

PLANNING STATEMENT

FORMER BLACKSMITHS ARMS ALTON

MAY 2024

Site Address:

Former Blacksmiths Arms, Tythe Barn, Alton, ST10 4AZ

Applicant:

Mr. & Mrs. Power-Vaughan

Proposal:

Change of use and alteration of former public house to form 3no.
apartments

Planning Statement:

Date Issued: 15th May 2024

Job Reference: RDP/2024/042

Report Prepared By:

Rob Duncan BSc(Hons) MA MRTPI
Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd

Contact Details:

Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd.
28 Ferndale Road, Lichfield, Staffordshire, WS13 7DJ
Email: rob78duncan@gmail.com
Tel. 07779 783521

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Mr. & Mrs. Power-Vaughan to seek full planning permission for the change of use and alteration of the former Blacksmiths Arms, Tythe Barn, Alton to form 3no. apartments.
- 1.2 By way of background the public house ceased trading back in 2020 at the onset of the Covid-19 Pandemic and has remained closed since that time. Consent has previously been sought for the change of use of the premises to a single dwellinghouse by way of a prior approval application (DET/2021/0015) but that was refused by the Local Authority on the grounds that public houses cannot be converted via Permitted Development. Full planning permission is required for such proposals.
- 1.3 This full application proposes to change of use of the public house to provide 3no. apartments. Each apartment will comprise of an open plan living / dining area, kitchen, utility, w.c. and cloakroom at ground floor, with stairs leading up to three bedrooms (one ensuite) and family bathroom at first floor.
- 1.4 External alterations to the building are proposed in the form of the insertion / enlargement of existing openings, the application of render to part of the building, the addition of chimney details and formation of a subdividing low-level wall and screen to the rear amenity spaces.
- 1.5 Each apartment will benefit from its own area of individual amenity space, along with access to a communal area of garden that will extend around the eastern and southeastern perimeters of the site. Off-street parking for 3no. vehicles per unit is also proposed on the existing car park, with access onto the public highway being via the existing vehicular access that previously served the pub.

2. Site & Surroundings

- 2.1 The application site is located within the defined settlement boundary of Alton and comprises an irregularly shaped parcel of land that extends to approximately 0.13 hectares. The former public house is positioned towards the western site boundary, with a large area of hardstanding that was formerly the pub car park, extending to its east and southeast.
- 2.2 The eastern boundary of the site is enclosed by a low dry stone wall and mature vegetation, beyond which runs the carriageway of Nabb Lane. Further to the east beyond the carriageway of Nabb Lane lies Nabb Cottage which comprises a Grade II Listed Building. Additional built development extends along Nabb Lane to the southeast.
- 2.3 Residential development also extends in a southwesterly direction away from the site, with the carriageway of Tythe Barn enclosing the northern site boundary. Further residential development lies to the north and northeast of the site on the opposite side of the carriageway (Fox House / Jasmine Cottage).
- 2.4 The site is located within Flood Zone 1 (low-probability of flooding) and comprises a previously developed site. The site is not within the Alton Conservation Area.

3. Planning Policy

3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the Development Plan taking into consideration any relevant material considerations. The Development Plan for this area comprises the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020) of which the following policies are considered to be relevant to the determination of the application:

3.2 Policy SS1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Development Principles' and states that the Council will expect the development and use of land to contribute positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands in terms of delivering, in partnership with other agencies and services:

- a mix of types and tenures of quality, affordable homes, to meet the needs and aspirations of the existing and future communities.
- quality local services, including provision for education, healthcare, leisure, community, cultural and tourist facilities in response to anticipated population change and visitor numbers.
- easy access to jobs, shops and transport services by all sections of the community.
- increased economic prosperity and opportunities for employment and greater local capacity with an educated, skilled and flexible workforce.

- a healthy, safe, attractive, active, well-designed and well-maintained environment.
- development which maintains the locally distinctive character of the Staffordshire Moorlands, its individual towns and villages and their settings.
- development that is 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, both now and for future generations.
- support development which secures high quality, sustainable environments, efficient and effective use of resources and contributes effectively to tackling climate change and reduced carbon emissions.

