

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2024/0462
Valid 07/10/2024

**THE LONG BARN & THE
GRANARY
BANK TOP FARM
CHURNET VALLEY ROAD
KINGSLEY HOLT**

**CHANGE OF USE FROM 2NO.
HOLIDAY COTTAGES TO 2NO.
DWELLINGHOUSES
(FULL - MINOR)**

MAIN ISSUES

- The principle of the development
- The impact on the character and appearance of the area
- Impact on residential amenity
- Impact on highway safety.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site is in the open countryside about 100m to the east of the built-up part of Kingsley Holt village. The site is within the Churnet Valley. It is not in the Green Belt. It comprises two barns on a former farm, one a traditional long and narrow red-brick barn with tiled roof, which was converted into a holiday let under a 2007 planning permission and is called The Long Barn. There is a similar barn opposite ("The Cowshed"), to the other side of a yard, to the north-west, which was also converted into a holiday let in 2002 and a change of use of this building into a dwelling was approved earlier this year (SMD/2024/0225). The other barn lies to the south-east of the red-brick barn and which lies at the end of the track which runs past the two red-brick barns. This is a smaller traditional stone barn called "The Granary" and was converted into a further holiday let under a 2002 permission. The buildings were once part of a traditional farm and the farmhouse, still in use as a dwelling is adjacent to the site to the west. To the north of The Granary lies further farm outbuildings outside of the application site including a double garage. The farm buildings and application site are reached via a long driveway connected to Churnet Valley Road, A521, about 200m to the west. The former farm is surrounded by fields and woodland.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application for the change of use of the two holiday let barns into permanent dwellings. There would be no external or internal alterations with the building ready to use as dwelling with no changes and no changes to the floorplans/room layouts. There are four bedrooms (one on the ground floor) in the Long Barn which would remain as bedrooms. The site includes half of the yard in front which would continue to be used for car parking and there is enough space to allow at least three cars to park and turn. There are garden areas to the north and south-east of the barn, within the red-edge site, which would continue to be used as a garden/private outdoor amenity space for the eventual residents. The Granary has

two bedroom, one of the ground floor. There is also an existing garden area to the south-east which would continue to be used for this purpose. The application includes a Planning Statement which states the following:

“The holiday let business no longer provides a viable income and has led the applicant to consider this options for the site and having noted the recent approval of consent for the change of use an adjacent barn (The Cow Shed) to a dwellinghouse under application SMD/2024/0225, he has opted to bring forward this application to change the use of the two buildings to dwellinghouses.”

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Adopted Sept 2020)

SS10 Other Rural Areas Strategy
S11 Churnet Valley Strategy
H1 New Housing
E4 Tourism development
DC1 Design Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (Dec 2024)

Section 5 (Housing), 6 (Economy) and 12 (Design).

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

02/01309/FUL: Conversion of two barns into holiday lets. Approved.

02/01324/FUL: Conversion of barn into a holiday let. Approved and implemented.
This relates to The Granary.

07/01082/FUL: Conversion of barn into a holiday let. Approved and implemented.
This relates to The Long Barn.

SMD/2024/0225: Conversion of holiday let into a dwelling. Approved (8.7.24) and implemented.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 12.11.24
Neighbour consultation period ends: 12.11.24
Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None.

Town / Parish Comments

Support.

Local Highways Authority

No objection.

Environmental Health

No objection subject to standard conditions used for such changes of use on redundant farms such as those to restrict activity during construction, unexpected ground contamination and new lighting.

SMDC Waste Collection Service

No issues regarding waste collections.

OFFICER COMMENTS

The site is outside of the Development Boundaries which are drawn around the towns and large villages as that is where the focus for new development should be located. The site is therefore deemed to be in the countryside. The strategy for the countryside, Policy SS10 and Policy H1 relating to new housing, allows the change of use of rural buildings into residential uses where the buildings are physically, architecturally and in character terms suitable. I consider the proposal would comply with this.

The further change to permanent unrestricted dwellings should be attached significant weight as there is a deemed undersupply of housing in the District. The Council cannot demonstrate a five year supply of housing and a recently updated NPPF (Dec 2024) emphasises the need to approve more housing in sustainable locations where there is less than a five year supply. There is also a particular demand for small units of accommodation i.e. 1 or 2-bed dwellings and the proposal would provide a new small 2-bed unit in "The Granary". I consider the site, despite being in the countryside, is in a relatively sustainable location. The private access driveway is connected to the main road that runs through the village less about 300m away from the site. The private drive entrance is connected to the centre of the village via a safe lit pedestrian footway along the main road. There are limited services in Kingsley Holt but there is a bus route in the centre of the village less than 1km from the site and also another footway which leads to the larger village of Kingsley, a further 1km, along Holt Lane. Kingsley has a larger number of services including a convenience store and primary school. The town of Cheadle, with shops, workplaces, supermarkets and secondary schools, is less than 2.5 miles from the site and can be reached via public transport or a short cycle ride which is on fairly flat roads and is not arduous. The fairly decent and safe access to services

from the site and the proximity to them reduces the reliance to reach local shops and services by car and hence can potentially reduce emissions.

