SYLVESTERS FARM

JOHN POINTON & SONS LTD

PLANNING STATEMENT

JUNE 2023

REFERENCE: 1302/J200048

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This planning statement has been prepared on behalf of John Pointon & Sons Ltd. It accompanies an application for retrospective consent for the change of use of the former agricultural storage building into B8 storage with associated operational development, and for an extension to the front of the barn for the site office and welfare. The application site is Sylvesters Farm, Rownall Road, Wetley Rocks, ST9 0BT.

1.2 Sylvesters Farm is located approximately 2 km north of the outer edge of Werrington and approximately 6km east of Hanley as shown in the image below. The site is indicated by the red pointer.

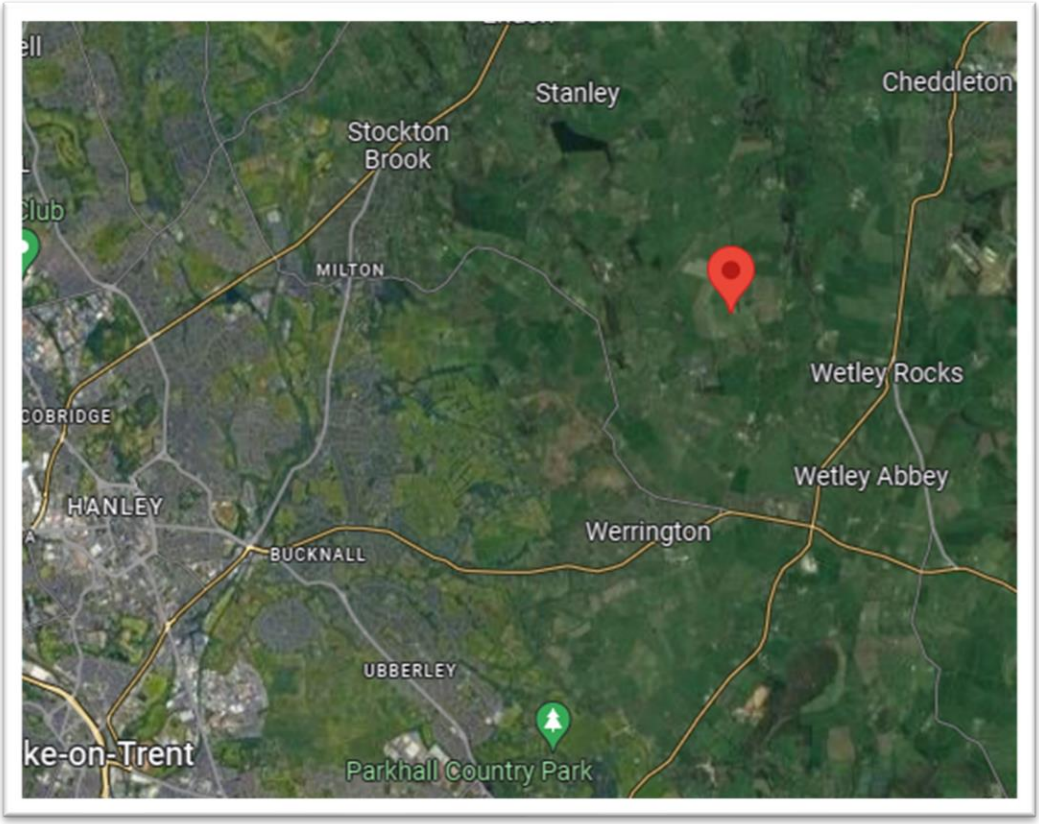


Figure 1: Site Location

2 THE PROPOSAL

SITE CONTEXT AND PROPOSAL

2.1 The site features a former, rectangular agricultural building. Roughly two-thirds of the building has been in B8 storage use for more than 10 years and is subject of a separate application to confirm its lawful use.

2.2 The proposal under this application includes:

- The change of use of the remaining third of the building to B8 storage use and associated development. This is shown on the plan extract below by the northernmost red edge.
- An extension to the existing building on the southeast corner.
- A replacement services housing building.

2.3 Each of these elements is described in further detail below. The access route to the highway is indicated by the red edge for compliance purposes. Extant permission exists for a cattle building, indicated to the west of the application building and annotated as such on the proposed site plan for completeness.