3.3 Policy SS3 of the Local Plan relates to the 'Future Provision and Distribution of Development' and states that provision will be made for at least 6080 additional dwellings (net of demolitions) to be completed in Staffordshire Moorlands during the period 2014 to 2033 - an annual average of 320 homes per year. Sufficient deliverable land will be identified to provide at least 5 years of development at all times. The policy goes on to confirm that 25% of the total housing requirement will be delivered within the rural areas.

3.4 Policy SS8 of the Local Plan relates to the 'Larger Villages Areas Strategy' and confirms Alton to constitute a larger village. The policy states that the larger villages shall retain and enhance their role as rural service centres, providing for the bulk of the housing requirement of the rural areas and also for employment needs of a scale and type appropriate to each settlement having

regard to infrastructure capacity and character. This will be achieved through a number of actions, including:

- Protecting community facilities where loss would be deemed to reduce the community's ability to meet it's day to day needs
- Increasing the range of available and affordable house types, including for first time buyers and families
- Supporting the development of housing windfall sites within the village boundaries, subject to wider Local Plan policies
- Giving priority to the reuse and regeneration of existing redundant, underused or surplus sites and premises for new development
- Ensuring that development is of a suitable scale in relation to the role and function of the villages as set out in the Spatial Strategy
- Protecting and enhancing the setting and historic character of the village, including heritage assets

3.5 Policy H1 of the Local Plan relates to 'New Housing Development' and states that, amongst other requirements:

- New housing development should provide for a mix of housing sizes, types and tenure including a proportion of affordable housing as set out in Policy H3, and where appropriate housing for special groups, to meet the needs and aspirations of the current and future population having regard to the Area Strategies.

- All development will be assessed according to the extent to which it provides for high quality, sustainable housing and to which it meets identified housing needs, having regard to the location of the development, the characteristics of the site and the economics of provision.
- All housing development should be at the most appropriate density compatible with the site and its location, and with the character of the surrounding area. Higher densities will generally be appropriate in locations which are more accessible by public transport and which have good access to services.
- 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 in accordance with the Nationally Described Space standard and delivered to meet accessibility standards set out in the Optional Requirement M4(2) of Part M of the Building Regulations. This will be determined on a site-by-site basis subject to considerations such as viability and design.
- All new dwellings must be of sufficient size to provide satisfactory levels of amenity for future occupiers of the dwellings whilst respecting the privacy and amenity of occupiers of existing dwellings.
- Housing development on sites not allocated for such purposes in Policy H2 will be supported within the development boundaries of the towns and larger villages subject to compliance with the Spatial Strategy and wider Local Plan policies.

3.6 Policy C1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Creating Sustainable Communities' and states that the Council will resist proposals involving the loss of community facilities unless:

- a) an alternative facility of the same type and quality that meets the needs of the community is available in the locality or can be provided in an accessible location in the same locality; or
- b) a viability appraisal including a marketing exercise by a qualified professional demonstrates that there are no options for continued or shared use as any type of community facility which are financially viable and it can be demonstrated that loss of the facility would not disadvantage local residents.

3.7 Policy DC1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Design Considerations' and states that 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.
- 3. create, where appropriate, attractive, active, functional, accessible and safe public and private environments which incorporate public spaces, green infrastructure including making provision for networks of multi-

functional new and existing green space (both public and private), landscaping, public art, 'designing out crime' initiatives and the principles of Active Design.

4. incorporate sustainable construction techniques and design concepts for buildings and their layouts to reduce the impact of the development.
5. protect the amenity of the area, including creation of healthy active environments and residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, visual impact, sunlight, outlook, privacy, soft landscaping as well as noise, odour and light pollution.
6. promote the maintenance, enhancement, restoration and re-creation of biodiversity and geological heritage, where appropriate.
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.
9. ensure that existing drainage, waste water and sewerage infrastructure capacity is available, and where necessary enhanced, to enable the development to proceed.
10. ensure, where appropriate, equality of access and use for all sections of the community.
11. be served by high speed broadband (>30mbps) unless it can be demonstrated through consultation with Next Generation Access Network

providers that this would not be possible, practical or economically viable. In all circumstances during construction of the site sufficient and suitable ducting should be provided within the site and to the property to facilitate ease of installation at a future date.

