

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2022/0469
Valid 18/08/2022

HERMITAGE FARM
FROGHALL ROAD
FROGHALL

DEMOLITION OF A POULTRY
UNIT AND THE ERECTION OF
A HOLIDAY UNIT ANCILLARY
TO HERMITAGE FARM.

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- The principle of the change of use
- The impact on the setting of a listed building
- The impact on highway safety.
- The impact on the ecological value of the area

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site is in countryside between Froghall to the south and Ipstones to the north and comprises a Grade II listed farmhouse with traditional barns a short distance to the north of it across a yard, which were converted into holiday lets. These barns are also included in the listing. There are three other buildings forming a farmstead grouping, to the west and east of the farmhouse, including a farm workers dwelling. There is also a timber clad poultry building a further distance away from the farmhouse, in the middle of a field to the south of the farmhouse. Outside the application site, there is another field to the east of the farmhouse included as part of the property. To the north of the site exists a number of large modern portal framed farm buildings which used to be part of the same property as the application site but are now in separate ownership. The site is on the west side of Froghall Road which provides the access to the site via a short access track. The land rises up in a general northern direction. The farm is surrounded by open land in all directions including the other side of the road to the east. The site is outside of the Green Belt.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application to rebuild the poultry building on the same footprint and with a similar form and dimensions (although the new would be slightly higher to eaves and ridge) and the same finishing materials to provide a holiday let in addition to the existing ones at the barns to the north of the farmhouse. It would have three double bedrooms. The parking would be provided in the existing car park to the east of the farmhouse and a path would be provided to the proposed building. The site plan also shows a sewage treatment plant, drainage field and soakaway. A native hedgerow with additional five half standard oak trees would be placed on the eastern and northern boundaries of the field.

A Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment report and Design and Access Statement has also been submitted.

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

There have been several planning applications relating to Hermitage Farm but the most recent applications are as follows:

SMD/2019/0394: Demolition of three agricultural (storage/cattle) sheds and creation of enclosed garden areas to serve the cottages in the adjacent stone barn conversion, together with creation of a 12-bay car park with access track, manoeuvring area and stone retaining walls. Refused. Appeal dismissed.

SMD/2019/0390: Corresponding Listed Building Consent application for SMD/2019/0394. Refused. Appeal dismissed.

SMD/2019/0391: Variation/Removal of condition application to remove the holiday let restriction on the barns to allow them to become unrestricted dwellings. Refused. Appeal dismissed on the grounds that this could not be achieved via a Variation/Removal of Condition application and that a full planning application for a change of use would be required instead.

There is also a concurrent Listed Building Consent application to replace the windows of the farmhouse which is still pending.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 11.10.22
Neighbour consultation period ends: 11.10.22
Press Advert: 21.9.22

Public Comments

None.

Parish/Town Council Comments

Members of the parish council have voted to OBJECT to the above mentioned, planning application for the following reasons: -

- Over development of a residential property in the open countryside
- It is outside the main development
- It is an inappropriate development

Staffordshire County Council Highways

No objection. No conditions recommended.

Conservation Officer

Objection. Recommended refusal.

The Hermitage Farmhouse, Grade II and the Barn just north of the principle building also Grade II, are two C17 and C18 red sandstone structures. The principle building of the Hermitage Farmhouse has some intricate detailing, ogee arches and chamfered mullioned windows, and the Barn, sees similar detailing of chamfered eaves and heavy lintels. Both structures are fairly visually striking in mass and design, enveloped within the rural landscape.

The scheme shows the proposal of a large and lengthy holiday accommodation building, in a relatively exposed location in the grounds nearby. It is seen to replace a disused poultry farming building. The description of the proposed development demonstrates the scheme to include vertical timber boarding, with grey aluminium windows, a grey roof, and large glazed doors to the south east elevation.

