

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

**SMD/2023/0630
AND 0631**

Valid 15/12/2023

**CATSWALL FARM
HUNTLEY ROAD
DENFORD
LEEK**

**CONVERSION OF FORMER
AGRICULTURAL BUILDING TO
FORM 1NO.
DWELLINGHOUSE AND
ASSOCIATED WORKS**

(FULL - MINOR) (LBC)

MAIN ISSUES

- Whether or not the works amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt
- The principle of development
- The impact on a listed building
- The impact on the character and appearance of the rural area
- The impact on residential amenity
- The impact on highway safety
- The impact on the ecological value of the site

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site is within the Green Belt and in the open countryside just over a mile to the east of Endon village and a mile to the south-west of Longsdon village. It comprises part of a farm immediately to the north of Huntley Road, a country lane. Within the site is a Grade II listed stone and tile barn of two-storey height which is next to the lane (separated from it by a grass road-side verge) and runs parallel with it. There are two accesses to the site, off the lane and these are either side of the building to the west and east. To the north of the building are smaller traditional farm buildings also included within the listing as curtilage structures. One of these, also included in the listing, a short distance to the north-west, has been converted into a holiday let unit via a recent planning permission. To the west of the site, immediately to the other side of the main access to the west of the barn, is a stone and brick farmhouse which is also Grade II listed. Further to the north of the site is a large modern agricultural building and yard. The group of farm buildings are surrounded by open land and fields.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application and accompanying Listed Building Consent application to convert the barn into a 4-bed dwelling. The barn would not be extended and all original openings would be re-used as windows and doors with no change of shape or size. All the works, both external and internal are shown on amended plans and additional drawings and details submitted on 1.3.24. There would be two new Conservation-type small rooflights placed in the front roof-slope (facing north). All new windows would be painted timber. Internal works would

include new floors, partition walls, a central structural/load bearing wall, staircases and insulation cladding and steels attached to the inside of the external walls.

The access to the east of the building would be used as the sole private access for the dwelling and would lead to proposed parking area next to the outbuilding to the north. A private garden area would be formed between the converted barn and outbuilding. The site plan also shows the planting of a hedge facing the lane, to the east of the barn and with timber post-and-rail fence behind. Wild grass areas are shown next to the road. There is further planting and new dry-stone walls to define boundaries to the north.

The application is accompanied by a Planning Statement, a Design & Access Statement with Heritage Statement, Bat Activity Survey Report and Structural Survey letter/report.

Planning permission was granted in 2017 to convert the barn on site (Barn A) and the smaller barn to the north-west of it (Barn B) into holiday lets. Barn B has been converted for this purpose whereas no conversion works were undertaken to Barn A, which is now the subject of a revised proposal under this new application to convert it into a separate dwelling.

Amended plans showing further alterations to the barn and more specific details of aspects of the conversion works were received on 5.4.24, 3.5.24 and 7.6.24.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023)

Sections 5 (Housing), 12 (Design), 13 (Green Belts), 15 (Natural Environment) and 16 (Historic Environment).

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (adopted Sep 2020).

SS10 Other Rural Areas Strategy
H1 Housing
DC1 Design Considerations
DC2 The Historic Environment
NE1 Biodiversity

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD/2015/0603: Conversion of barns into holiday lets. Approved.
SMD/2016/0790: Conversion of barns into holiday lets. Approved.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 13.2.24
Neighbour consultation period ends: 13.2.24

Press Advert: 2.1.24 expires 31.1.24.

Public Comments

None.

Parish Council (Cheddleton)

No objection.

Local Highways Authority

No objection subject to a condition to retain the parking area.

Environmental Health

No objection subject to standard conditions for barn conversions.