3.8 Policy DC2 of the Local Plan relates to 'The Historic Environment' and states that:

1. The Council will conserve and where possible enhance heritage assets, including their setting in a manner appropriate to their significance. This will take into account the desirability of maintaining and enhancing their significance and will ensure that development proposals contribute positively to the character of the built and historic environment.
2. Protection will be given to designated heritage assets and their settings and non-designated heritage assets as set out in the NPPF.
3. All applications likely to affect heritage assets will require the submission of a heritage statement, including a qualitative visual assessment where appropriate.
4. Where development is likely to affect archaeology, both designated and undesignated, the Council requires the submission of a desk based assessment, and where appropriate, field surveys and trench evaluation by a qualified professional.
5. Where the loss of significance is unavoidable, recording should take place and this should be added to the Historic Environment Record as a minimum, held by Staffordshire County Council.

6. The Council will continue its proactive approach to heritage assets at risk and welcomes development proposals which would result in the sympathetic reuse of these assets in line with NPPF policy.
7. The Council will promote development which sustains, respects or enhances buildings and features which contribute to the character or heritage of an area and those interests of acknowledged importance through the use of Conservation Area Appraisals, Design Guidance and Statements, Archaeological Assessments, Characterisation Studies and Masterplanning.

3.9 Policy NE1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Biodiversity and Geological Resources' and states that such resources will be conserved and enhanced by positive management and strict control of development by (amongst other measures):

- Expecting all development where possible seeks to deliver a net gain in biodiversity proportionate to the size and scale of the development. In circumstances where adverse impacts are demonstrated to be unavoidable, developers will be required to ensure that impacts are appropriately mitigated, with suitable compensation measures towards loss of habitat used only as a last resort where there is no alternative. Where any mitigation and compensation measures are required, they should be appropriately scheduled and managed according to the nature, size and scale of the development so as to minimise impacts that may disturb protected or important habitats and species.

3.10 Policy T1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Development and Sustainable Transport' and states that the Council will promote and support development which 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. This will be achieved by:

1. Ensuring that all new development is located where the highway network can satisfactorily accommodate traffic generated by the development or can be improved as part of the development.
2. Ensuring that major development is located in areas that are accessible by sustainable travel modes or can be made accessible as part of the proposal.
3. Considering appropriate parking provision on a case by case basis with recourse to the parking guidance set out in Appendix 2.
4. Where appropriate all new development shall facilitate walking and cycling within neighbourhoods and town centres, and link with or extend identified walking or cycling routes. In addition applicants should also consider how their schemes can enhance the existing path network in line with the Staffordshire County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan and also give consideration to the protection of non-definitive public footpath routes in addition to definitive routes.

4 Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework seeks to secure the delivery of sustainable development and sets out policies, *inter-alia*, in respect of significantly boosting the supply of housing, supporting the redevelopment of previously developed sites, protecting community facilities, safeguarding heritage assets, securing high quality design, ensuring highway safety and delivering a net gain to biodiversity. The content of the NPPF has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide SPD

- 4.2 The adopted Design Guide SPD sets out guidance aimed at securing high quality design within the Moorlands, including considerations such as form, detailed design and materials. The content of the Design Guide has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

Staffordshire Moorlands Space about Dwellings SPG

- 4.3 The adopted Space About Dwellings SPG provides a series of numerical standards that new development should seek to achieve in the interests of safeguarding residential amenity. The content of the Space About Dwellings SPG has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

5 Planning Assessment

Principle of Development

- 5.1 The application site is located within the adopted settlement boundary of Alton wherein new residential development is supported. In this case the proposal involves the reuse of an underutilised building to provide 3no. apartments on a site which comprises previously-developed land. The principle of residential development on this site is consequently considered to be acceptable, in accordance with the provisions of policy SS8 of the Local Plan.
- 5.2 It is acknowledged that the proposed development will see the loss of the public house as a community facility, but the public house itself has already been closed for over 4 years. Policy C1 of the Local Plan confirms that the Council will resist proposals involving the loss of community facilities unless an alternative facility of the same type and quality that meets the needs of the community is available in the locality, or a viability appraisal demonstrates that there are no options for continued or shared use as a community facility which are financially viable.
- 5.3 In this case the village of Alton is noted to benefit from four other similar facilities, namely:
- The Bridge House Hotel & Restaurant (915m)
 - The Talbot Public House (915m)
 - The Bulls Head (600m)
 - The White Hart (675m)
- 5.4 These premises are of the same type and quality as the former Blacksmiths Arms, with good public reviews (4.5 out of 5 upwards) and all lie within the recognised threshold distance for walking (2km). The day-to-day needs of the

local community will therefore continue to be met by these other alternative community facilities and they will not be prejudiced by the loss of the Blacksmiths Arms. The proposed change of use is consequently held to meet the requirements of policies C1 and SS8 of the Local Plan.

