

Response to Planning Application Reference SMD/2024/0077

29 October 2024

We write further to our **OBJECTION** of 30 March 2024 to planning application reference no. SMD/2024/0077 submitted in February 2024 and validated by the Council on 5th March.

The application relates to the proposed erection of an agricultural and woodchip storage building on land at Basford Hall, Basford Green Road, Cheddleton, Staffordshire, ST13 7ER.

This further combined response is a combined objection from the Basford Green Community, as signed in the previous letter.

The original reasons for our objection are summarised below and the justification was also detailed in the previous letter.

- Insufficient information submitted as part of the planning application relating to its proposed use, impact on the landscape and heritage setting, and impacts on neighbouring uses.
- Incorrectly completed Application Forms.
- Lack of suitable access proposals.
- Insufficient supporting information and evidence including ecological and tree/hedgerow surveys.
- Impact on the landscape, its character and development on a currently greenfield part of the estate without utilising existing brownfield land on the estate, which is already well served by existing access roads.
- Impact on heritage assets, namely in the form of impacting on the historic parkland setting and listed buildings.
- Ecological impacts arising from the scheme itself and the broader implications in respect of encouraging further tree felling on the estate; and
- Amenity impacts on neighbouring uses which will be further increased depending on the ultimate end use of the proposed building.
- Whether the building should actually be B2 use classification rather than 'agricultural building'.
- The proposed building will set a threshold precedent and establish a new foothold for further staged development / buildings on a current greenfield part of the parkland landscape.

On the 2/5/2024 the applicant submitted 'Agents Additional Supporting Information 02.05.2024' and on 16/08/2024 submitted 'Applicants Additional Information' and 'Revised Site Plan with Landscaping'.

However, most of the points from our original reasons for objection remain to be addressed by the applicant and their response has further infuriated our community and given even more reasons to object.

The Basford Green Community position is that there is no agricultural need or requirement for this building (as demonstrated in our initial objection and below) and this application is a clear attempt to establish a future development footprint within a greenfield part of the parkland estate for future conversion to a holiday let, as part of the continued parcelised strategy to extend the Consall Hall and Gardens offer into the Basford Hall Estate.

Newly Proposed Access Track

As stated in our previous objection, there has never been an access track in this location, why would there be a track to just one part of a field?

A new hardcore track is even more new development within the virgin parkland landscape and within the setting of the listed Lodge Cottages directly opposite. The precedent refusal has already been set for this with the refusal of new tracks under retrospective application SMD/2022/0654 in March 2023 and the second refusal in September 2023 with application no. SMD/2023/0307. As part of these refusals, as set out in our previous objection, the applicant was required to reinstate those tracks back to greenfield.

Use of the Building

In the Planning Statement dated 9th February 2024, it states: -

'The building is to provide storage for agricultural implements associated with the agricultural activities across the wider Basford Estate, along with the storage of woodchip to serve the two existing biomass boilers on the Estate, as approved under applications SMD/2013/0731 and SMD/2017/0145.'

As set out in our previous response, the applicant doesn't farm his own land (Basford Farming Ltd ceased trading in February 2019 – see Companies House) and the tenant farmers all keep their equipment at their own farms.

In the subsequent supporting information, the applicant has stated that the shed would be used for storing the following:

- 13t JCB Excavator
- JCB Loadall
- 5 Tonne Hitachi Excavator
- 3 Tonne Excavator
- Trailers
- Other miscellaneous equipment

We would like to ask why a farmer would need 3 excavators etc. The equipment listed by the applicant is clearly plant that has been and is used for civil construction at the Consall Hall and Gardens and the conversion of a growing number of residential and other properties on the Basford Hall Estate that have been converted to holiday lets and **definitely not for agricultural use**.

The applicant then goes on to say:

'Uncovered storage leads to faster deterioration from rain, snow, sun exposure, etc. Keeping the machinery indoors will extend its usable lifespan.'

We categorically object to this 'need' when by its very nature, plant is made to be outside. Are the excavators used on any building or civil construction site up and down the country kept indoors? No, of course not, they are outside on site all year round. You only need to drive along the Holmes Chapel Road from Congleton and there are hundreds of pieces of plant at Ashbrook's plant hire, that are kept outside all year round. **So again, there is no agricultural need whatsoever.**

As per our previous objection, the applicant already has a huge woodchip storage, which already has access, as shown below:



The existing woodchip storage is at least 30 ft x 30 ft, so we find the applicants statement in the subsequent information confusing to say the least:

'The estate currently has very limited woodchip storage capacity, with only enough space to store 10 tonnes under a roofless area. This is inadequate for supplying the 2 biomass boilers that provide renewable heat to all the properties on the estate. In previous years the wood that has been chipped has been stored by a neighbouring estate. This is no longer a viable option.'

When the existing storage could hold 50 tonnes of woodchip at least, why doesn't the applicant just put a cover over the existing store if needed, which already has access for articulated lorries, is located between the two woodchip boilers and is in more 'discrete' location away from neighbouring properties?

On this basis, again, there is **no need** for this development and all of its associated unconsidered impacts on the landscape, surrounding properties, listed buildings, ecology, hedgerow, trees etc etc. which in 10 years time will, through change of use, become yet another noisy and brightly lit holiday let property as per SMD/2023/0328, which very recently converted an existing agricultural barn into incidental accommodation including plunge hot tub!

