

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2024/0478
Valid 22/10/2024

WOODBINE COTTAGE
SALTERSFORD LANE
ALTON

CHANGE OF USE OF ANNEXE
TO SEPARATE DWELLING

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Impact on the character and appearance of the area
- Living conditions for existing and future occupants

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The existing building consists of a former farm shed or outbuilding within the unit of ownership and occupation belonging to Woodbine Cottage. It has already been altered, with planning permission, to provide ancillary living accommodation for the existing dwelling. The height and pitch of the roof has been built up with new block work within the gable and the whole roof has been replaced with cemented plain tiles laid on felt, and a roof light has been installed. The building fronts Saltersford Lane with a gable containing a wide glazed patio window and a front door. The building has been clad with ship lap timber.

The building is to the north eastern edge of the dwelling's curtilage, the other, lower, side of a stone retaining wall and laurel hedge. According to planning history the building once formed a unit with a horse manege behind, to the northwest, and a stable yard and the dwelling's curtilage to the southwest. It appears that the ownership has since been reduced with the manege area given over to a housing development of 23 dwellings, now largely constructed, that surrounds the unit on all sides to the north, north west and north east. The north east facing side elevation of the application building flanks the large rear garden boundary of the new dwelling (16 Meadowside). The north west facing rear elevation of the building has a small patio courtyard enclosed by a timber fence that backs onto the rear garden of the new dwelling behind (14 Meadowside) .

Woodbine Cottage and the building are just beyond the adopted section of Saltersford Lane, to the north east of the turning head, where the lane transitions into an unmade farm track that serves two dwellings and a farm to the east. The cottage and the application building are on the inside edge of the Alton 'Larger Village' settlement, where its Local Plan defined boundary surrounds a peninsula of existing development to the south east. The development of 23 dwellings, allowed at appeal, occupies farm land that is outside that defined area.

PROPOSAL

The application proposes to change the use of the ancillary accommodation to provide a single independent dwellinghouse. The application and plans confirm that no internal or external alterations are proposed to the building.

The self-contained living accommodation provided within the building includes two double bedrooms, sizable open plan kitchen/dining/living space, 3 WCs.

To provide the new dwelling with the standard necessary two parking spaces it is proposed to remove boundary hedge, wall and retaining structure from the north east corner of the cottages garden and to dig out a square of the raised level of the garden.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan Development Plan Document (Adopted 2020)

S01 Spatial Objectives

SS1 Development Principles

SS8 Larger Village Strategy DC1 Design Considerations

DC1 Design Considerations

T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

SMDC Design Guide

National Planning Policy Framework

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

13/00028/FUL Outdoor equestrian manage. APPROVED.

SMD/2015/0435 Outline permission 23 dwellings. ALLOWED at Appeal.

SMD/2019/0486 REM 23 Dwellings. APPROVED.

SMD/2022/0290 Alterations and conversion to ancillary living accommodation.

APPROVED subject to occupancy and use restriction.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 17th Dec 2024

Neighbour consultation period ends: 17th Dec 2024

Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

Two objections/comments received from neighbours.

One that lives in a new dwelling to the rear/north west of the building, concerned that the change of use would affect their privacy if the building were occupied more regularly. The objector requests that the existing boundary fence be increased in height.

The second lives off Saltersford Lane and comments that the dwelling must be provided with off road parking space. Lane side parking affects access to their property.

Town / Parish Comments

Alton PC: Objection. It has not been demonstrated that the dwellinghouse is able to provide an appropriate standard of living condition for persons that do not have a

preexisting connection or association with the occupation and use of other adjacent land and buildings.

Environmental Health

No Objection

Staffordshire County Council Highways

No Objection. The proposed plan demonstrates a standard compliant number of parking spaces to be provided for a dwelling of this size.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

The Council has an undersupply of housing and cannot demonstrate a 5year supply. For the purposes of paragraph 11d of the revised NPPF, adopted on the 12th December 2024, the development plan policies most important for determining the application shall be considered out of date. Planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefit, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole.