- 5.5 In addition to the above considerations, the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) need to be taken into account. Paragraph 123 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, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that **makes as much use as possible of previously-developed or ‘brownfield’ land**” (our emphasis)*

- 5.6 Paragraph 124 of the NPPF adds that planning decisions should:

*“**promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially if this would help to meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained** and available sites could be used more effectively (for example converting space above shops, and building on or above service yards, car parks, lock-ups and railway infrastructure)” (our emphasis)*

- 5.7 Whilst the Local Authority is not currently required to demonstrate a five year deliverable supply of housing following recent revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework, it remains the case that it has a significant shortfall

in housing against its targets for housing delivery as set out in the Local Plan, and once the Local Plan becomes five years old in September 2025 the Local Authority will continue to have less than a five year supply of housing.

5.8 Policy SS3 of the Local Plan states that the Local Authority will deliver an annual average of 320 dwellings per year over the plan period 2014 – 2033. A review of the Local Authority's Annual Monitoring Report confirms that this **annualised target has not once been met**. Since 2014/15 the Local Authority has delivered 1,635 dwellings (up to April 2023) which equates to an average of 182 dwellings per annum, well below the commitment of 320 dwellings set out within policy SS3 of the Local Plan.

5.9 The proposed development will make beneficial reuse of an under-utilised building and previously-developed site to deliver 3no. dwellinghouses, in a sustainable location within the settlement boundary of a larger village. The provisions of paragraphs 123 and 124 of the National Planning Policy Framework consequently lend considerable weight in favour of this application being approved.

Design & Layout

5.10 The existing building comprises a two storey structure constructed from a mixed palette of materials. There is natural stone to the northern elevation, with red facing brickwork to the remainder. The roof is finished in Staffordshire blue tiles. A number of window openings exist on all elevations.

5.11 The application adopts a sensitive approach to the alteration of the building and has been guided by advice provided by the applicant's Heritage Consultant. The application proposes to reinstate one of the former chimney stacks to the front range, and introduce a further chimney stack to the elongated rear range, which will help to punctuate its appearance and reduce

its apparent scale. Render is also to be applied to part of the building, which along with the provision of a new entrance door will further break up the apparent scale of the building.

- 5.12 The proposal otherwise makes beneficial reuse / alteration of existing openings in order to preserve the character (such as it is) of the existing building and it is submitted that the proposed alterations to the building will modestly enhance its appearance, and will not detract from the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
- 5.13 External alterations to the car parking area will further enhance the appearance of the site, providing an area of communal amenity space / planting along the eastern, northeastern and southeastern perimeters of the site, with parking set-in behind. This area is currently all laid to hardstanding so such changes will represent a further enhancement to the appearance of the site. The proposed development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policies SS1, SS8 and DC1 of the Local Plan and the provisions of the NPPF in this regard.

Heritage Impact

- 5.14 The accompanying Heritage Statement notes that the Blacksmiths Arms dates from the 1870s or thereabouts and has been the subject of extensive modern additions of a bland and over-scaled character. It notes the beneficial enhancements proposed to the external appearance and exterior layout of the site (discussed in the preceding section), and concludes that the impact of the proposal on the building will be mildly positive, and that the development as a whole will not cause any harm to nearby heritage assets or their settings. The proposed development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policy DC2 of the Local Plan and the provisions of the NPPF in this regard.