There is no specific policy which prevents the loss of holiday let accommodation but the loss of such accommodation on the local economy, which could be affected by the loss of tourist accommodation would need to be taken into account. There is some encouragement for new sustainable tourist development in the District and particularly in the Churnet Valley. However, although the site is in a fairly sustainable location for new dwellings, it is not that well connected to any significant tourist attractions in the District via means other than the car. The distance and connectivity between the site and more major tourist attractions in the area such as Alton Towers or Peak Wildlife Park could explain why the current holiday let in The Cowshed had not attracted enough bookings to remain viable, as claimed by the applicant when applying for the conversion of the Cowshed earlier this year. The two holiday let barns subject of this new application are directly adjacent to The Cowshed and share the same access and so would therefore be similarly affected.

The agent submitted further information to demonstrate the problems with viability of the current holiday let business at the site. This includes accounts information for the year ending 2021, 2022 and 2023. It also includes a marketing report undertaken by local Chartered Surveyors firm, Graham Watkins & Co. This reveals that in the 12 months since the site was put on the sales market, in November 2023, only one person had shown an interest in purchasing the property but only on the basis of living in one of the barns rather than run the buildings as holiday lets. The accounts sheets do show that profits have been made in the three year period but according to the agent these are not sustainable profits.

A covering email from the application agent regarding the accounts sheets and marketing report has been provided and the key comments of this are as follows:

We draw particular attention to the fact that the net profit figures for each of the accounting periods do not include any payment of salary. A considerable amount of time is spent each week by the applicant cleaning the premises, meeting and greeting guests, washing bedding, ironing bedding, carrying out maintenance etc. Based on a 30hr week at the minimum wage of £11.41 that amounts to a salary of some £17,846 (£19,047 from April 2025), leaving not much overall profit thereafter.

The 2021 accounts show a net profit of £22,210, but that has only arisen as a consequence of the applicant receiving some £21,170 of Covid Grant money (shown as 'Other Income' in the accounts). If you remove the Covid Grant there was just £1,040 net profit (without accounting for a salary).

The 2022 and 2023 accounts show a much healthier level of income which is attributable to the boom in staycations following the Covid-19 pandemic. The 2022 figures also included £10,667 of Covid Grant. If you remove that Covid Grant from the net profit figure for 2022, the overall profit reduces to £24,017 (without accounting for a salary). The 2023 accounts show a lesser overall net profit of £21,250 (without accounting for a salary).

So whilst the business turns a profit, it is not a sustainable one, as once you take a salary the overall net profits are not healthy at all. There are ever increasing costs in running the premises (increased agency fees, lighting and heating costs nearly doubling etc) and these will continue to eat into the bottom line. The applicant is 70 years old, lives on his own and has no desire to keep running the holiday lets. He has already served notice on the holiday agency (Hoseasons), so 2025 will be the last year these premises will operate as holiday lets, irrespective of the outcome of this application.

In addition to the above we draw attention to the Marketing Report prepared by Graham Watkins & Co. Chartered Surveyors. The Marketing Report confirms that the premises have been on the market for sale since 13th November 2023 (12+months), and during that period only one offer has been received. That offer was subsequently withdrawn due to the costs and uncertainty over whether planning permission would be granted for full residential use, as the purchaser wanted to live in one of the barns. The report notes that there have been a number of enquiries received where the parties would have been interested if full residential use had been possible.

Of particular note is the observation within the report that because of the holiday let restriction, the property could not be purchased with a standard mortgage, but rather would require a commercial loan / mortgage which are more difficult to obtain and command much higher rates, with lower loan-to-value restrictions. This makes it all the more unlikely that a purchaser will be found for the premises, and is reflected in the fact that no offers have been received for the premises to continue operating as holiday lets.

Having regard to the above factors we submit that the continued use of the premises as holiday accommodation would not be viable, and the ongoing use of the premises has been fully tested through the marketing that has been undertaken. The applicant has already served notice on the holiday agency meaning the holiday use will stop operating at the end of this year, come what may, meaning it will not contribute at all to the local tourism economy.

In consideration of the above, although the holiday let business has made a profit in the three years, this becomes very minimal even if a minimum wage salary was offered in order to successfully run the holiday let business i.e. to service the two units including cleaning and maintenance. This would reasonably be required given the age of the owner (beyond retirement age) and it is understandable that he would not want to operate the business by himself and therefore I accept the claims that there is no long terms sustainable viability in the business. According to the applicant's agent, the owner has served notice on the holiday letting agents. Furthermore, the advertisement of the property for sale over the 12 month period has not attracted any purchasers with a view to running the two buildings as holiday lets.