For the purposes of the adopted Local Plan the site lies within the settlement boundary of Alton, which Policy SS8 identifies as a 'Larger Village'. Policy SS8 sets out that within settlement boundaries a range of development is acceptable in principle, including new residential development and the conversion of existing buildings to alternative uses.

Local Plan housing policy H1 requires 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".

The development in this case relates to a building that has its origins as a garden outbuilding, provided only as ancillary accommodation for the existing dwelling. It has not been subject to the policy tests and standards normally applicable to housing development. The application development proposes the re use/material change of use to an existing building.

Design and Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area

SMDC Local Plan DC1 generally requires all development to 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, to comply with the policy, 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; be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place.

The character and appearance of the area has changed significantly in recent years the outbuilding provided a farm shed on farmland to the edge of the village

development boundary for many years. Until more recent alterations and the application of new facing materials, the building was a functional concrete block shed with a sheet metal roof - not unusual to a farmland setting. Now that the surrounding housing development has been carried out by Walton Homes, the land to the north and east provides large red brick modern homes on large plots with sizeable gardens enclosed by close boarded fences. The building's east facing flank wall provides the garden to the new dwelling at 16 Meadowside, while the building's courtyard boundary to the north backs onto the rear garden of 14 Meadowside with a timber close boarded fence.

Now the building occupies a location within a distinctly more residential setting. The recent alterations and the application of new facing materials, carried out with the planning permission to provide the ancillary accommodation, has made the building more relatable to a residential character and appearance. While the building now has an 'improved' appearance for its residential setting, the building, against the context of the brick dwellings that surround, otherwise retains the appearance of a secondary or subordinate building or shed.

This application does not propose any further alteration to the external appearance of the building. However, an allocation and extension of curtilage to provide two adjacent parking spaces would see a large corner of the cottage's retained garden level excavated and hard surfaced with a significant section of garden wall and boundary hedge removed. The new parking area would erode strong boundary feature that is presented to the lane and open the site to make hard surfacing and parked vehicles an overly prominent feature within the lane. This would erode and be at odds with the prevailing character of the residential lane that sees parked cars set back from the lane behind strong garden boundary feature.

Where the building's appearance as a secondary outbuilding within its residential setting is a product of its history as a farm shed, as a dwellinghouse it would appear strangely appointed, positioned and arranged in a manner that is at odds with the pattern of the surrounding residential development. The building's plot is limited and the walls of the building provide boundary to neighbouring gardens, while the small amenity area courtyard at the rear juts out into neighbouring garden space.

Overall, the proposal would fail to reinforce local distinctiveness and would not positively contribute to the special character of the area, it would not add value to the local area. The development would not respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place. In all of these regards the development is contrary to Policy SS8, H1 and DC1 of the SMDC Local Plan and the SMDC design guide.

Amenity/Living Conditions of existing and future occupiers

The front of the building is a, Space About Dwelling compliant, 23m from the side elevation of the dwelling 'Summerlea' on the opposite side of the road. Summerlea is on a higher ground level, the other side of a steep highway verge and high hedgerow. The front window in the building's gable does not overlook the property at Summerlea and the neighbouring occupants should not be subject to unreasonable noise or disturbance under the conditions of normal use. The proximity of Summerlea would not adversely affect or limit the living conditions of future residents if the building were used and occupied as a dwelling.

The side elevation of the building, facing north east, flanks and provides the boundary to the rear garden of 16 Meadowside View. The side of the building is 15m to 20m from the rear of no. 16. The bottom edge of three roof lights introduced across this roof slope are less than 1.7m above the floor height of the rooms. As a condition of the ancillary accommodation permission therefore, these rooflights should be obscure glazed and non-opening. That condition does not appear to have been complied with. With that degree of immediate proximity there is the potential for future residents of the proposed dwelling to overlook the neighbour from the bedroom rooflights. Also, garden activity within the plot at 16 Meadowside View could cause disturbance for future residents if it is occupied as a dwelling and a sole and only residence.