Residential Amenity

- 5.15 The proposed apartments are spaciously proportioned such that all three units will comfortably exceed the minimum floorspace requirements set out within the Nationally Described Space Standard (policy H1 refers). These floor areas are summarised in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 – Assessment of Floor Areas

	Required NDSS Area	Proposed Floor Area
Apartment 1	102m ²	128m ²
Apartment 2	102m ²	195m ²
Apartment 3	102m ²	185m ²

- 5.16 In terms of amenity space, Apartment 1 will have an area of amenity space extending to the south of the building adjacent to its gable end, along with part of the existing first floor terrace. Apartment 2 will have an area of amenity space to the west of the building, as well as the other half of the existing first floor terrace. Apartment 3 will have an area of amenity space at the front of the building, enclosed by the existing dry stone wall. All three apartments will also benefit from shared use of a communal area of amenity space that will extend around the northeastern / eastern / southeastern perimeters of the site. By resultant effect future occupiers of the dwellings will be afforded a good standard of residential amenity.
- 5.17 The proposed change of use will not give rise to any material loss of amenity to the occupiers of the neighbouring properties to the west, north and east. Views from the north facing windows will face towards an existing gated driveway and high level brick wall associated with Fox House, and consequently will not derive any loss of amenity to the occupiers of that property. The eastern facing windows will lie some 33m distant from the

nearest windows in Nabb Cottage and thereby derive no conflict with the Space About Dwellings standards.

- 5.18 The neighbouring property to the west (Sandstones) is noted to have a number of side facing windows that look out towards the western elevation of the existing building. The application nevertheless does not propose any extensions to the building, nor any encroachment towards that neighbouring property, and the existing first floor terrace is already used as an area of amenity space by the occupiers of the first floor accommodation on the site. The proposed development will therefore not lead to any greater degree of harm to residential amenity than that which already occurs.
- 5.19 It is consequently concluded that the proposed development will provide an acceptable level of residential amenity for its future occupiers and will not detract from the amenity of existing neighbouring occupiers. The development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policies H1 and DC1 of the Local Plan in this regard.

Highway Safety

- 5.20 The application site benefits from an existing means of vehicular access along its northern boundary which has previously served the public house, and which connects with the carriageway of Tythe Barn close to its junction with Denstone Lane, Uttoxeter Road and Saltersford Lane. The site also occupies a sustainable location on the edge of one of the larger villages, with day-to-day services accessible on foot and by bicycle.
- 5.21 The existing access is to be repurposed as part of the application to serve the 3no. apartments, and whilst its visibility to oncoming traffic to the east is substandard owing to the bend in the carriageway, we submit that the proposal will still represent a betterment to highway safety as the proposal will

result in a reduction in vehicle movements using the access compared to the lawful use of the site as a public house where considerably greater vehicle movements could have been expected.

- 5.22 The existing access is wide enough for two vehicles to pass and will provide access to a new parking / turning area, with 3no. off-street parking spaces provided for each apartment, in accordance with the Local Authority's adopted Parking Standards. No severe residual impacts to highway safety will therefore arise, and as such the proposal is held to meet the requirements of policy T1 of the Local Plan and guidance contained within the NPPF.

Biodiversity

- 5.23 The proposal falls below the statutory threshold for demonstrating a net gain to biodiversity, as the vast majority of the site is laid to hardstanding, as either car park to the former public house, or as patio areas. A net gain to biodiversity will nevertheless still be achieved through the provision of the new communal amenity space along the eastern and south eastern perimeters of the site, and through new landscaping along those boundaries. The applicant is also agreeable to installing a bat box and bird box on the existing building to further enhance biodiversity.
- 5.24 Such ecological enhancement measures can be secured via a suitably worded planning condition and in doing so the development will deliver a net gain to biodiversity, in accordance with the provisions of policy NE1 of the Local Plan and guidance contained within the NPPF.

6 Conclusion

6.1 The submitted proposal represents an appropriate form of sustainable development having regard to the following conclusions:

- The principle of residential development on the site is acceptable as the proposal makes beneficial reuse of an under-utilised building on a previously developed site, within the adopted settlement boundary of a larger village.
- The design and layout of the development will modestly enhance the appearance of the building and not detract from the character and appearance of the area.
- The proposal will not give rise to any harm to nearby heritage assets.
- The proposal will provide an acceptable level of residential amenity for future occupants and avoid any adverse impacts on neighbouring occupiers.
- The proposed development will not detract from highway safety within the locality and will provide adequate off-street parking to meet the needs of future occupiers of the dwellings.
- The proposal will deliver a net gain to biodiversity.

6.2 The proposed development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policies SS1, SS3, SS8, H1, C1, DC1, DC2, NE1 and T1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan, and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework, the Staffordshire Moorlands Design SPD and the Space about Dwellings SPG.