The proposed scheme is not respectful of the setting of the two assets and the identity of the farmstead, nor does it seem to be proactive in being subservient against them, or the rural vicinity. It is unsuccessful in becoming part of the relationship between the principle buildings and organic landscape. The scheme, though utilising a currently redundant structure, has not taken reference from the historic elements nearby, nor the natural environment, to thoroughly inform the design and scale, and be unobtrusive in the setting.

It is seen the scheme will cause harm to the heritage assets and does not adhere to Local Plan policy.

Staffs Wildlife Trust

No objection subject to conditions:

1. Landscaping scheme including grassland/ wetland enhancement
2. Bat precautions to be followed as per Preliminary Roost Assessment dated August 2022 by Haslam Ecology
3. Details of suitable replacement swallow nesting features

The Preliminary Roost Assessment dated August 2022 by Haslam Ecology found no evidence or potential for bats (in the existing poultry building to be demolished).

Severn Trent Water

No objection. No conditions recommended.

OFFICER COMMENTS

The site is in the countryside and is within the Churnet Valley. The strategic policies for those areas, policies SS10 and SS11 encourage tourist development where this does not have a significant impact on the landscape and heritage values of the area or lead to significant traffic. The Churnet Valley Masterplan for this part of the District requires “minimal” new development outside of those areas specifically allocated for new tourism development. Hermitage Farm is not in such an allocated location. The main policy relating to tourism 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.

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, the site is in the countryside and the nearest town or village which offers facilities/services for tourists (such as a grocery store/supermarket and pubs) is Ipstones, a mile to the north but which although is a short cycle ride away along a fairly flat road, is not accessible via walking (there is no footway along the connecting road) or public transport (there is no bus stop near to the site). In the case of test C, the site is not in an area identified for further tourist development.

However, I consider the proposal does accord with criterion A. There are no significant tourist attractions within easy reach via walking, cycling or public transport but Hermitage Farm is an already established holiday let business with five 1 or 2-bed units comprising 2 x 5-person, 2 x 4-person units and a 2-person unit. The proposed new unit would be the first 3-bed 6-person unit and it appears that whilst the other units are geared towards single family stays, the proposed has three double beds suggesting availability for groups or couples who are friends. The proposal would diversify the accommodation on offer and I consider the proposal would therefore compliment an existing tourist accommodation facility and amount to an appropriate expansion which is not large-scale in relation to the existing and which would not lead to a significant increase in traffic in this area. The site location by being adjacent to other holiday lets within the same property is therefore well connected to existing tourist amenities, therefore passing Test A and therefore the proposal does 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), there was an application in 2019 to remove the restriction on the holiday lets to allow their change of use to dwellings. This was refused as the Council did not consider it had been demonstrated that there was insufficient demand for this type of tourist accommodation in the area. The appeal was dismissed although this was on the grounds of planning procedure (a full planning application for a change of use should have been submitted and not a Removal of Condition procedure) rather than the merits of the case. Nonetheless, the refusal was around three years ago and the applicant has stated the following with regard to current demand:

"We have 5 holiday cottages and re-established these in the summer of 2021. Since we have been trading we have generated a high level of bookings and are well above the average in this field of business. We do receive many enquiries for larger groups looking for accommodation on one site and for this reason we are looking to extend the business to support such requests. We have received a number of enquiries from wedding parties and family groups looking to accommodate friends and families all on the one site, in a countryside setting and the extra unit would mean we would be able to accept such groups. The business we currently have is very viable and generates a good income for our family business and now we are beginning to employ local people."

I consider that the recent increase in demand is plausible given the pandemic has subsided and there is a current trend for UK based holidays. I consider that compliance with Part 2 Test A has been demonstrated.

