

PLANNING STATEMENT

**THORNFIELDS FARM
CELLARHEAD**

APRIL 2025

Site Address:

Thornfields Farm, Leek Road, Cellarhead, ST3 5BE

Applicant:

Mr. L. Shuker

Proposal:

Change of use and alteration of agricultural building to
form veterinary surgery

Planning Statement:

Date Issued: 10th April 2025

Job Reference: RDP/2025/034

Report Prepared By:

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Mr. L. Shuker to seek full planning permission for the change of use and alteration of an agricultural building at Thornfields Farm, Leek Road, Cellarhead to form a veterinary surgery.
- 1.2 The existing building lies to the west of the established farm shop and butchery on the site, and northwest of the existing animal feeds shop. The building comprises an open sided portal framed structure that has previously been used for the keeping of livestock.
- 1.3 The application proposes the change of use and alteration of the building to form a veterinary surgery. The external works will comprise of the installation of blockwork walls to the lower elevations, with new metal cladding above, of a style and colour to match the rest of the building. The development will not result in an increase in the footprint of the building.
- 1.4 The accommodation of the veterinary surgery will extend to 187 square metres and will comprise of a reception area, three consultation rooms, treatment area, laboratory, cattery and kennels, laundry / food area, storage room, x-ray room, theatre, and a physio/hydrotherapy room. An external patient area will be provided to the north of the building on the existing area of hardstanding, accessed via the kennels.
- 1.5 Parking to serve the veterinary surgery will be accommodated to the north of the building where some minor revisions to the existing car parking layout are proposed in order to accommodate the external patient area. 6no. parking spaces are to be allocated for the veterinary surgery, with the remaining 33no. spaces retained for use by customers of all the retail / commercial uses on the site.

2 Site & Surroundings

- 2.1 The application site is located within the North Staffordshire Green Belt and lies on the western side of the Leek Road some 1.5km from Weston Coyney and 2km from Cellarhead.
- 2.2 The wider Thornfields Farm site is currently in mixed use, comprising of a number of successful retail / commercial uses, including Shukers Pet and Country Stores, Shukers Farm Shop and Butchers, Vintage Paws Dog Grooming, VVS Hair Salon, and Bramble & Bear Vets (who will be relocating into the building that is the subject of this application). The remaining buildings on the holding are in agricultural use.
- 2.3 The site benefits from an existing vehicular access that connects with the Leek Road in between an existing hay / straw storage building, and the existing Pet and Country Stores shop. A previous planning consent to create a new exit from the site to the south of the shop has been implemented in accordance with SMD/2016/0140.
- 2.4 To the north of the building lies a large area of car parking with space for circa 34no. vehicles, which serves the existing retail uses across the site.

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 considered to be of relevance:

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

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. This will be achieved by:

- Enabling the limited expansion or development of business for employment uses where a rural location can be justified
- Supporting the diversification of existing farm enterprises
- 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

- Strict control will continue to be exercised over inappropriate development within the Green Belt allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government policy.

3.4 Policy E1 of the Local Plan relates to 'New Employment Development' and states that new employment development will be assessed according to the extent to which it supports and improves the local economy in terms of providing for the needs and skills of the existing and future local resident workforce and meeting identified business needs. It goes on to state that in general the Council will endeavour to support the expansion of existing businesses and new businesses in the District. The policy furthermore states that schemes involving the re-use of rural buildings for commercial enterprise, including tourism uses, will be considered favourably where the proposed use does not harm the building's character and/or the character of its surroundings, and that to support the growth of the economy the Council will encourage provision for small-scale and start-up businesses.

3.5 Policy TCR3 of the Local Plan relates to 'Retailing and other Town Centre Uses outside Town Centres' and states that in determining proposals for retail and other town centre uses of 200m² or more (net sales for A1) on sites outside town centres and not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan, a Sequential Assessment will be required. Preference will be given to town centre and then edge of centre sites. Where there are no sequentially preferable sites available, sites outside Leek, Biddulph and Cheadle in highly accessible locations that are well connected to the town centre will be considered. An Impact Assessment will be required on proposals for town centre uses of 200m² or more (net sales for A1) located outside of the town centres and not in accordance with the Local Plan. Developer contributions may be sought to mitigate identified impacts on defined centres where appropriate. Proposals with a significant adverse impact will be refused.

3.6 Policy DC1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Design Considerations' and states that all development should 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 SPD. It goes on to state that new development should (amongst others):

- 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 and identity through its scale, height, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance
- protect the amenity of the area, including creation of healthy active environments and residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, sunlight, outlook, privacy and soft landscaping, as well as noise, odour and light pollution.
- provide for safe and satisfactory access and make a contribution to meeting the parking requirement arising from necessary car use.