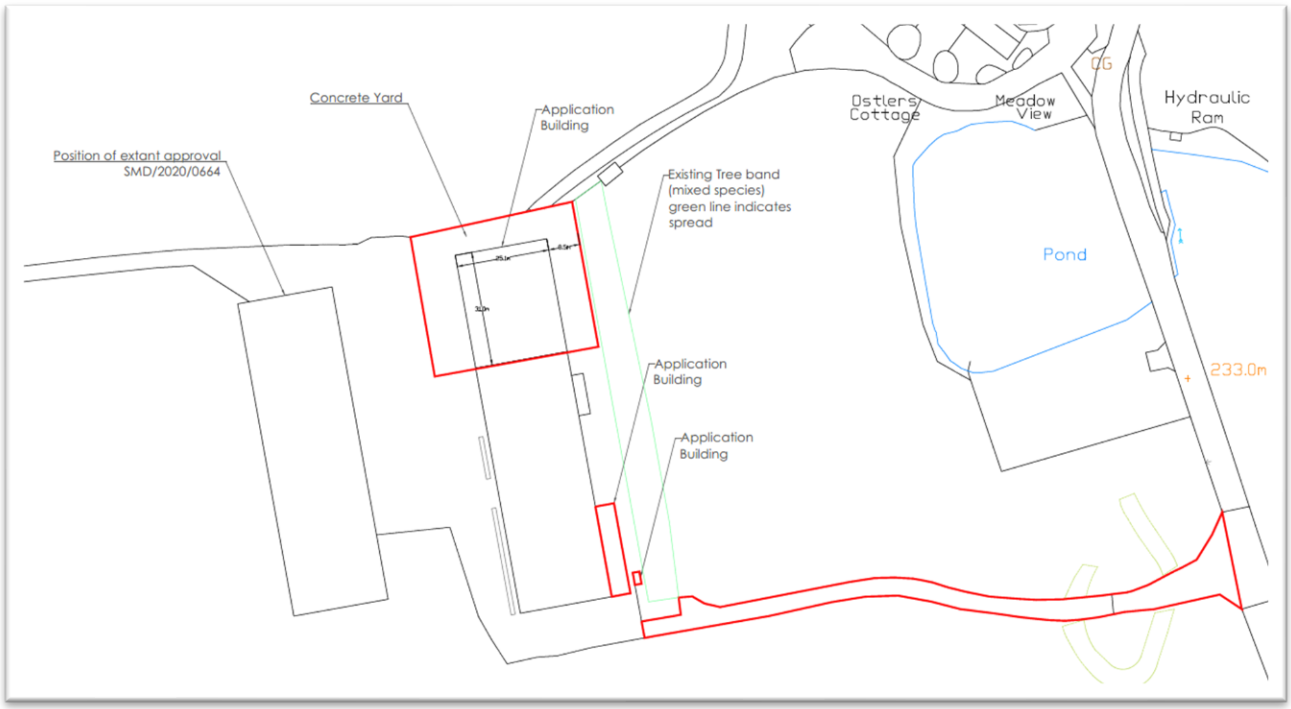


Figure 2: Site plan

CHANGE OF USE AND ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENT

2.4 The application seeks the retrospective change of use of the former agricultural storage building into B8 storage use.

2.5 To allow the former agricultural storage building to function as a secure B8 storage unit, the front elevation has been infilled with green box profile sheeting and a roller shutter entrance door has been added.



Figure 3: Building entrance

OFFICE/WELFARE EXTENSION AND SERVICES BUILDING

2.6 An office related to the B8 storage business has been constructed east of the main barn, finished in green-painted blockwork. This measures 5m x 25m and has a ridge height of 3.4m.

2.7 A detached replacement services housing building measuring 1.8m x 3.3m with a ridge height of 2.7m is located east of the office, also finished in green blockwork.

2.8 These are shown in the site photographs below.



Figure 4: Office/welfare extension and services building

LAYOUT

2.9 The operational layout of the site makes use of the existing yard areas and land immediately surrounding the building.

ACCESS AND PARKING

2.10 The site provides ample space for vehicle manoeuvres. Formal parking is not considered to be required due to the proposed use with the availability of several vehicles in front of the building for parking and unloading.

2.11 The site entrance does not confront any neighbouring properties and consequently keeps disruption at a minimum. The site offers direct access onto Rownall Road, which connects to the A52 toward the south. The site access and agricultural uses have been used for B8 purposes for more than ten years. A Transport Note is submitted with the application.

TREES

2.12 There are no protected trees on the site. The proposed development doesn't require the removal of trees.

3 PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

3.1 Sylvesters Farm lies within the Staffordshire Moorlands Council area. The Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan was adopted on 9 September 2020 and sets out the council's vision and strategy for the district until 2033. The adopted Local Plan has replaced the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy 2014.

3.2 The site is located in the Green Belt, as shown in the image below from the 2020 adopted Local Plan map. No other local plan policies or designations are identified on the Local Plan map.



