

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

**SMD/2021/0798
AND
SMD/2021/0807
Valid 17/08/2022**

**THE SMITHY SMITHY LANE
FARLEY**

**CONSERVATION AND
CHANGE OF USE OF THE
SMITHY TO GUEST
ACCOMODATION, HOLIDAY
LET.**

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- The principle of the change of use
- The impact on the Listed Building
- The impact on the character and appearance of a Conservation Area.
- The impact on residential amenity.
- The impact on highway safety.
- The impact on the ecological value of the area

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site is in Farley, which comprises several old traditional dwellings grouped around Farley Lane, a C class road immediately to the west of the main entrance to Alton Towers. It is not listed as a Small Village in the Local Plan and could be best described as a small hamlet as there appears to be no village facilities. It is therefore deemed as being in the open countryside. There are several old listed buildings and the settlement is within a Conservation Area. The site itself is on the east side of Smithy Lane, a dead end private rural lane which adjoins Farley Lane a short distance to the south and comprises a Grade II listed small stone-built traditional dwelling but used as an agricultural barn store and which has a steep pitched roof with traditional grey tile. It was thought to be built in 1780 but remodelled in 1851. It is attached to another similar stone dwelling to the south which forms the corner plot between Farley Lane and Smithy Lane. There is another similar stone dwelling a short distance to the north side. Included in the site to the east/rear of the building is a concrete patio to the rear and a small part of a large lawned rear garden raised above the concrete. On the opposite side of Farley Lane to the west is a row of stone dwellings which face Farley Lane and the rear gardens of those dwellings. The land rises towards the north.

The building is two-storey and has two rooms at ground floor and two rooms above.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application and accompanying Listed Building Consent application to convert the building into a 2-bed holiday let. The only external alterations would comprise a glass screen behind existing black timber garage/barn

doors, the painting of the timber windows, fascia and eaves boards in “Farley Estate” and the replacement of gutters and rainwater pipes. Existing rooflights would be replaced with Conservation-type rooflights flush with the roofslope.

Internally there would be works associated with the conversion into a living room and dining kitchen on the ground floor and two bedrooms above and short sections of partition walls to create WC and bathroom space. There would also be a new staircase in a similar position to that existing and a replacement fireplace. Insulation materials would be added to the walls and doors. The drawings also show fixtures and fittings details attached to the fabric of the building.

The Design, Access and Heritage Statement along with a Preliminary Bat and Bird Survey Report dated Jan 2022 and an updated report (Aug 2022) which gives details of subsequent bat activity surveys required to be undertaken in Summer 2022, as a result of the findings in the Jan 2022 report.

The application was originally validated in February 2022 and “re-validated” in August 2022 following the receipt of further Ecology Survey Reports and a new round of consultations, notifications, site notices and press adverts were undertaken.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan (Adopted Sep 2020)

SS1 Development Principles
SS10 Other Rural Areas Area Strategy
SS11 Churnet Valley Strategy
E4 Tourism and Cultural Development
DC1 Design Considerations
DC2 The Historic Environment
T1 Development and Sustainable Transport
NE1 Biodiversity

National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021)

Sections 6 (Economy), 12 (Design), 15 (Natural Environment) and 16 (Historic Environment).

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

None.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 11.10.22 (August re-consultation)
Neighbour consultation period ends: 11.10.22 (August re-consultation)
Press Advert: 14.9.22 (Re-advertisement).

Public Comments

None.

Parish/Town Council Comments

No objection.

Staffordshire County Council Highways

No objection and no conditions recommended. Although there is no off-street parking, demand for parking spaces from a 2-bed seasonal holiday let is likely to be low and it is safe to park on Smithy Lane.

Environmental Health

No objection subject to standard conditions relating to residential conversions.

SMDC Waste Collection Services

No issues regarding waste collections.

Historic Buildings and Places

We find the accompanying plans and statement do not provide sufficient detail about the historic and architectural significance of this building, particularly the internal areas and features to be altered or removed – such as the replacement of the staircase and fireplace. Also, how the new partitions may affect existing features of significance.

Conservation Officer

No objection subject to conditions.

Staffs Wildlife Trust

March 2022: Holding objection as bat activity surveys are required to establish if bats are present in the building, which has potential for use by bats, a protected species.

October 2022: No objection as no birds or bats were found inside the building. Conditions requiring precautionary measures during construction works are recommended particularly as the building has potential for nesting birds.

OFFICER COMMENTS

The site is in the countryside and Policy SS10, the strategy for the countryside, allows the conversion of suitable buildings to other uses including holiday lets. The building is suitable. It is solid stone building with an intact tiled roof and as a listed traditional rural dwelling or barn attached to dwelling, is very much in keeping with

the character and appearance of the area. The Churnet Valley Strategy, Policy S11 encourages development which provides for new tourist facilities and accommodation and whilst the Churnet Valley Masterplan requires only minimal new development in the Alton area, the proposal is for the conversion of an existing building and the change of use to holiday accommodation would not be contrary to either Policy S11 or the Masterplan.

The key policy for tourism related development is Policy E4 which has two parts which both need to be complied with. Part 1 allows tourist development including accommodation in locations in locations that offer, or are capable of offering either:

- A) good connectivity with other tourist destinations and amenities, particularly by public transport, walking and cycling; or
- B) in locations in or close to settlements where local services, facilities and public transport are available; or
- C) in areas specifically identified for tourism development in the Churnet Valley Masterplan or other relevant documents.

The proposal would need to comply with just one of the three criteria for it to comply with Part 1 of the policy. It would not comply with B or C as in the case of B, Farley is a small hamlet with no services or facilities and in the case of C, although a major tourist attraction is within a mile, Alton Towers, the site is outside of the attraction and the Churnet Valley Masterplan does not identify the area outside of the attraction for further tourist development.