Conservation Officer

"This barn is listed and included for group value with respective Grade II Catswall Farmhouse of which is situated closely adjacent. Historic and aesthetic association is extant and remains well read, with the open courtyard plan and long sense of approach, it forms a good example of a Moorlands vernacular farmstead. The surviving structures are of a fair size, seen first along this road (Huntley Road) with the farmhouse of an intricate design, offset fenestration, legible wings to the floorplan and particularly handsome facades."*

In response to the original submission, the officer felt that whilst there was no issue in principle with a project of this nature, i.e conversions/reuse etc there were a number of potentially contentious elements that needed addressing.

Further details and information was requested for many aspects of the works. The officer also requested the reduction in rooflights to two, methods of installation for the tie bars or rods for the structural movement, the removal of a reinstated door, the removal of showers, cookers and bathrooms against solid walls with plasterboard (due to moisture build-up). In addition the officer considered that materials including gypsum plasterboard, tanking membranes, damp proof flooring, gypsum plaster skim and polythene 'vapour barrier' were unacceptable.

In response to the amended plans (comments dated 26.4.24):

I am in receipt of revised drawings.

Issues remain:

-The revised plans still show drylining, gypsum plaster and plasterboard.

-There is a gap from what it appears demonstrated for the ensembles but again still drylining is shown.

-Lime mortar colour and specification should be being informed by what is existing.

Still not confident where this proposed spec has been found.

-'it is assumed all inside faces of perimeter stone walls will be drylined' gypsum

plasterboard and skim still being shown.

-Kontract tanking membrane?

-Roof to also have plasterboard and skim on plastic vapour barriers?

The only improvements that have been made are to rooflights, staircase and alteration of doors as noted previously. This is not enough to give full commitment to the scheme, therefore I cannot provide full support.

In response to the further amendments received on 3rd May, the Conservation Officer considered (on 4th June) was not fully satisfied but that conditions could be imposed to cover many of the points above but further clarification was required regarding the possible use of “tanking” (a method of preventing water ingress by creating a completely impermeable waterproof barrier on an internal wall).

Confirmation that tanking would not be used was provided. The Conservation Officer accepted this. On 20th June, the final comments of the Conservation Officer were provided, that the scheme was acceptable subject to conditions requiring more specific details on the above matters.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

Previously, the proposed conversion of two barns (Barn A and Barn B) into three holiday lets, and alterations to an existing barn to form garage and shed unit ancillary to the farmhouse received planning and Listed Building Consent in 2017. Under this previous consent, Barn B was converted however Barn A remains unaffected.

a Holding objection to the proposals is recommended due to a lack of ecological information, specifically information in relation to protected species on the site and also information in relation to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

Required prior to determination:

1. A survey is required to determine the potential for / presence of protected species on site;
2. Clarification is required as to the extent of any habitats on site or impacted by the proposals; and
3. An assessment is required in respect of BNG.

In response to the revised Bat Activity Survey Report dated June 2024, SWT removed its objection.

SMDC Waste Collection Service

No issues with waste collections.

COMMENTS

The site is in the Green Belt and the strategy for the countryside, Policy SS10, requires strict control over inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The NPPF lists the exceptional forms of development in the Green Belt which are not inappropriate. The change of use of a building is listed but providing it is permanent

and substantial. The building, a large barn made of stone, is clearly substantial. Furthermore, it was approved for the conversion into a holiday let in 2017 and it was therefore deemed to be permanent and substantial in determining the previous planning application. A Structural Survey Report undertaken in 2023 confirms the building is structurally in good condition and capable of a residential conversion without significant further rebuilding. The building remains to be permanent and substantial and the proposal would clearly pass this particular test of the Green Belt section of the NPPF and therefore its conversion into a dwelling without extension can be deemed to not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and is therefore by definition in the NPPF, not harmful to its openness. It therefore complies with the NPPF and Policy SS10 in this respect.

Policy SS10 also does allow the conversion of buildings into residential uses in the countryside where they are physically, architecturally and in character terms, suitable for such a conversion. It is already established it is physically capable of a residential conversion. Due to the particular traditional stone-and-tile form, shape and size of the building together with its materials and overall form and appearance, worthy of being listed due to its heritage value, the building is clearly architecturally and in character terms suitable for the change of use.

