

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2024/0085
Valid 23/02/2024

TONGUE LANE FARM
TONGUE LANE
BROWN EDGE

**CONVERSION AND
ALTERATION OF 2NO.
AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS
TO FORM 2NO.
DWELLINGHOUSES AND
ASSOCIATED WORKS**

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Whether or not the works amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt
- The principle of development
- 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 a short distance to the north-west of Brown Edge village. The site is reached via a narrow country lane. It lies immediately to the north-west of the lane where there is an access into the site. It comprises of two traditional barns, Barn B1, a two-storey stone barn closest to the road in the front (south) part of the site and Barn B2, a larger brick two-storey barn to the north of Barn B1. The farm access takes you past the front of both barns (to the east of them) and leads to a yard to the north of Barn B2 and to the west of the stone farmhouse which faces the yard. Barn B1 has a modern farm building immediately to the rear (west). Barn B2 has a single-storey brick rear projection with pitched roof. There is a very large modern farm building to the rear of the main part of Barn B2 and to the south of the rear projection. There is a flat roof blockwork building attached to the north wall of the rear projection, next to the yard and a smaller flat-roofed blockwork building attached to the side gable of the main part of Barn B2.

The group of farm buildings is surrounded by open land.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application to convert the two barns into two dwellings. Barn B1 would have four bedrooms and B2 would have five (one of which would be on the ground floor in the single storey rear off-shot). There are no extensions proposed other than the modest raising of the roof ridge of the rear off-shot of Barn B2 in order to create a bat loft. All other existing buildings (B3, B4, B5 and B6 as annotated in the site plan) would be demolished including the large modern farm buildings immediately to the rear of each barn to be converted. The farmhouse would remain

but this is outside of the application site. All the existing openings on Barn B1 would be re-used as doors and windows and only one new opening in the walls would be formed, on the rear (south-west) elevation in addition to two new small rooflights also on the rear elevation. Barn B2 would also re-use all existing openings and three new windows would be inserted into the rear elevation of the main two-storey part of the building (two on the first floor) and one new opening on the south-facing gable at first-floor level. Modern lean-to structures on the north and south gables would be removed.

The spaces behind the two barns, currently occupied by the modern farm buildings, would become garden and parking areas and hedges would be planted to separate the garden areas for each new dwelling, which would also be placed along the rear boundaries of each new plot.

The site plan also shows the inclusion of bat lofts for both the barns to be converted. An amended site plan was received in May 2024 showing the retention of barn B7, immediately to the south of the site and next to the lane.

The application is accompanied by Structural Survey Reports for each of the two barns to be converted, a Bat Activity Survey Report (dated January 2024) for the two old barns and the two large adjacent modern barns (to be demolished) and a Planning Statement. Later on in the process, an amended Bat Report was submitted with further details of the bat mitigation and the inclusion of the two smaller modern farm buildings on site in the survey, was also submitted (dated May 2024), as those were also proposed to be demolished and were not included in the original survey.

A further updated Bat Activity Report with further details of the bat loft mitigation measures was received on 8th July 2024.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023)

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

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (adopted Sep 2020).

SS10 Other Rural Areas Strategy
H1 Housing
DC1 Design Considerations
NE1 Biodiversity

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

None relevant.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 11.4.24
Neighbour consultation period ends: 11.4.24
Press Advert: N/A.

Public Comments

One letter of support has been received from local residents.

Parish Council

None received.

Local Highways Authority

No objection subject to standard conditions for new residential uses.

Environmental Health

No objection subject to standard conditions for barn conversions and including a condition requiring details of measures to control noise.

Staffs Wildlife Trust (SWT)

A holding objection was initially raised as it was considered that all six buildings should have been included in the bat survey and not just the two old barns and adjacent modern buildings and further information regarding bat mitigation/compensation and hibernation potential was also required. It also considered a building outside of the site, Barn B7, to the south should have been included.

On receipt of the requested information in the amended Bat Activity Survey Report (May 2024), SWT accepted the findings that the two further modern buildings to be demolished had negligible potential for bat use. SWT considered barn B7 to have high bat potential and recommended a condition requiring details of new lighting for the barns to be submitted for approval as this could impact on bats around the site.

However, whilst SWT accepted the mitigation measures such as bat boxes around the site, it continued to raise a Holding Objection due to the lack of information about the design and measures for the proposed bat lofts (to be created on barns B1 and B2 to be converted).

In response to the an updated Bat Activity Survey Report (submitted in July 2024) which included more details about the bat lofts, SWT removed its objection.

Conservation Officer

*"Site is within proximity to listed buildings:
Knypersley Mill. Grade II. List UID: 1374604.
Lower Stone House Farmhouse. Grade II. List UID: 1374603.*

The former is within approximately 118 yards as the crow flies to Tongue Lane Farm. Due to the rolling topography and the fact that the Mill sits within an enclave adjacent to the pond, there would be limited lines of intervisibility and limited impact on setting. The latter is again afforded quite rolling topography enveloping it so it is seen it would not have a direct detriment imposed on views, vistas or setting."

Heritage records state the following about Barn B1:

-Stone barn with tiled gabled roof of king post construction, probably built in late 18thC or early 19thC.

- A stone barn with a tiled roof of king construction, gabled to one end with a lean-to at the other. Externally the barn measures 54ft by 21ft with a single wide cart entrance and ventilation holes. The barn is in excellent condition and is currently used for crop storage.

Depicted on the 1" ordnance survey mapping of 1834.

"Summary: Barn above is appraised highly for its construction and condition with specifically mentioned vernacular tooling."

"Site is dispersed primitive farmstead arrangement plan with later or modern shed additions, the barn of B1 is prominent and tall, in a strong handsome position on the site."

