

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2024/0561
Valid 17/12/2024

THE GRANGE WHISTON
EAVES LANE
WHISTON

**ERECTION OF A BARN FOR
AGRICULTURAL USE AND
ASSOCIATED WORKS TO
INCLUDE ACCESS TRACK
AND YARD AREA INVOLVING
EXCAVATION AND SPOIL
DISPERSAL, RETAINING
WALL AND RE-GRADING TO
ACHIEVE LEVELS**

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Character and appearance
- Landscape
- Scale and design
- Ecology

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

Rural field pasture / meadow land. The application site red edge has been drawn to enclose two small fields which together form an approximately rectangular parcel of land on gently undulating and rising ground to the rear (north east) of the small farmstead dwelling of Whiston Grange. The site area is given as 18,000m² (1.8ha / 4.4 acres). Excluded from the red edge is the applicant's dwelling, yard area and outbuildings of Whiston Grange which stands alongside Whiston Eaves Lane together with its garden and paddock (also excluded from the red edge) running to the south east parallel with the road. Access is taken from Whiston Eaves Lane at the north west end of the farmstead buildings.

Houses on Jubilee Drive off Black Lane on the edge of the 'smaller village' of Whiston are some 250m to 300m away to the north separated from the application land by similar small field pastures with a children's play area in one closest to the village. Further rising ground to the north east and immediate east is in use as part of Whiston Hall Golf Course. Nearest neighbours are Little Heath House Farm 200m to the south west and Heath House Farm some 300m to the west.

An evidently moderately well used public footpath right of way (Kingsley 51) runs from Whiston Eaves Lane cutting through the application land and onwards in a generally northerly or north easterly direction towards Whiston Hall.

Whiston Grange is recorded in the Staffordshire Heritage Environment Record as an isolated farmstead laid out around a loose, single-sided yard with extant farmhouse and associated out buildings identified on historic mapping from the 19th century and likely to have been established between 1775 and 1834.

In the Council's Landscape and Settlement Character study (2008) the application land and its visible surrounding setting is within the 'Dissected sandstone highland fringe' landscape character type. This is ranked as being of 'high' quality (level four on a five point scale where five is highest) in the County-wide context and additionally is within an area noted as having the highest sensitivity to landscape change.

The application land is bordered by traditional dry-stone walls with some hedging and intermittent boundary bushes and a similar walled boundary separates the two fields.

PROPOSAL

The application description has been amended with the agent's agreement to encompass five principal elements chief of these being the erection of a steel framed building 25m x 10m with eaves at 4.8m and ridge height of 7.8 metres.

To facilitate this on the rising and undulating ground an appreciable excavation is required to establish a level area. As existing, the land levels across the excavated area rise from c.196m (southern corner) to 201m in the northern corner (5m). The building floor level is proposed at 198.9 metres. The total yard area including the site of the building scales from plan as being c.37m x 29 metres. A c.2m high concrete retaining wall is proposed parallel with the north westerly side of the building. The excavation is to have a battered slope along its south easterly end and along its rear (north easterly) long edge. The excavation involves some cut-and-fill within its area to achieve its level but surplus spoil is to be dispersed within an area of the field north east from the building.

The statement describes the building as: "constructed from a steel portal frame with concrete panels to a height of 1.8m. The walls above this height will be in composite colour coated cladding, with the roof of similar composite cladding with translucent sheets. The southwest elevation would have a pedestrian access door and vehicle access door at the western end, and the southeast elevation would have a larger vehicle access door, both served by a yard accessed from a farm track off the existing main entrance to the homestead."

Access would share the existing junction from Whiston Eaves Lane but would then forge a new route through the adjacent field and curve around to the rear of the existing steading. This is proposed to have a 4.2m width and would again involve excavation and graded banking and appears likely to generate further surplus spoil for dispersal. New hedge planting is shown to the outer edge of the new track route. The proposal plans show a number of details which are not of themselves development and would not require planning permission such as fencing along one side of the public footpath, pond restoration and planting an orchard.

