

PLANNING STATEMENT

**EASING VILLA
STILE HOUSE LANE, LEEK**

NOVEMBER 2024

Site Address:

Easing Villa, Stile House Lane, Leek, Staffordshire, ST13 7LS

Applicant:

Mrs. A. Morris

Proposal:

Conversion and alteration of domestic outbuilding to form 1no.
dwellinghouse and associated works

Planning Statement:

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Job Reference: RDP/2024/090

Report Prepared By:

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Mrs. A. Morris to seek full planning permission for the conversion and alteration of an existing domestic outbuilding at Easing Villa, Stile House Lane, Leek, to form a dwellinghouse.
- 1.2 The existing building is located to the northwest of the existing dwellinghouse on the site and comprises a part two storey / part single storey outbuilding constructed principally from red/orange facing brickwork with a Staffordshire blue tiled roof atop. Its design is accentuated by stone quoins and header detailing. The building is currently used as a garage, workshop, storage and hobby room, and has previously benefitted from consent for conversion to a residential annex under application SMD/2020/0543 which has been part implemented.
- 1.3 The accommodation of the proposed dwellinghouse will comprise of an open living room / kitchen, sun lounge and snug, hobby room, wet room and boot room with a double bedroom and bathroom / dressing room at first floor. External alterations are proposed in the form of new and enlarged windows, and the insertion of new rooflights. A new low-level boundary wall to be erected along the southeast boundary of the site to subdivide the plot from the existing dwelling adjacent (Easing Villa).
- 1.4 The site benefits from two vehicular access points off Stile House Lane. The proposed dwelling will be served via the northernmost access, whilst Easing Villa adjacent will be served via the southernmost access. No alterations are proposed to either access. Parking for two vehicles will be accommodated within the existing car port on the site that lies to the west of the existing building.

2 Site & Surroundings

- 2.1 The application site is located within the rural area some 500m from the main built up area of Leek. The site is located on the northeastern side of Stile House Lane, a short distance southeast of its junction with Thorncliffe Road.
- 2.2 The site currently comprises a detached two storey dwellinghouse, which is located in a setback position from the road, with the part two storey / part single storey outbuilding that is the subject of the application located to its northwest. A detached stable block is located to the north of the dwelling and northeast of the outbuilding. A detached carport lies to the west of the dwellinghouse and southwest of the existing two storey outbuilding.
- 2.3 Paddocks extend to the northwest and southeast of the site, with a mature hedgerow enclosing land to the east. The carriageway of Stile House Lane encloses the southwestern boundary of the site, with open fields located beyond. The nearest neighbouring property (Hollystones) lies approximately 165 metres to the southeast of the site.
- 2.4 The existing building is not statutorily listed, nor does it lie within a Conservation Area. The entirety of the site is located within Flood Zone 1 (low-probability of flooding).

3 Planning Policy

3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires proposals to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan taking into consideration any material considerations relevant to the determination of the application. The Development Plan for this area comprises the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020) of which the following policies are of relevance 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, including starter 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 SS10 of the Local Plan relates to the 'Other Rural Areas Strategy' and states that these areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be located in the countryside, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism, or enhances the countryside. The policy confirms that the Council will meet housing requirements by allowing the conversion or replacement of an existing rural building in accordance with policy H1.

3.4 Policy H1 of the Local Plan relates to 'New Housing Development' and states that 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. It goes on to state

that 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. It also requires that 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.

3.5 Policy H1 also states that in the rural areas, only the following forms of housing development will be permitted:

- a) Affordable housing which cannot be met elsewhere, in accordance with Policy H3.
- b) A new dwelling that meets an essential local need, such as accommodation for an agricultural, forestry or other rural enterprise worker, where the need for such accommodation has been satisfactorily demonstrated and that need cannot be met elsewhere.
- c) Proposals for replacement dwellings, provided they do not have a significantly greater detrimental impact on the existing character of the rural area than the original dwelling or result in the loss of a building which is intrinsic to the character of the area.
- d) The conversion of rural buildings for residential use where the building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion; or where such development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets.