Figure 5: Local Plan proposals map

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS LOCAL PLAN 2014 - 2033

3.3 The relevant policies are set out below:

VISION FOR THE RURAL AREAS

3.4 The vision for the rural areas includes the following:

> *There will be a more **vibrant and diverse rural economy** which will provide a range of local job opportunities…*

POLICY E1

3.5 Policy E1 sets out the Council's approach to new employment development. It endeavours to support the expansion of existing businesses and new businesses by a number of provisions, including:

> *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;

> *Encourage provision for small-scale and start-up businesses*

POLICY SS 8

3.6 Policy SS 8 identifies the development strategy for larger village areas such as Wetley Rocks. The policy is supportive of the redevelopment of rural land by:

> *Meeting limited employment needs by enabling small scale new employment development*

POLICY SS 10

3.7 Policy SS 10 identifies the development strategy for development in the countryside and green belt. The policy is supportive of sustaining the rural economy by:

> *Enabling the limited expansion or development of business for employment users*
>
> *Supporting the **diversification of existing farm enterprises***

3.8 Development in the Green Belt defers to the national policy:

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

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK 2021

3.9 The National Planning Policy Framework 2021 is a material consideration in the determination of this application. The relevant paragraphs relating to the proposal and conditions include:

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

3.10 Paragraphs 8 - 11 of the NPPF set out a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

3.11 The framework gives significant weight to economic growth stating at paragraph 81:

> *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.*

3.12 Specifically relating to supporting a prosperous rural economy, paragraph 84 states:

> *Planning policies and decisions should enable:*
>
> *a) the sustainable growth and* ***expansion of all types of business in rural areas****, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*
>
> *b) the development and* ***diversification of agricultural*** *and other land-based rural businesses;*

MAKING EFFECTIVE USE OF LAND

3.13 Section 11 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses.

3.14 Paragraph 120 d) states

> *promote and support the development of under-utilised land and* ***buildings****…*

GREEN BELT

3.15 Section 13 of the NPPF details Green Belt policy, paragraph 137 sets out the overarching aim of Green Belt:

> *The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.*

3.16 Paragraph 138 details the purposes of Green Belt:

- *to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*

- *to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
- *to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
- *to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
- *to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.*

3.17 Paragraph 149 outlines exemptions to inappropriate development and point c) states:

> *the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does* ***not result in disproportionate additions*** *over and above the size of the original building*

3.18 Paragraph 149 point d) states

> *the* ***replacement of a building****, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;*

3.19 Paragraph 150 sets out additional forms of development that are not inappropriate. It includes point d) and e) which states:

> *the* ***re-use of buildings*** *provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction*
>
> ***material changes in the use of land*** *(such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds);*

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, FLOODING AND COASTAL CHANGE

3.20 Paragraph 152 of the framework provides further evidence of the desire to re-use existing buildings to contribute towards tackling climate change:

> *The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change. It should help to shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience;* ***encourage the re-use of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings****; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.*

4 COMPARABLE APPROVAL AT WAYFIELDS FARM

4.1 The example below details development of a similar nature to that proposed under this application. The comparable was a recent approval for development considered under the same policy considerations.

SMD/2021/0483 - WAYFIELDS FARM, WETLEY ROCKS

4.2 The application at Wayfields Farm was approved for the the change of use of land and buildings from agricultural to business and B8 use with associated new openings. The site was located in the Green Belt.

4.3 The crux of the assessment made by the officer was whether or not the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and in this regard the officer stated the following -

> ***"The two buildings are solid metal framed warehouse buildings and the change of use of these would, under the NPPF guidance, not be inappropriate or harmful to the Green Belt."***
>
> ***"I therefore consider the principle of the change of use of the two buildings to be acceptable."***
>
> ***"The changes of use to other commercial uses would also not be contrary to other policies in the Local Plan which allow changes of use of rural buildings or new employment uses in the countryside where this involves the change of use of an existing building, in the interests of the rural economy and local employment opportunities…"***

4.4 With regard to highways considerations the officer stated the following -

> ***"On the basis that the buildings be restricted to storage/distribution uses and light industry/research uses within the two smaller buildings, the local highways authority consider there would not be a significant increase in vehicle movements beyond that of the previous approved agricultural uses…"***
>
> ***"Parking provision for the two buildings/four units within the ample yard area is considered sufficient and would not lead to pressure to park on the lane running past the site to the detriment of highway safety."***

4.5 With regard to impacts upon residential amenity the officer stated the following -

> ***"Given the approved agricultural workings that can take place in the buildings, it is not considered the proposed light industrial, research or storage and distribution uses would lead to significant further harm to the living conditions and residential amenities of the nearest dwellings…"***

5 APPRAISAL

PRINCIPLE

EXTENSION

5.1 The principle of an extension is acceptable under the Green Belt exceptions listed at paragraph 149 (c) of the NPPF. This paragraph allows for extensions to buildings provided they are not a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building.