The application is accompanied by a Design and Access Statement and documents in response to BNG requirements.

BNG

The application is accompanied by biodiversity net gain submissions.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan (adopted 9th September 2020)

SS1 Development Principles
SS2 Settlement Hierarchy
SS10 Other Rural Areas Area Strategy
SS11 Churnet Valley Strategy
DC1 Design Considerations
DC2 The Historic Environment
DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting
NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources
NE2 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

National Planning Policy Framework (Dec 2024)

Paragraph(s) 1 – 14;
Section(s) 4 – Decision making; 6 – Building a strong and competitive economy; 8 Promoting healthy and safe communities; 11 – Making effective use of land; 12 – Achieving well designed places; 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment; 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Adopted Supplementary Planning Documents/Guidance (SPD/G):

- Space About Dwellings SPG
- Design Principles SPG
- Design Guide SPD adopted 21st February 2018

Local Plan Supporting Evidence Documents:

- Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2008)

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

None specific to the application land but SMD/2017/0324 was approved for an extension to the dwelling at Whiston Grange to form a larger kitchen with bedroom extension over including en-suite.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 11.02.2025
Neighbour consultation period ends: N/A
Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None

Town / Parish Comments

Kingsley Parish Council supports the application

Ramblers Association

Notes Kingsley fp 51 and comments that the proposal must not affect the rights for the public to use this path.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

To fully assess the ecological implications of the proposed development we require a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal or Ecology Statement completed by a suitably qualified and experienced ecologist assess the potential for the site and adjacent habitats to support protected species, with recommendations for any further surveys or mitigation that may be required. There also needs to be evidence that the mitigation hierarchy has been applied.

In the BNG metric submitted the existing grassland here should be listed as strategic. The proposed orchard hasn't been taken account of in the submitted BNG metric and would diverge from the BNG habitats proposed – this could become a basis for enforcement if not included in the 30 year legally binding gain plan. Clarification needed as to the habitat recovery time on the spoil disposal area.-

Based on the information provided, we recommend that the following are secured through planning conditions: Any trees planted should be native trees of local provenance; seed mix for grassland should be native, of local provenance and appropriate to the site conditions.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

In its general approach, in accordance with policy SS1, the Council expects the development and use of land to contribute positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands. When considering development proposals the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the NPPF. This means that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Local Plan shall be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The relevant strategic policy is SS10 for the rural areas as it is applied outside of development boundaries. The policy is 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”. As the proposal is conjectured to support a land use (agriculture) dependent upon a countryside location it is to that extent supported in principle under SS10. However, it may be noted that the development does not strictly fall in any of the subsections by which the policy says that this is to be achieved. The potential relevant section is SS10(2) but this proposal is not an employment use within the meaning of that section nor is it about farm diversification as normally understood by the term; although the Local Plan glossary definition of ‘Rural Diversification’ could be read as giving some wider scope that may cover the proposal if it is regarded as an enterprise extension of existing farm activity. This is not shown to be the case here.

No less significant is SS10 (3) which aims to enhance and conserve the quality of the countryside by [first point]: Giving priority to the need to protect the quality and character of the area and requiring all development proposals to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape.

In conclusion, to find support in principle would require a clear demonstration of the need for the development which as discussed here has not been established. The main issues would then be a matter of weighing the design impacts and any other matters relative to the justification.

Design

Functional purpose

There is some slight discrepancy as to the site area with the overall land holding put at 5.29 acres in the statement but which appears to include the house and existing yard and garden / paddock that are not included in the site red edge which is shown extending to 4.4 acres. This is functionally in agricultural terms a very small land parcel for livestock and would reduce to 4 acres as a result of the development – enough for a maximum of 4 head of adult cattle or circa 20 sheep. No indication is given of the intended animal species, age group or numbers proposed with none currently being kept on the holding.