However, I consider the proposal does accord with criterion A. The site is just 400 metres way from the main entrance to Alton Towers and is easily reached by bicycle along flat terrain along a suitable main road (Farley Lane). This section of road appears unsafe for walking as there is no footway and is largely enclosed by walls and hedges. However, there is public footpath a short distance to the north of the site which crosses fields and is parallel with the main road and links up to Longshaw Lane where it is safe to walk to the main entrance of Alton Towers. This route is approx. 450 to 500 metres long and therefore deemed to be easily walkable and not much longer than the Farley Lane route. There are no bus stops in Farley (except outside the main entrance to Alton Towers) despite Farley Lane being on a bus route but the fact that Alton Towers is easily accessible from the site via walking and cycling, would deem the proposal to comply with Part 1 of Policy E4.

Part 2 of the above policy requires new tourist facilities and accommodation to:

- A) support the provision and expansion of tourist, visitor and cultural facilities in the rural areas where needs are not met by existing facilities; and
- B) all development shall be of an appropriate quality, scale and character compatible with the local area, protect the residential amenity of the area, enhance the heritage, landscape and biodiversity of the area and shall not harm interests of acknowledged importance.

With regard to A), it is acknowledged there is already a large range of accommodation options within the Alton Towers resort itself. However, the proposal would offer a different, more “niche” form of accommodation, being self-catering within an attractive listed barn in a village/hamlet setting that may appeal to people who want to visit Alton Towers but not stay in the resort. There appears to be two

other holiday lets in Farley “village” but these are large multiple 4 or 5 bedroom lets whereas the proposed would be the only small 1 or 2 bed holiday let (or one of just two small scale lets if the concurrent application further along the road is approved (SMD/2022/0796)). The proposal would therefore diversify the range and type of accommodation on offer in the area which therefore helps to support the provision and expansion of tourist facilities/accommodation in this part of the Churnet Valley.

With regard to B), I also consider there is compliance with this criterion. As it involves the conversion but not enlargement of an existing small, solid building with character it would therefore be compatible with the local area. There would be no direct overlooking from the bedroom or living area windows into the main windows of nearby houses and so the existing residential amenities of the area are unaffected. Finally, the proposal would help to restore and therefore result in the long-term protection and maintenance of a Grade II listed building by bringing the vacant building back into use and minor works to the exterior are proposed which would improve it and prevent it falling into disrepair. I consider the impacts on landscape and ecology are neutral. There are no significant changes to the building or site and due to the limited space around the site (which is to the rear and in a well screened area), no scope for landscape improvements. The site has a low ecological value with no use by protected species. Due to the limited space on site there is no scope for new planting for ecological enhancements and bat or bird boxes on listed buildings would not be desirable. However, overall, due to the benefits to the heritage value of the area, there would be a net improvement to the heritage, landscape and ecological values of the area, in compliance with Part 2 of Policy E4.

With regard to the comments of Historic Buildings and Places, the agent has confirmed that the existing staircase is steep and it appears to be contemporary. The Fireplace is to be retained and not replaced although there may be some conservation work and fluing to enable it to function. Nevertheless the Conservation Officer also concurs that more detailed information of the works is required but on the basis of the above does not object to the proposal and considers approval of the further information required can be achieved by way of planning conditions requiring the details to be submitted for approval.

With regard to compliance with other policies in the Local Plan, in terms of traffic and highway safety, the vehicle movements generated from a 2-bed holiday let would not be significant enough to increase traffic problems on surrounding roads and despite there being no parking provision, it is safe to park on Smithy Lane. The junction of Farley Lane and Smithy Lane is not considered to be dangerous in terms of the level of visibility along the main road for drivers using the junction.

Finally with regard to the ecological value of the site, the ecology reports including activity surveys revealed no protected species, which in this case would be bats and birds. The proposal would not lead to any harm to the ecological value of the area subject to precautionary measures carried out during the conversion works which can be achieved via a condition.

With regard to residential amenity, no external alterations that could affect the amenity of neighbours are proposed. The proposed use is an alternative form of residential accommodation in an existing dwelling and is therefore entirely

appropriate. The EHO has raised no objection on amenity grounds subject to conditions including a “noise control plan” to include a code of conduct for residents, a complaint handling procedure and contact details for the operator of the holiday let. It is not considered that this would be appropriate to impose as a planning condition as such matters can be dealt with under other legislation relating to anti-social behaviour and statutory nuisance.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The proposal would provide a small (1 or 2-bed) self-catering holiday let unit where there is not one available a short distance outside of the Alton Towers Resort and due to the good level of connectivity with Alton Towers, a major tourist attraction, just a short distance away, the principle of the change of use is acceptable. The proposal would help safeguard the long-term future of a historic listed building and the improvements made would be sympathetic with its character and appearance of the building, both internally and externally, with the safeguard of several conditions. The character and appearance of the Conservation Area would therefore also not be harmed as development within the curtilage would be minimal. The proposal would also not harm residential amenity due to the positional relationship between the building and nearby dwellings and as a small unit would not lead to any significant noise and disturbance affecting the area. The proposal would not lead to significant traffic which would harm the character and appearance of the rural locality or harm highway safety. The proposal would not harm the ecological value of the site which is already low.

Overall, the proposal would therefore have economic, environmental and heritage benefits without any negative social impacts. The proposal therefore complies with the policies of the Local Plan and the government planning guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE PLANNING AND LBC

Case Officer: Chris Johnston
Recommendation Date: 11/11/2022

X 

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council