Tree Felling

In the applicants subsequent supporting information, they state:

'Overall, the shed will support more effective management of resources fundamental to the estate's current operations. It offers environmental benefits by enabling renewable energy to continue and protection of equipment. This overview outlines the rationale and intended functions that make the shed a worthwhile investment for the estate. The proposed development consequently supports rural sustainability and meets the requirements of policy SS10 of the Local Plan.'

As confirmed by the Forestry Commission, the applicant does not have a felling licence and the huge pile of dead trees on the site of the proposed agricultural buildings were therefore felled illegally. As such on the 7 March 2024, the Forestry Commission issued the applicant with a Restockment Order for which the applicant must plant over 600 replacement trees by June 2025.

Noise

In the subsequent supporting information, it states:

'For reference the wood itself will stacked and then chipped in the woodland (defined as Consall Woods) the majority of the time and therefore will create no noise at the storage shed. This process is nothing new to the estate.'

So why is there an enormous mountain of dead trees located at the site of the proposed agricultural building? Is the applicant planning to move all of these dead trees back to where they were felled to chip them?





Also, as the applicant doesn't have a felling licence, it would be hoped that the applicant won't be felling any further trees on the estate.

Fire Risk

The applicant states:

'One of the most important properties of woodchips is their moisture content. This refers to the percentage of water contained within the wood. Freshly cut woodchips can initially have a moisture content of over 100% and when stock piled are very susceptible to spontaneous combustion. However, this wood is not chipped straight away, it is stacked to dry for over a year until moisture content has been recorded under 25%.

When woodchips are dried to around 25% moisture content, decomposing or combusting is extremely unlikely. Woodchips dried to this 25% threshold are safe for long-term stockpiling and have a low risk of causing fires through spontaneous combustion.'

As per our previous response and other objections, very little consideration has been given to fire risk and having huge volumes of highly combustible material in the same building as plant and machinery is a recipe for disaster. No consideration has been given to the proximity to the protected hedgerow and trees, neighbours nor the agricultural shed and livestock at Sneyd Arms Farm.

What would happen if imported woodchip was put into the proposed agricultural building with a high moisture content by mistake and it did spontaneously combust? It is inconceivable to consider it appropriate to construct storage of a highly combustible material right on the boundary of a neighbouring property!

Classification

It transpires that the applicant has recently served notice of 5 more of their tenants, as they want the properties back to convert to exclusive holiday homes in association with Consall Hall and Gardens.

This means that nearly half of the residential properties in the Basford Green Hamlet have already been lost to holiday accommodation and those tenants are having to find homes elsewhere, which flies in the face of the national housing crisis.

As stated in our previous objection, the woodchip is being / will be used to heat rental properties and or commercial 'holiday lets' and therefore with the storage of 'civil plant', **the classification of the 'Agricultural Building' is wrong**. The woodchip is also being used to heat multiple plunge pools (all uncovered) and now there is a new application (SMD/2024/0427) for a swimming pool at the Bath House at a time when the council have stated there to be a "climate emergency"

Location Consideration

The applicant states in their subsequent supporting information:

'The estate considered different locations but the chosen location is between the 2 woodchip boilers and is also neighbouring the other sheds in the Basford Green area. Application SMD/2020/0178 was accepted in 2020 as an agricultural shed and is within 10 meters of the proposed application. The hedgerow allows the shed to be discrete. There was no survey carried out by the neighbouring application, which is equal distance from the hedge. This area of land is also not considered in the parkland of the estate and also located with easy access.'

Firstly, the proposed agricultural shed is clearly not located between the two woodchip boilers, see below: -



As stated in our previous objection, the agricultural shed at Sneyd Arms Farm permitted under SMD/2020/0178, stands at 4.5m (14.5ft) is therefore only half the height of the **8.5m (28ft)** shed in this proposal that will tower above the mature hedgerow and trees and the neighbouring shed itself In full visibility from all directions. **It is twice as high of any agricultural building in the area**. It is the

same as building one house when all other properties around it are bungalows – completely out of context.

We ask that the applicant provides a series of cross sections in the context of the adjacent agricultural shed at Sneyd Arms Farm, the protected hedgerow and trees to the north and east and its elevated position at the top of the valley, so that the Planning Committee can fully understand the scale of this proposal.

The protected hedge and trees, as shown below, being ‘pinched’ between the two sheds will be starved of light and will inevitably die as a result. Hence, we respectfully ask if the SMDC Tree Officer has been consulted on this application? As well as being protected, the hedgerow is half owned by Sneyd Arms Farm.



The hedgerow **does not** allow the shed to be discrete – at 8.5m (28ft), the will tower above the 4m high hedge and the adjacent shed let alone being completely open to the west and south – so it categorically will not be discrete – **it will be fully visible from all directions!**

Consultees

Given the clear impacts on the listed buildings, protected hedgerow and trees, ecology etc. please can you confirm that the SMDC Conservation Officer, Tree Officer and Ecologist have been consulted on this application? We also request that the fire service is also asked to be consulted too.

Planning Policy

Our position with regards to conflicts with planning policy still stand, as these have not been addressed or even mentioned by the applicant in the subsequent supporting information.

We thank you again for providing us with the opportunity to comment on this application and if we can provide any further information, we would gladly assist.

The Basford Green Community