

**Well House Farm,
Rudyard Road,
Biddulph Moor,
Staffordshire,
ST8 7JW**

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The application site is within land associated with a detached, previously altered and extended, stone and clay tile farm house. The farm lies in the Green Belt, in a rural field location to the north-east of Biddulph Moor. A public footpath right of way follows the access drive and skirts the easterly side of the farm house. Footpaths then continue to the west across the fields.

MAIN ISSUES

Principle of development in the Green Belt

Amenity

Ecology

PROPOSAL

It is proposed to construct a horse ménage to the western side of the farm. It is to be 800 square metres in area – 40m by 20m with the long edge alongside the field boundary.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan 2020

SS 1 Development Principles

SS 2 Settlement Hierarchy

SS 10 Other Rural Areas Strategy

DC 1 Design Considerations

DC 3 Landscape character

NE 1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources

NE 2 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows

T 1 Development and Sustainable Transport

Local Plan Supporting Evidence Documents:

- Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2008)

Principle of Development

The determination of a planning application is to be made pursuant to section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which is to be read in conjunction with section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Section 38(6) requires the local planning authority to determine planning applications in accordance with the development plan, unless there are material circumstances which 'indicate otherwise'. Section 70(2) provides that in determining applications the local planning authority "shall have regard to the provisions of the Development Plan, so far as

material to the application and to any other material considerations." The Development Plan consists of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan Policies Adopted September 2020.

Other material considerations include the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) December 2024 and National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG).

Paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) promotes a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. For decision takers this means (c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or (d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are more important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission, unless: i) the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or ii) Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.

Paragraph 8 of the NPPF identifies three dimensions to sustainable development as being economic, social and environmental.

In accordance with Policy SS1 Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan the Council will expect all new development to make a positive contribution towards the sustainability of communities and to protecting, and where possible enhancing the environment. When considering development proposals the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The application site falls under 'other rural areas' in the settlement hierarchy: the open countryside where development is normally unacceptable and green belt where further development is generally inappropriate.

Policy S10 of the Adopted Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Other Rural Areas) states that these areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be located in the countryside.

The site is located within the Green Belt. Consequently great weight must be given to Section 13 of the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) – Protecting Green Belt land.

Policy SS10 states that strict control will continue to be exercised over inappropriate development within the Green Belt allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government policy.

The fundamental aim of the Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The essential characteristics of Green Belts, to be maintained, are their openness and their permanence.

The Government identifies five purposes of the Green Belt:

Green Belt serves five purposes:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;

- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The NPPF (paragraphs 143-144) states that inappropriate development is harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. These will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt is clearly outweighed by other considerations. Paragraph 144 of the NPPF requires that local planning authorities ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt.

Paragraph 154 of the NPPF states that new development in the Green Belt is by definition inappropriate, with some exceptions. One of these at 154 (h) makes provision for appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation subject to preserving openness and not conflicting with Green Belt purposes. Further exceptions which are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are engineering operations and material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds). The proposed ménage would constitute an engineering operation. Subject to maintaining the openness of the Green Belt, the proposal would not be inappropriate development.

The ménage would be sited as part of the existing farm buildings. It would have limited visibility if any from Rudyard Road or Hot Lane, to the north and south of the site respectively, due to screening from vegetation and farm buildings, and due to the slope of the land. While it is possible that the ménage would be slightly visible from Top Road to the east, it would be partly screened by the existing farmhouse, and partly by vegetation. Additionally, the significant distance (approximately 82 m) between the ménage and Top Road would reduce its prominence in views.

It is considered that any visible part of the ménage would be read as part of the farm buildings, and not as separate development, and as a result the ménage would not impact on the openness of the Green Belt in any views from roads. Furthermore the proposal does not introduce any new structures or erections over and above its surrounding fencing which is permitted development and so would in effect preserve openness.

Consideration has been given to the possible scale of any cut-and-fill needed to achieve a continuous level necessary for a ménage. As there is a slope trend on the existing site downwards from east to west, it would be best to follow the existing levels with a 2% slope which equates to a drop of 80cm over 40 metres. On this basis it is judged in this case that the engineering to achieve site levels would preserve openness and not conflict with Green Belt purposes by way of undue ground raising or embanking to form a level ménage. The openness of the Green Belt would consequently be maintained as a result of the proposed development, and the proposal is in accordance with the Local Plan and NPPF.

Design

Policy DC1 refers to design and states that all new development should be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area. New development should promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, height, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance. The proposed ménage is to have a post and rail fence to its perimeter, and a surface of rubber and sand.

There are no issues with the proposed materials and design which would be as expected and has been permitted nearby in accordance with its location and not unduly prominent. The ménage in this particular location is not considered to be overly impactful on landscape character and appearance. However it is considered that the introduction of some native species hedging to at least some of the perimeter around the ménage would provide screening and assist with its assimilation into the surrounding pattern of fields and field boundaries. This can be secured by condition.

Amenity

Local Plan Policy DC1 seeks to secure development that protects the amenity, including residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, sunlight, outlook, privacy and soft landscaping.

The nearest neighbouring properties are over 80m away. The operational works to construct the ménage are unlikely to result in any impact on amenity. With regard to the use, no lighting is proposed as part of this application, and this should be maintained via condition. It is also considered important to attach a drainage condition re the ménage to ensure water cannot collect within the ménage and drain into adjacent neighbours' land. It is judged that it would be feasible to contain all drainage within the applicant's land.

Two footpaths pass very close to the farm and the ménage will be visible from these. However, it is again considered that it would be read as part of the cluster of existing buildings due to its position. The footpath that approaches the farm from the south will have limited visibility when crossing the field due to vegetation and the slope of the land, and thus views will be brief and appear in the context of the whole farm.

Ecology

Local Plan Policy NE 1 seeks to ensure development protects biodiversity, while Policy NE2 seeks to protect existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows.

An Ecological Report has been submitted with the application that states the development will have low or negligible impacts on all species..

The report also states that the trees surrounding the site are of value. As these are not within the site itself they should not be affected by the proposed works.

The proposal is consequently in accordance with Policies NE 1 and NE 2 subject to suitable ecological condition to plant hedgerow and trees in accordance with Biodiversity Net Gain.