Overall, the conversion is acceptable in principle and complies with the Local Plan and NPPF in this respect.

The internal and external works as shown on amended and additional plans were ultimately considered by the Conservation Officer to respect the character and appearance of the listed barn and its historic fabric (see consultation comments above in this report). This is subject to several conditions to be imposed on the planning permission which require finalised and more specific details of some of the works.

The works to the curtilage would not be intrusive and include some hard-surfacing and new stone boundary walls along with new hedge and shrub planting. A condition can be applied to require details of the surfacing materials to be submitted and approved by the Council. The curtilage works are not regarded to harm the setting of the listed buildings. They would also be well screened from the road by the presence of the buildings. Due to the distance of the site from the nearest public footpaths crossing fields to the north, it would be difficult to view the works from those paths. Overall, the proposal would not lead to harm to the character and appearance of the area or the significance of the designated heritage asset.

With regard to residential amenity, it would not be possible to harmfully overlook any separate residential properties from the new windows of the barn conversion the nearest residential property outside of the farm is at least 150 metres away to the south. In terms of the living conditions of the future occupants, the proposed floorspace would meet the thresholds set out in government's Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) for 4-bed two-storey dwellings. There is also a private garden area provided which although is not very large (or would be particularly private), the amount of green open space around the site due to the countryside location, would compensate for this. Overall, the residential amenities of the area and living conditions would not be harmed by the proposal.

With regard to highway safety, despite the unsustainable rural location, the provision of one additional 4-bed dwelling at the property would not lead to a significant increase in vehicular movements on local roads. The proposed access onto the road allows a good level of visibility for drivers leaving the site (looking in both directions) and is safe. The parking provision complies with the Council's parking standards and there is sufficient additional hardstanding space to enable turning to avoid reversing into the road. The local highways authority does not object to the application.

Finally, with regard to any biodiversity impacts, the building being a rural stone-and-tile barn, has significant potential for use by bats, a protected species and a Bat Activity survey undertaken in the Summer of 2023 (August although the report is dated Nov 2023), the optimal time for the use of rural buildings by bats, revealed that protected species i.e. bats and birds were present in the building. There is no requirement to apply the Natural England Protected Species "3 Tests" under the biodiversity legislation as this is a "minor" conversion proposal. However, under Policy NE1, any proposal affecting protected species must demonstrate that such species are not harmed by the proposal via protection and mitigation measures. Such measures are outlined in the Bat Activity Report and Staffs Wildlife Trust (SWT) approved of the report. Such measures include carrying out the works outside of the optimal bat season, protection methodologies through construction and applying roof tiles and bat and bird boxes to allow the continued use of the site by the bats and birds. This can be achieved by way of a planning condition.

SWT has not commented on whether the measures would lead to a Biodiversity Net Gain. But this requirement only applies to minor schemes submitted from 2nd April 2024 and the application was validated before this date. Whilst there is a requirement under planning policies to ensure that protected species present on site are protected from the works and that mitigation measures are put in place, there is no requirement for an actual Biodiversity Net Gain for this particular application.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The conversion of the building into a holiday let was approved in 2017. The new scheme to convert it into a separate dwelling would not lead to any additional works that could be deemed to amount to significant harm to the Green Belt, the listed building (including its setting) or the overall character and amenities of the area or the environment in general. The proposal is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt and is acceptable in principle in general in this countryside location and would not result in harms to the visual and residential amenities of the area or to highway safety. With the safeguard of appropriate conditions, particularly to protect the character and appearance and historic fabric of the listed building, the development would therefore comply with the Council's Local Plan and the government planning guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE PP AND LISTED BUILDING CONSENT

Case Officer: Chris Johnston
Recommendation Date: 12.7.24

X *B.J. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council