- e) Proposals to redevelop previously developed land provided it is not of high environmental value.
- f) The subdivision of an existing residential dwelling provided it is not in an isolated location.

3.6 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, overbearing development, 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.

3.7 Policy DC3 of the Local Plan relates to ‘Landscape and Settlement Setting’ and states that the Council will protect and, where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements in the Staffordshire Moorlands by:

1. Resisting development which would lead to prominent intrusion into the countryside or have a significant adverse impact on the character or the setting of a settlement or important views into and out of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character evidence.
2. Supporting development which respects and enhances local landscape character and which reinforces and enhances the setting of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character evidence.
3. Supporting developments which conserve or enhance the biodiversity qualities of any natural or man-made features within the landscape, such as trees, woodlands, hedgerows, walls, watercourses or ponds.
4. Supporting opportunities to positively manage the landscape and use sustainable building techniques and materials which are sympathetic to the landscape.
5. Ensuring that development does not adversely affect the wider setting of the Peak District National Park.

3.8 Policy NE1 of the Local Plan relates to “Biodiversity and Geological Resources’ and states that the biodiversity and geological resources of the District and neighbouring areas will be conserved and enhanced by positive management and strict control of development (and having regard to relevant ecological evidence) by (amongst other measures):

- Conserving, and enhancing regional and locally designated sites. The Council will not permit any development proposal which would directly or indirectly result in significant harm to geological and biodiversity conservation interests, unless it can be demonstrated that:
 - a) there is no appropriate alternative site available; and
 - b) all statutory and regulatory requirements relating to any such proposal have been satisfied; and
 - c) appropriate conservation and mitigation measures are provided; or if it is demonstrated that this is not possible
 - d) the need for, and benefit of, the development is demonstrated to clearly outweigh the need to safeguard the intrinsic nature conservation value of the site and compensatory measures are implemented.
- 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.

3.9 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 securing the sustainable reuse of buildings, delivering rural housing, securing high quality design, ensuring highway safety and achieving a net gain to biodiversity. The content of the NPPF has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

SMDC Design Guide SPD

- 4.2 The adopted Design Guide SPD provides advice aimed at securing the delivery of high-quality built development within the District, and provides specific guidance in respect of conversion schemes. The content of the Design Guide SPD has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

SMDC Space About Dwellings SPG

- 4.3 The adopted Space About Dwellings SPG provides advice aimed at securing a high level of residential amenity for both future occupiers of dwellings, and well as neighbouring properties. 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 proposes the conversion and alteration of an existing outbuilding within the rural area to form a dwellinghouse. Policy SS10 of the Local Plan provides support for new housing development within the rural areas where it conforms with the provisions of policy H1 of the Local Plan.
- 5.2 Policy H1 of the Local Plan provides support for the conversion of existing rural buildings to residential use within the rural areas, provided that the building is worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion. The existing building is currently in use as a domestic store, hobby room and workshop and evidently is of a sound structural condition with no signs of distortion to the walls or roof of the building.
- 5.3 The building also has a very pleasant aesthetic which contributes positively to the character and appearance of the area, and is constructed from vernacular materials. The building is therefore held to be worthy in architectural and character terms for conversion, and as a consequence the proposal is in accordance with the requirements of policies SS10 and H1 of the Local Plan.
- 5.4 The proposal is also in accordance with paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework which states that planning policies and decisions should avoid the creation of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of a limited number of specific circumstances apply. The resultant dwelling will not be isolated as it will lie in close proximity to the existing dwelling adjacent (Easing Villa) and also lie relatively close to the neighbouring property to the southeast (Hollystones). No conflict with paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework will therefore arise.

Design and Layout

5.5 The adopted Design Guide SPD states that:

“The guiding principle behind the design of any conversion should be that the character of the original building and its setting should be respected and retained. This means that that in most cases the barn, mill or chapel should afterwards look like a converted barn, mill or chapel, and not like a new house or a new block of flats. When converting traditional buildings, new uses should not normally require the construction of extensions or ancillary buildings. However, if alterations are necessary and approached carefully, it may be possible to bring about a new understanding of historic buildings by making a clear distinction between what is old and what is new”.