5.2 In the case of this application, the eastern office extension represents an increase of 3% volume over the original building. The development is therefore not considered to be a disproportionate addition and compliant with the exemption.

REPLACEMENT BUILDING

5.3 Paragraph 149 (d) of the NPFF allows for replacement buildings, provided they are in the same use and not materially larger than what they replace. The services building has replaced a previous services building of the same scale and is therefore acceptable.

CHANGE OF USE

5.4 Policy SS 10 advises that areas of the countryside within the Green Belt will be subject to additional restrictions and defers to the National Planning Policy Framework.

5.5 Paragraph 150 of the Framework allows certain forms of development, *'provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt'.* The types of development include

- (d) *'the **re-use of buildings** provided that the buildings are of **permanent and substantial** construction* and

- (e) '***material changes in the use of land** (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds)'*

5.6 The former agricultural storage building has been in its current format for a significant amount of time. It could not be described as anything other than being of permanent and substantial construction.

5.7 The former agricultural storage building was used for general agricultural storage until February 2023. The change of use therefore relates to the storage of different items, and is only an internal change within the building. It is considered that this does not conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt nor impact upon openness. It would therefore be compliant with the exceptions set out in paragraph 150 of the Framework.

5.8 Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan policy E 1 states schemes involving the re-use of rural buildings for commercial enterprise, will be considered favourably. The policy has a positive slant,

encouraging economic and commercial enterprise within rural communities. Further support for economic purposes is seen within policy E 1 in which the council aim to *'encourage the provision for small-scale and start-up businesses'.*

5.9 Furthermore, Policy SS 10 reinforces this affirming that the council want to sustain the rural economy by enabling the limited expansion or development for employment uses and support the diversification of existing farm enterprises. The proposed use replaces the previous agricultural use, with another economic benefit in the countryside within an existing building of a suitable size and setting.

5.10 The NPPF supports the expansion and development of the rural economy. Paragraph 81 of the Framework advises that *'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'*. Furthermore, the proposal is supported by core planning principles that recognise the importance of re-using land and buildings.

5.11 Paragraph 84 of the Framework encourages the conversion of existing buildings to enable growth and expansion within the rural area. The efficient use of land is welcomed by paragraph 120, which specifically outlines that policies and decisions should support the development of under-utilised land and buildings. Further backing for re-using buildings continues through paragraph 152, where it considers that converting existing buildings can help transition to a low-carbon future.

5.12 One of the challenges Staffordshire Moorlands Council have highlighted is the need to tackle economic decline in the rural areas. It is stated that economic development needs to recognise the contribution which the rural areas make to the district's economy. Due to the sustainability of sites, there is often limited scope to accommodate significant new development in rural areas. There is now a *'need to exploit opportunities arising from the closure of developed areas in the countryside'.*

5.13 The proposed development is considered to be acceptable in principle. Further assessment of other matters is carried out below.

DESIGN

5.14 The office extension is simple in its form and has been designed to be visually subordinate to the larger barn. The elevational alteration to the former agricultural storage building has not resulted in any additional floor space and creates a coherent design within its context alongside the remaining part of the building. The materials used ensure that the development has an acceptable appearance.

RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

5.15 The nearest residential property is located some 630m west of the application building and this distance will ensure that there are no impacts upon amenity. The continued use of the building for B8 is not considered to attract significant movement or generate noise. The use of the application buildings for their proposed uses are not considered to be intrusive to residential amenity and can be controlled by planning conditions where necessary.

HIGHWAYS

5.16 A Transport Note prepared by Eddisions is submitted in support of the application. This concludes that the proposed increase in vehicle movements would not result in a material impact on the local highway network

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 John Pointon & Sons Ltd are the owners of Sylvesters Farm. The former agricultural storage building is no longer required for agriculture at the site; the grant of planning approval will allow the building to continue to be used for an alternative economic use that is compatible with the existing use within the rest of the building.

6.2 The building is considered to be appropriate for the proposed storage use. The principle of the re-use of buildings within the countryside and Green Belt attracts significant support throughout the national and local policy.

6.3 The office extension is not a disproportionate addition and is necessary for the functioning of the B8 use. The application site provides suitable access and safeguards residential amenity. The services building is a replacement building of the same use and scale.

6.4 The proposal is considered to be a sustainable form of development that is consistent with the policies in the development plan and the Framework. It is, therefore, respectfully requested that the application is approved without delay.