

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

DET/2021/0027
Valid 30/06/2021

OAKAPPLE FARM
MEERBROOK ROAD
LEEK

PROPOSED AGRICULTURAL
BARN AND POLYTUNNEL

(AGRICULTURAL/FORESTRY
DETERMINATION)

MAIN ISSUES

- Siting
- Design
- External appearance

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The location is a relatively open and prominent rural meadow currently grazed as sheep pasture. The land is relatively level to the north alongside the road but then rolls away abruptly to the SE into a small distinct valley. The total holding is stated as being 5.1ha and this appears to be confirmed by scaling from the submitted location block plan 1:2500 drawing. There are drystone wall boundaries to the northerly roadside and to the west field edge. There is an entrance from the road in the NW corner which appears recently enlarged and newly surfaced. There are trees and a gappy hedge forming the easterly boundary following the line of a slight gully. There is recent new tree / shrub planting to the westerly boundary. There is a minor makeshift shelter in the lee of the field out of sight from the road well towards the south east of the site. This coincides with the position of a small marked building present on early OS mapping (c.1900).

The site is not associated with any existing farm. The nearest properties are Folly Rest about 130m to the SW and Franklins and Parkfields two farms c.100m and 200m to the north. The site has its northerly boundary with the single track C195 Meerbrook Road.

A public footpath crosses within c.100m to the NW and a further public footpath more-or-less following the ridge 500m to the south affords clear views to the site and surrounding landscape. The area generally is attractive high quality countryside and part of the Gritstone Highland Fringe landscape character type as defined in the Council's Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2008) assessed as being 'very high' quality, the highest ranking in the five point scale used in the County-wide survey.

PROPOSAL

The proposal comprises two structures, an enclosed building 20m x 10m with eaves 5m and ridge 7m high finished externally in green corrugated cladding with high

roller shutter doors to both ends and on one long side. There would also be a poly tunnel 15m x 8m to ridge top height of 3m.

The solid walled 20m x 10m building would be set against the falling slope of the field at a point some 120m south from the road. The poly tunnel would be some 50m further to the south and lower on the slope, set in a partial hollow or depression in the slope.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan (adopted 9th September 2020)

SS1 Development Principles
SS10 Other Rural Areas Area Strategy
DC1 Design Considerations
DC2 The Historic Environment
DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting
E1 New Employment Development
NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources
NE2 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

National Planning Policy Framework Dec 2023

Paragraph(s) 1 – 14;

Section(s) 4 – Decision making; 6 – Building a strong and competitive economy; 8 – promoting healthy and safe communities; 11 – Making effective use of land; 12 – Achieving well designed and beautiful places; 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment; 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Adopted Supplementary Planning Documents/Guidance (SPD/G):

- Space About Dwellings SPG
- Design Principles SPG
- Design Guide SPD adopted 21st February 2018

Local Plan Supporting Evidence Documents:

- Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2008)

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

DET/2020/0013 – Proposed agricultural barn – prior notice required – not applied for

DET/2021/0027 – Proposed agricultural barn and polytunnel – prior approval required [subject of this report] issued 28th July 2021

10/00266/FUL gave consent to an agricultural building now built in a field to the west adjacent to Folly Rest.

94/00397/OLD refused consent for the siting of a residential caravan on land adjacent to the far SE of the application holding.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 25th July 2021

Public Comments

Concern raised by local resident that the site is being used as an 'unauthorised campsite for commercial purposes' and is not nor ever has been a working farm.

Town / Parish Comments

Leekfrith Parish Council (July 2021) – no consultation response received.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

The issues open for the LPA to consider are the matters solely of siting, design and external appearance. If found acceptable on those counts the development can proceed but would be limited exclusively to use for bone-fide agriculture / horticulture.

The development must be 'reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture within the meaning and definitions of GPDO(2015) Schedule 2 Part 6. This can include horticulture and it is understood that this may be the primary intended activity of the applicant on this site with the building used for storage and handling.

Siting

In terms of siting the location is usefully part hidden at least from the roadside and views generally from the 180 degree arc of land to the north due to being in the lee of a marked slope-change running east west across the land some 120m from the road. There are views towards the site from rising ground to the south east near North Hillswood where there is a public footpath at some 300m distant. Here the development will be visible but should not be unduly prominent as it would be seen largely against the backdrop of rising ground and in a setting where other scattered rural buildings and active farm steads occur. The overall development should not seem especially out-of-place and / or should be sufficiently reduced in visual impact by the topography of the area and the structure positions.

Design /External Appearance

The polytunnel would appear a relatively ephemeral structure and is tucked toward the bottom of the land slope towards the valley. It should not be unduly conspicuous.

The main shed building would be a relatively substantial structure. The nature of its intended use as protective storage is understood to be the reason for the solid and secure design including metal clad external finishes. It is judged on balance tolerable in this rural location due to its advantageous position with the lie of the land as noted under Siting (above).

Other matters

A public comment has raised concern that the site was being used / may be used for overnight stays. There is however nothing in this consent, if granted, that would legitimise overnight visitor presence beyond any existing rights of the owner(s) to camp on the land from time-to-time – potentially up to 28 days in the year. If infringements were to occur beyond permissible limits these would need to be investigated and potentially made subject to enforcement action.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

In an earlier proposal (DET/2020/0013) the building was to have been very prominently located on the exposed flat of the land near the public road. The applicant did not pursue this but was advised that it was likely to be found unduly harmful in its siting and appearance. The development now being considered can be judged on balance tolerable in the new location proposed for the reasons discussed in the report. If consent is granted the decision notice should very clearly set out the limitations and conditions under part 6.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : PNREQ – approve

Case Officer: Arne Swithenbank

Recommendation Date: 09/02/2024

X 

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council