the site, and so it is unclear how surface water drainage is achieved at present. However, as the site is previously developed, it seems unlikely that this would be a significant constraint. It may be necessary to mitigate the run-off from the site, and this would be explored as part of the detailed design of the surface water drainage connections, but would most likely use storage through over-sized pipes, consistent with the small scale nature of the development.

The applicant is content to accept a planning condition to provide details of surface water drainage prior to commencing the development.

3.7 HERITAGE & ARCHAEOLOGY

Listed assets: There are no listed assets shown on the site itself. The nearest listings are some distance away – a milepost on the A53 to the south-east and Middle Hulme farmhouse some distance to the west.

Non-designated assets: The site is not mentioned on Staffordshire Moorlands Local Heritage Register.

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3.8 LANDSCAPE & VISUAL IMPACT

The site is currently a brownfield site in a rural area, and we consider that it would be improved as a result of the careful scheme design that has been applied.

There may be distant views of the site from the Leekfrith 1R/2403 PROW, which runs north-south to the west of the site. However, this PROW is more than 600m away from the site at its closest point, and so it is not considered likely that this would be a constraint in practice.

The Local Plan policy DC 3 deals generally with Landscape and Settlement Setting, and this states (among other things) that the Council will protect and, where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements by ensuring that development does not adversely affect the wider setting of the Peak District National Park. The proposal complies with this policy because it sits within the same built footprint and will be no higher than the current built form, and so it will not affect the setting of the National Park.

We would contend that the scheme is more likely to enhance the setting of the National Park, as a result of the improved boundary planting, the removal of some hard standing areas from within the site and the reduction in traffic impacts.

3.9 NOISE IMPACT

There are no sensitive receptors that would be affected by development at the site, and the site is unlikely to be impacted by any nearby sound generators.

3.10 PARKING ARRANGEMENTS

The scheme includes a new double garage for the new house, and a single garage and parking space for the existing house. The layout configuration allows for vehicles to turn within the site so that they can enter and leave in forward gear.

3.11 PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

As a minor scheme proposal the project is not required to make a specific provision for public open space. However, within the site, the amount of garden and green space will increase compared to the current layout.

3.12 TRANSPORT AND ACCESS ISSUES

The site will retain its existing access to Blackshaw Lane via a simple priority junction, and the shift to smaller, lighter vehicles such as private cars will mean that the existing driveway access will be less intensively used than it might be under the existing use.

There is a bus stop to the south of the Three Horseshoes Inn, 200m to the east of the site at the junction with the A53. The No.16 bus services provides a half hourly service into Leek, with the first service is at 9:45 and the last service back from Leek at 15:45.

Any proposals would need to respond to the requirements of the Local Plan Policy T1 -Development and Sustainable Transport. This states that the Council will promote and support development which

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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.

The proposals respond to Policy T1 because the site is located where the highway network is able to accommodate the traffic, and in all likelihood, the level and nature of traffic generation is likely to reduce this impact from the current agricultural / semi-industrial use with one house to two domestic homes with mainly light vehicle movements. In addition, the site is accessible by public transport – it is within easy walking distance of available bus stops with a level of service that is proportionate to the scale and location of the development proposed.

Adequate parking standards can be met on the site (see parking standards below).

The low traffic nature of Blackshaw Lane makes it suitable as a pedestrian route back to Blackshaw Moor. Although it does not have a footway, this route is demonstrably suitable for pedestrians as it forms part of the PROW network which run along the lane a short distance to the west. Pedestrians could walk along the edge of the carriageway quite safely, but there are also wide verges that would be available as refuges in the event that an occasional large vehicle needed to pass.

The Local Plan parking standards as set out in Appendix 2 would be applied on the site. This requires 2 spaces for 3 bedroom homes and 3 spaces for 4 bedroom homes. The proposals create a garage and a parking space for the existing 3 bedroom house, and a double garage with two additional spaces in front of it for the new house.

The proposal has not been subject to a separate transport assessment, as it is a small scale proposal and so this should not be required. The scheme does not have any characteristics that would suggest an abnormal or excessive level of travel demand or traffic generation from the new homes on the site. Indeed, as already noted, the size and nature of traffic to the site is likely to be diminished with a wholly residential land use.

3.13 TREES & ARBORICULTURAL

The existing trees on the northern and part of the western boundaries of the site, and in the existing front garden would be retained. There are no trees on the section of the site that would be subject to the construction of the new house.

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Conclusion

4.0 CONCLUSION

The proposed scheme for Thorncroft Farm, Blackshaw Lane comprises a minor application on a small, previously developed area of land.

4.1 PLANNING POLICY WEIGHT

The proposal is for the redevelopment of an existing, previously used site entirely within the built form of the existing buildings, but with enhancements to the environmental aspects of the site that will provide a net benefit to the local area.

The site is currently a farm house with an agricultural yard, and the proposal is to provide development entirely within the existing building footprint and envelope to ensure that no additional impacts are likely. The transport provision is good in the context of a village location, and the level and impact of traffic generation from the site is highly likely to be reduced by the proposals. Enhancements to a range of environmental factors can be delivered as part of the proposals, as the site will have less hard standing and the boundary hedgerows can be enhanced and improved with native species.

In policy terms, the proposals make a contribution to meet the housing need in the District, and those of the Neighbourhood Plan.

The access onto Blackshaw Lane is sufficient to serve two dwellings, and it would be possible to manage the hedge on the frontage to ensure that drivers emerging from the site have visibility along the lane. The site is within 200m of bus stops on the A53, which provides an unusually close level of public transport provision for a site in the villages. There are local facilities that are easily walkable and cyclable in the village as well.

Achieving a modest, but tangible net gain in soft surfaced areas and planting compared to the current hard surfaced accesses, buildings and hardstanding would be helpful in mitigating the existing surface water run-off rates and in terms of ecology.

The opportunity would be taken to reinforce, replace and enhance the existing hedgerows on the boundaries of the site to the benefit of wildlife and the local landscape. There is also the opportunity for some native tree planting on the boundaries and within the site as part of the final design of the scheme.

In this respect, the visual impact of the scheme is benign. The current smallholding use is less attractive, and the site boundaries less well established and maintained than would be the case with a residential dwelling. The landscape immediately around the site is of hedgerows and fields, and this would be enhanced by the development of the site.

4.2 THE PLANNING BALANCE

The balance of social, economic and environmental effects and benefits should be considered in the determination of any planning application.

PLANNING STATEMENT

Conclusion

In this case, the social effects of the scheme are that it makes a contribution to the need for housing in the District and the local area. There is little impact from the scheme, as the built form will be largely unchanged and arguably enhanced, and this can be set alongside the social benefits of the scheme in delivering housing in a location where there are already amenities that make co-location sensible – the primary school and bus stops, for example.

The addition of the families that live in the homes on the site will help to support the local economy and services, contributing to the overall sustainability of Blackshaw Moor and the rural area nearby.

The scheme is unlikely to create any appreciable environmental impacts based on the evidence available, and, we would contend, is more likely to bring environmental benefits – lesser impactful traffic movements, more green space compared to hard-standing and improved hedgerows and tree planting on the boundaries.

All of these potential benefits should also be set in the context that the site is not especially visible from any public vantage point, apart from Blackshaw Lane, from which the view will be very little changed.

This means that, rarely in our experience, the development of the site is likely to pass unnoticed by the majority of the people, but will make use of an otherwise quite spoilt parcel of land that could be making its contribution to the economic, social and environmental development of Blackshaw Moor and the wider District, with limited, if any, impact.