5.6 The submitted proposal embraces the above philosophy and adopts a sensitive approach to the conversion and alteration of the building, taking the opportunity to reuse the existing openings within the building to provide natural light to the internal accommodation. A greater degree of intervention is incorporated into the single storey part of the building where larger openings are proposed in favour of the existing openings currently present, but since that part of the building comprises a more recent addition (approved under SMD/2020/0543) the introduction of larger openings does not cause any loss of character to the main building which sits in behind. The introduction of a small window in the northeast elevation of the building, and the addition of rooflights does not fundamentally erode the original character of the building. The existing breather gaps are also be retained.

5.7 Externally it is proposed to create area an area of amenity space to the northwest of the building within the existing field. That area of land is to be

enclosed by a new indigenous hedgerow and will project no further into the field than the adjacent equestrian yard already does. Such works will not materially detract from the character and appearance of the existing building or the wider surrounding area.

- 5.8 The proposed area of amenity space will exceed the minimum required standard of 65m² as set out within the Local Authority's Space About Dwellings Standards, and thus provide an acceptable level of amenity for proposed dwelling. The gross internal floor area of the building also comfortably exceeds the minimum required standard for a one bedroomed dwellinghouse as dictated by the Nationally Described Space Standards (Policy H1 refers).
- 5.9 Future occupiers of the dwellings will therefore be provided with a high standard of residential amenity, and as a consequence the design and layout of the development is held to meet the requirements of policies SS1, H1, DC1 and DC3 of the Local Plan.

Highway Safety

- 5.10 The property of Easing Villa is served by two vehicular access points off Stile House Lane. The application proposes to repurpose the northernmost access point to serve the new dwelling, with the existing dwelling retaining the southerly access point. The existing car port to the west of the building will provide undercover parking for two vehicles to serve the new dwelling. Ample space will remain in front of Easing Villa for the parking of vehicles to serve that property, thus ensuring that the adopted car parking standards are met.
- 5.11 Both access points afford reasonable visibility in both directions on egress, onto what is an unclassified, and not heavily used, road. The proposed development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policy T1 of

the Local Plan and guidance contained within paragraph 115 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Biodiversity

- 5.12 The application is accompanied by a Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment prepared by Tamworth Property Services which following an inspection of the building confirmed evidence of bats using it as a place of shelter, as well as identifying a number of potential roosting opportunities. No evidence of nesting birds was identified.
- 5.13 Owing to evidence of bats using the building the Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment recommended that bat activity surveys (emergence surveys) be undertaken. These have subsequently been carried out by Fauna Forest Ecology and their findings are set out within the accompanying Bat and Bird Survey Report.
- 5.14 The survey concludes that there is evidence of a brown long eared bat using the building for roosting. A bat licence from Natural England will therefore be required before any works to convert the building may be undertaken. A series of recommendations are set out to mitigate the impact of the development, including the provision of a bat loft and bat boxes, and these measures, along with the other recommendations, can be secured via an appropriately worded condition. In doing so the proposal will meet the requirements of policy NE1 of the Local Plan.
- 5.15 The proposed development is exempt from statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements as the proposal will not result in the loss of any habitat. The *de-minimis* exemption therefore applies. A net gain to biodiversity will nevertheless be achieved through the undertaking of the recommended enhancement measures set out within the Bat Activity Survey Report.

6 Conclusion

6.1 The submitted proposal constitutes a sustainable form of development having regard to the following conclusions:

- The proposal entails the change of use of an existing rural building that is worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion.
- The design and layout of the development will safeguard the existing character of the building and will not harm the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
- The proposed development will provide a good level of residential amenity for future occupiers.
- The proposed development will not give rise to any severe residual impacts to highway safety.
- The proposed development will safeguard protected species on the site and provide appropriate mitigation and enhancement.

6.2 The proposed development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policies SS1, SS10, H1, DC1, DC3, NE1 and T1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020), the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework, and guidance contained within the Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide SPD.