The rear of the building, facing north west, faces toward the rear elevation of No. 14 Meadowside View, some 13m away. The building's rear patio windows face onto a small patio and a close boarded fence just 5m away. The small patio is surrounded on two sides by the garden of No. 14. It does not provide Space About Dwelling compliant outdoor amenity space (depth or area) or range of outlook from what would be principal rear facing windows to the fence. This small area would be susceptible to noise and disturbance from the garden activity of the large family dwelling at 14 Meadowside. Moreover, given that the area of patio amenity is so small, the outdoor activities of any future occupier would be concentrated in this area and this would have the potential to disturb the amenity of those residents at No. 14 Meadowside.

An occupation and use condition attached to the existing planning permission confirms and limits the use of the building to purposes ancillary to the existing cottage and restricts occupancy only to members or guests of the household. The reason for the condition is that it has not been demonstrated that the dwellinghouse is able to provide an appropriate standard of living condition for persons that do not have a pre-existing connection or association with the occupation and use of other adjacent land and buildings. It is also apparent that if the use and occupation of the building were to become concentrated and consistent in a manner associated with full occupation as a sole residence and full dwellinghouse, that would have the potential to cause noise and disturbance and negatively affect living conditions of the new dwellings to the side and rear.

In these respects the building should only be temporarily or occasionally occupied by persons who are part or guests of the existing Woodbine Cottage and have permanent residence available elsewhere and need not require or be afforded the same standard of amenity or living condition. That matter has not been addressed or discussed by the applicant with this submission.

The accommodation and building here would not provide quality housing and standards of amenity necessary for an independent standalone dwelling. For example:

- the large area of glazing, principal kitchen window, within the front gable are less than 3m from the edge of the access lane serving properties to the east;
- the bedrooms in the roof space appear substandard against the 'nationally described space standards' by reason of reduced head height above floor area;
- the bedrooms are not served with light, ventilation and outlook from opening conventional windows;

- the patio windows at the rear are just 5m from a close boarded fence shared with the garden of a much larger family dwelling to the rear and garden and outdoor amenity space is substandard in depth and area and is completely surrounded by the residential gardens of much larger dwellings

The two existing bed spaces have substandard head height that falls short of what the 'Nationally Described Space' standards require and, in the absence of conventional window arrangement, they are poorly served in terms of daylight, outlook and ventilation by roof light windows. The principal outlook to the front and rear has limited and obscured outlook by reason of its close proximity to a shared boundary fence at the rear and the edge of the lane to the front, in both respects the separation distances do not comply with the Council's adopted 'Space About Dwellings' SPG.

The existing building and accommodation, by reason of its positioning, limited space, arrangement, and proximity to neighbours, would fail to provide a 'high quality' house with acceptable living conditions and standards of amenity provided for existing residential neighbours and future occupiers of the development. In these regards there would be conflict with policy SS8, H1 and DC1 of the adopted SMDC Local Plan 2020, a breach of standards set out in the Council's adopted 'Space About Dwellings' SPG, and the terms of the NPPF.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the area, it would not be well related to the existing pattern of development and would erode the distinctiveness of the locality. The development would not complement the local context or the established layout which includes strong roadside boundary features with parking set-back from the road with good plot spacing around dwellings. The increased parking provision taken from the host dwelling's curtilage would result in a very vehicle dominant layout, with vehicles being prominent within the roadside street scene. In these regards there would be conflict with Policy SS8, H1 and DC1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan 2020 and the terms of the NPPF.

The building would not provide a high quality house having regard to its location, the characteristics of the site, the limited space within the plot, and its proximity to neighbours. A regular and sustained use of the building as an independent and sole residence would introduce an intensity of use and activity in a concentrated area that would affect the amenity of surrounding neighbours through overlooking, noise and disturbance. The building and its limited plot would fail to provide acceptable standards of amenity and living conditions for future occupiers that would use the accommodation as their sole and independent residence. In these regards there would be conflict with Policy SS8, H1 and DC1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan 2020 and the terms of the NPPF.

The proposal to provide a low quality substandard dwelling would make a negligible contribution to housing supply and there would be little or no benefit associated with that. The adverse impacts of granting planning permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefit, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : REFUSE

Case Officer: Ben Hurst

Recommendation Date:

X

J Curley

Signed by: Jane Curley

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council