Although the building is described in the statement as being for mixed agricultural use, including storage of machinery “to manage the landholding” and livestock, it is not designed with any of the necessary allowances normally required in order to house livestock or harvested fodder. The design uses steel sheeting for the walls (above the concrete base walls) and steel doors and appears entirely sealed with no ventilation either at the roof ridge or by way of gap boarding for example. No internal space divisions are shown to separate livestock and machine storage or fodder. Equipment items listed for storage are tractor, trailer, roller, mower and topper which would be expected to take up only a modest amount of space.

There is significant emphasis in the statement on the applicant's apparent intentions to manage the holding for wildlife habitat and biodiversity. Currently rented out it is their stated intention to revert to a small holding. They say "nature recovery on the site would be enabled by the proposed barn, along with the potential for enterprise and farm diversification, enhancing the local rural economy" but no fuller explanation of what this means is provided. The need for a barn, new additional access tracks and yard space on this scale in order to support 'nature recovery' seems odd.

Scale and need

Fundamentally the scale of the development is excessive both for the very small acreage involved and for the modest interventions that would be demanded to encourage the development (or continuation) of species-rich grassland. The very modest equipment storage needs do not justify new additional track access to 4.2m surfaced widths. It is also difficult to understand why such a large yard area could possibly be required.

Appearance

Despite proposing to use a green colour finish the sheet metal wall cladding and steel doors are more akin to an industrial store than a rural building for agricultural use.

Whilst the building would be set into a backdrop of rising ground at the rear, its front and especially the south corner would be visually prominent as a result of the near 5m eaves and near 8m ridge heights involved especially when seen across the exposed flat of the excavated, and raised, yard area.

Landscape

In common with much of the immediate surroundings the fields of the application land are small scale with refined details of traditional wall boundaries and a series of exquisite stone squeeze stiles along the public footpath. Also notable is the degree of undulation in the land-lie of the two fields. The engineered land works to achieve the expansive yard and new access road would greatly disrupt the gentle rhythm and visual intimacy of this ground.

Heritage

The farmstead at The Grange should be regarded as a non-designated heritage asset due to its being recorded on the Staffordshire County Heritage and Environment Register as having historic interest. NPPF(2024) paragraph 215 places an expectation on the LPA to take this historic interest into account in assessing the application and to reach a balanced judgement in weighing the proposal's effects, having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

Amenity

There are no near neighbouring residents that could be affected. There would be an adverse visual impact for users of the cross field public footpath and from Whiston Eaves Lane.

Highway Safety

There appears unlikely to be a risk of adverse highways impacts from the very low level of additional usage proposed. A large tractor and muck spreader were seen entering the land at the LPA site visit using the spacious field gate off the access as seen in file photo P1120702.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The proposal is excessive in scale both in the storage building and in the amount of yard and track access proposed relative to the holding and the described needs. New development in the rural areas should only be supported where there is an 'essential need' (SS10). This has not been demonstrated here on the scales proposed. Moreover, policy SS10(3) establishes that priority should be given to protecting the quality and character of the area. This scheme fails in its justification and fails to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the location and its surroundings. The development would step out significantly from the established farmstead building group disrupting the established arrangement and in turn undermining the historic pattern. The proposal is thus found contrary to SS10; DC1; DC2 and DC3. The Grange has already seen some expansion in the yard area in recent time along its north east side adjacent to the buildings. The current proposal would appear likely to significantly more than double the developed area and thus 'swamp' the location relative to its existing developed scale to date. It would amount to an un-necessarily large encroachment into hitherto long undeveloped field land.

Attention paid in the application to ecology and habitat is to be noted but this cannot offset the scale of the harms identified, especially to landscape and visual character. It is also to be noted from the ecology consultee response that insufficient information has so far been compiled to establish the baseline ecological condition, in particular of the grassland species assemblage. Given the proximity of at least one pond and given the extent of ground works involved consideration needs to be given to the possible need for mitigation measures for Great Crested Newts.

The proposal does not comply with the policies in the Development plan. It does not deliver sustainable development

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : Refuse

Case Officer: Arne Swithenbank

Recommendation Date: 10.02.2025

X *J Curley*

Signed by: Jane Curley

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council