With regard to Test B, although the scale is not excessive (one additional holiday let to add to five existing), the proposal largely fails to comply with Test B. The current building to be replaced is an untidy and ramshackle building in the middle of a visually exposed field and is prominent from the main road with very little screening. It appears very detached from the rest of the farm. It does not contribute positively to the character and appearance of the area but yet has a narrow and low-lying low-key temporary appearance that is not substantially intrusive in the landscape. The replacement building despite the attempt to replicate the form and dimensions of the existing, would be more solid in appearance with timber cladding on two layers of blockwork in contrast to the thin single skin shell of the poultry unit. The eaves and ridge height would also inevitably be higher in order to provide adequate habitable accommodation in accordance with Building Regulations. Windows would also need to be provided and although the windows facing the road are intended to be screened by timber shutters, they realistically would not be closed for long periods of time as guests would demand light (and the windows with shutters face the south). Due to the form of the proposed building, it would appear as a more solid and

substantial building (despite no great difference in dimensions or height), a standard new bungalow in contrast to a redundant and single-skinned chicken rearing unit.

I do not consider that the replacement of the building rather than its conversion under Part 3 Class Q of the GPDO, would be preferable simply because it does not appear possible to convert the building without significant rebuilding for the intended purpose and therefore would fail the tests applied to that part of the legislation.

As the siting of the proposed is the same as the existing and would be in an exposed location in the middle of a field, detached from the group of buildings, I consider the proposal would present a greater intrusion on the landscape and that proposed hedgerow provision would not provide adequate screening, particularly from long-range views and therefore would not lead to an enhancement to the landscape in this area, contrary to Test B.

Even more harmful would be the impact on the heritage qualities of the area. The nearest buildings are Grade II listed stone farmstead buildings. The proposed siting of the building would detract harmfully from the traditional farmstead arrangement and in terms of its design, form and materials, would not be sympathetic to the existing listed traditional buildings. Although detached from the historic farmstead and not being seen against the backdrop of those buildings from the road or public footpath crossing through the farmstead, when viewed from the road, the building, a more solid and substantial replacement for the existing, would be seen within the same view looking north-west from the road, as the listed historic buildings of the farmstead and would significantly detract from their setting. I consider the proposed building would lead to “less than substantial” harm to the setting of the listed building and the NPPF makes clear that proposals leading to such a level of harm should not be allowed unless there are public benefits to outweigh the harm. Whilst it is acknowledged that there would be some minor economic benefits associated with the provision of the tourist accommodation and associated economic benefits during the construction period, these would be modest relative to the level of harm identified and do not outweigh it. The proposal would also therefore not enhance the heritage qualities of the area and also harms interests of acknowledged importance.

With regard to impacts on biodiversity, no protected species would be harmed by the proposal. The Ecology Report stated the building survey revealed low potential for bats and that none were discovered. The demolition of the building and the provision of the proposal development would not harm the ecology value of the area although this impact, although not harmful, would be “neutral”. There is scope to improve the biodiversity value of the area through native planting and the installation of bat and bird boxes but this would not compensate for the clear harms to the landscape and heritage qualities of the site.

There are no other harms identified with the proposal and highway safety would not be affected as there is adequate parking provision in the existing parking area to the east of the farmhouse.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

Although there is some encouragement for new tourist facilities in the countryside and particularly in the Churnet Valley, the proposed holiday let building would significantly harm the character and appearance of the area and landscape particularly due to the harm to the historic farmstead setting of two Grade II listed buildings. The economic and tourism benefits of adding a different form of holiday let to the five existing holiday let units at the same property would be far outweighed by the less than substantial harm to the heritage assets and overall environmental harms identified. The Churnet Valley Masterplan also requires “minimal” new development outside of the areas identified for further tourism development and the site is not within an area identified for this and the proposal in being a new-build would not be deemed to be “minimal” despite replacing an existing building. The proposal therefore does not comply with policies SS10, SS11 and E4 of the Council’s Local Plan and also due to its siting, design and form in relation to its surroundings, also does not comply with policies DC1 and DC2 of the Local Plan. The application is also therefore not in line with the government planning guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : REFUSE

Case Officer: Chris Johnston

Recommendation Date: 15.12.22

X *B.J. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council