Overall, given the demonstrated viability issues with a holiday let business at the site and the unrealistic prospect of them continuing as overnight visitor accommodation in the long term, I do not consider the loss of the two holiday lets in this particularly location would have a significant impact on attracting more tourism in the District, including longer visitor stays or the overall local rural economy.

Furthermore, it would be far preferable for the buildings to become dwellings in an area of undersupply than be left vacant in the long term and the possibility of them becoming neglected and derelict. The buildings have traditional character and are in a sustainable location and should be put to good use. It is also reminded that the 2024 updated NPPF provides further weight to the allowance of additional housing in sustainable locations where there is an undersupply.

Another factor in favour of the proposal is that the condition on the 2002 permission to convert the one of the barns into holiday lets, with the purpose of restricting the use to holiday lets, is also weak in that following the four week stay restriction, it does not restrict an immediate return to the unit in that there is no return period time restriction given. The condition was the same one applied to the conversion of The Cowshed into a holiday let. A permanent occupation of that barn could be achieved without any significant breach of the condition.

Overall, in terms of the principle of the development, on balance, the benefits of the two holiday let barns being used as a dwellings, due to the shortfall in housing numbers in the District and the sustainable location to schools, public transport and workplaces would outweigh the benefits of continued and economically uncertain holiday let uses in this location.

These are the same reasons why the application to convert Cowshed into a dwelling was approved in July 2024. The relevant planning policies in use by the Council for these sorts of proposals have not changed and there have been no significant changes to the housing supply, tourism or the nature of the site and its surroundings since the previous approval was made which could lead to a different decision being made for this new proposal.

With regard to visual amenity, there would be no changes to the exterior of the building or the grounds around it and therefore no impact on the character and appearance of the area would occur.

With regard to residential amenity, the floorspace of both buildings far exceeds the liveable floorspace thresholds set out in the government's Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) applying to a 4-bed two storey dwelling or 2-bed two storey dwelling. Elevational and floor plan drawings have been used to calculate the amount of usable floor space in line with the NDSS standards. On the basis that 100% of the first floor of the Long Barn has a floor to ceiling/head height of at least 2.0m, the Long Barn has a usable floorspace (with a minimum head height of 1.5m) of 202 sq.m which far exceeds the 115 sq.m set out in the standards for a 4-bed 7-person 2-storey dwelling or even the 128 sq.m threshold for 5-bed 8-person unit. The main bedroom width and overall area also meets the standards. With regard to the smaller unit (The Granary), due to the lower eaves, less than 100% of the first floor floorspace has a minimum head height of 1.5m but the overall usable floorspace was calculated as 96.5 sq.m which exceeds the 70 sq.m threshold for a 2-bed. 3-person two-storey unit and the main bedroom also meets the width and overall size standards. The proposal fully complies with the NDSS.

The garden areas for each building exceed the 65 sq.m area standards for private outdoor amenity space set out in the Council's Space About Dwellings SPG.

The new residents would not be affected by noise as farming operations at the former farm site have ceased.

With regard to the residential amenities of the area, The Cowshed opposite The Long Barn now appears to be occupied as a permanent dwelling. The distances between opposing windows (across the yard) would exceed those set out in the Space About Dwellings SPG and neither the existing residents or the eventual residents of The Longbarn would experience any significant loss of privacy. Also, the main garden areas for both are not significantly overlooked. Similarly, the distance between the Granary and Longbarn is such that no harmful level of overlooking would result between the two dwellings. Furthermore, the garden area for The Granary backs onto open fields and is on the opposite side of the building to the Cowshed and Longbarn and so is not overlooked. Overall, I do not consider the proposal would result in any additional harms to the existing residents and would provide satisfactory living conditions for new permanent residents. The residential amenities of the area would not be harmed.

Environmental Health have recommended a number of conditions and informatives but Given that the building is already occupied as a holiday let, and no works of alteration or demolition / rebuild are proposed, these are not considered to be necessary.

The proposal falls below the threshold for BNG.

Finally, with regard to highway safety and traffic, it is not considered the proposal would result in a significant increase in vehicle movements arising from the use of the buildings as a permanent dwellings in relation to a holiday let use, despite traffic with a holiday let use being more seasonal. The access onto the main road appears safe as the cars would enter a straight section of road when leaving the access. Parking provision for both proposed dwellings is sufficient and there is ample turning space on adjacent yard areas. The proposal would not lead to any detriment to highway safety.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The proposal is acceptable in principle in this location and would not lead to any significant additional impacts on the visual or residential amenities of the area or on traffic and highway safety. The proposal would 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: 31.1.25

X *B.J. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council