"At the moment this barn is proposed to have substantial disfiguring not wholly in acknowledgement of its historic use or survived legibility. I am struggling to see the logic behind some of the elements as noted above. I advise this is revisited in detail in order to retain its character and original form, and prevent totally confusing it with something it isn't. An honest approach is advised in line with SPAB guidance and Hist England guidance regarding conversions/adaptive reuse of traditional barns."

"With regard to Barn B2, again fairly interesting vernacular character. Simple brick construction with humble functional fenestration."

"No comments regarding demolition of later modern barns. I don't foresee there to be an issue with this. Interested in encouraging reinstating some traditional courtyard character and form once the modern corrugated sheds are demolished. In terms of soft and hard landscaping and surfaces there is opportunity to reinstate this character and bring some cohesion back to the site. The area around the historically significant barn (Barn B1) and that encompassing the second has the potential to become very barren and impose some visual harm on the structures otherwise. I note icons of cars are included in the plans though it would afford the buildings very little to have cars up against the elevations."

The consultation response also lists a large number of both internal and external alterations to both barns which are advised to be undertaken to respect the buildings character and appearance.

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 two buildings proposed for conversion, traditional barns made of stone and brick, are clearly substantial. The Structural Survey Reports (undertaken in August 2023) confirms both barns to be robust and stable and apart from some minor rebuilding of a small part of an external wall to fix it to an internal dividing wall (where there is currently a gap) for the stone barn and some similar works to secure external and internal walls for the brick barn, together with replacement of the first floor for both buildings, the only other recommendations advised in order to convert the barns into habitable accommodation is just minor repairs. No significant further rebuilding is required for either barn. The buildings remain to be permanent and substantial and the proposal would clearly pass this particular test of the Green Belt section of the NPPF and therefore their conversion into dwellings without extension can be deemed to not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and is therefore by definition in the NPPF, the development is 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 the barns are physically capable of residential conversions. Due to the particular traditional stone-and-tile or brick-and-tile (Staffs Blue tiles) form, shape and size of the building together with the materials and overall form and appearance, the building is clearly architecturally and in character terms suitable for the change of use. It should also be noted that whilst the stone barn is not listed, it does appear in HER records and could be considered a non-designated heritage asset.

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

The Conservation Officer in the consultation response advised several alterations should be made in order for the works to fully respect the character and appearance of the barns. These are mostly internal alterations and as neither barn is listed, it is not considered that a refusal on the basis of the internal works being out of keeping with historic fabric or interior of the building can be sustained. However, the external alterations advised by the Conservation Officer, to the parts which are visible from outside of the buildings, have been undertaken and are shown on amended plans dated May 2024. The scheme largely works by using all of the current openings as doors and windows. Four new windows have been added to the brick barn but these are on sections of wall which are directly adjacent to and screened by, the large modern barns which are to be demolished. The design of the four new windows are traditional and in keeping with the character and appearance of the barn. This particular elevation (the rear) would not be visually prominent when viewed from the road despite the removal of the modern farm buildings. Two new rooflights would be

added to the rear roofslope of the stone barn. However, these are small Conservation type rooflights which would not significantly harm the character and appearance of the building. Ideally, there should be no new windows on the west/rear elevation of Barn B1, but one has been placed on the first floor of this elevation but it is accepted this is essentially needed to light a bedroom. Overall, the external alterations requested have been largely carried out (and largely restricted to fenestration works including the fixing of windows and shutters) and the proposed amended works are considered to respect the overall character and appearance of the buildings and the surrounding area.

Neither barn would be in the line of sight of the nearest listed buildings due to the presence of hills, trees and other buildings in between the site and the listed buildings, the nearest of which is about 100 to 150 metres to the north of the site at Knypersley Mill Farm.

The areas vacated by the modern barns would be landscaped to create garden areas and new mixed native hedges would be planted to form boundaries as appropriate in this rural historic location and would also separate the barns from the parking areas, removing cars from being parked up against the buildings.

Overall, the amended proposal would not harm the character and appearance of the area in compliance with policies DC1 and DC2 of the Local Plan.

With regard to residential amenity, it would not be possible to harmfully overlook any separate residential properties from the new windows of the barn conversions, including the existing farmhouse and there would be no mutual harmful overlooking between the two new dwellings. 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 and 5-bed two-storey dwellings. The proposed garden areas using the footprints of the demolished modern barns would be well in excess of the area standards in the Council's Space About Dwellings SPG.

Overall, the residential amenities of the area and living conditions would not be harmed by the proposal in compliance with Policy DC1.

With regard to highway safety, despite the unsustainable rural location, the provision of two new dwellings via the conversion of barns 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 two barns to be converted along with a building outside of but adjacent to the site, Barn B7, are considered to have high potential for use by bats, a protected species. The modern barns to be demolished are considered to have negligible potential. An amended site plan shows the retention of Barn B7. Bat Activity Surveys were undertaken at the

optimal bat activity time and a range of mitigation measures has been put forward including the use of bat tiles, bat lofts and bat boxes. SWT requested further information about the bat loft measures and ultimately, on this basis, considered the proposal to be acceptable. The proposal would therefore ensure that the works would not harm protected species and would provide adequate ecological mitigation and with the inclusion of such measures and the provision of native hedge planting, some ecological enhancement could be achieved. The proposal complies with Policy NE1. The application is exempt from providing an actual Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) because it was submitted before 2nd April 2024.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The conversion scheme would not amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and the amendments would ensure that no harms would result to the historic character and appearance to the barns or the surrounding area. There would also be no harms to residential amenity, highway safety or the ecological value of the area. With the safeguard of appropriate conditions, 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

Case Officer: Chris Johnston

Recommendation Date: 9.8.24

X *B.S. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council