3.7 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 set out policies, *inter-alia*, in respect of supporting a prosperous rural economy, safeguarding the Green Belt and maintaining highway safety. The content of the NPPF has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

Staffordshire Moorlands Growth Strategy

- 4.2 The Growth Strategy identifies lower than average business start-up rates within the Staffordshire Moorlands, and a perception of rural areas being unsuitable and unwelcoming for business growth. It goes on to confirm that employment growth is a key political priority within the Moorlands. The content of the Growth Strategy has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

5 Planning Assessment

Green Belt

- 5.1 The application site is located within the North Staffordshire Green Belt, wherein policy SS10 of the Local Plan confirms that strict control will be exercised over inappropriate development, allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government policy.
- 5.2 Paragraph 154 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) allows for the reuse of existing buildings within the Green Belt provided that they are of a permanent and substantial construction and that the development preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. In addition, paragraph 154 of the NPPF also allows for the extension or alteration of a building provided it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
- 5.3 The application proposes the change of use and alteration of an existing portal framed agricultural building to form a new veterinary surgery. The building is finished in concrete blockwork and metal profiled sheeting to its elevations and roof. It is a robust structure and can readily be concluded to be of a permanent and substantial construction.
- 5.4 The change of use of the building to a veterinary surgery will furthermore not give rise to any harm to the openness of the Green Belt, nor conflict with the five purposes of including land within it. The proposed external alterations to the building will not result in any increase in the footprint of the building, and as such the works will not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.

- 5.5 The submitted proposal is consequently concluded to constitute an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt in accordance with paragraph 154 of the National Planning Policy Framework and policy SS10 of the Local Plan.

Rural Economy

- 5.6 Paragraph 85 of the NPPF states that:

“Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future. This is particularly important where Britain can be a global leader in driving innovation, and in areas with high levels of productivity, which should be able to capitalise on their performance and potential”

- 5.7 Paragraph 88 of the NPPF goes on to state that planning policies and decisions should enable:

“the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings”

And

“the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses”

- 5.8 This guidance is enshrined within policy SS10 of the Local Plan which confirms that the Council will enable the limited expansion or development of business for employment uses where a rural location can be justified and will support the diversification of existing farm enterprises.
- 5.9 Policy E1 of the Local Plan furthermore confirms that the Council will support the expansion of existing businesses and new businesses in the District, and that schemes involving the re-use of rural buildings for commercial enterprise, including tourism uses, will be considered favourably where the proposed use does not harm the building’s character and/or the character of its surroundings. Policy E1 goes on to state that to support the growth of the economy the Council will encourage provision for small-scale and start-up businesses.
- 5.10 The Local Authority’s Growth Strategy reflects the above policy provisions and confirms that the Staffordshire Moorlands has lower than average business start-up rates and a perception of the rural areas being unsuitable and unwelcoming for business growth.
- 5.11 The application proposes the change of use and alteration of an existing agricultural building to provide a veterinary surgery. The veterinary surgery is currently located on the site in one of the smaller retail units approved under application SMD/2022/0094. As a business they have continued to grow and require additional floorspace which the new development will provide. By relocating their business it will serve to free up space for another small start-up business to occupy the building they currently occupy.

- 5.12 The veterinary practice currently supports 7no. jobs on the site, and will be increasing up to 10no. from June/July. The veterinary practice expects that this proposal will see the number of jobs they support increasing to circa 19-20.
- 5.13 In terms of retail impact considerations policy TCR3 of the Local Plan states that a sequential assessment and impact assessment will be required for all retail uses of 200 square metres or more on sites outside town centres. The policy reflects the provisions of paragraph 93 of the NPPF which states that the sequential approach should be applied to applications for small scale rural offices or other small scale rural development.
- 5.14 The submitted proposal entails a cumulative gross floor area of 187 square metres and therefore does not invoke the need for a sequential assessment or impact assessment to be carried out. The proposal therefore derives no conflict with the provisions of policy TCR3 of the Local Plan or paragraph 93 of the NPPF.
- 5.15 The economic benefits associated with this proposal accord with the objectives of the Local Authority's Growth Strategy, as well as the provisions of policies SS10 and E1 of the Local Plan, and guidance contained within the NPPF. As such those economic benefits weigh heavily in favour of the proposed development.

Design & Layout

- 5.16 The works to convert the existing building to retail use is not considered to be controversial. The proposal will enclose the current open sides of the building, result in an appearance that is in keeping with other buildings on the site, and which will not cause harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area. The minor revisions to the car parking area are

likewise considered to be uncontroversial and will have no material impact on the character and appearance of the area. The proposed development is consequently in accordance with the requirements of policy DC1 of the Local Plan in this regard.

Highway Safety

- 5.17 The site benefits from two existing vehicular access points off the Leek Road. The northernmost access is where vehicles enter the site, with vehicles then exiting via the southernmost vehicular access. The accesses both benefit from good visibility in both directions on egress and their continued use for commercial and agricultural purposes is not considered to be harmful to highway safety.
- 5.18 In terms of parking provision, consent has previously been granted for the formation of 34no. parking spaces on the land to the north of the site under application SMD/2022/0094. Those spaces are to be retained, and 2no. additional spaces provided, which will be shared by the customers who visit the site and by the employees who work there.
- 5.19 The car park is of ample size to accommodate the growth arising from the additional of this development, and will derive no harm to highway safety. The proposal is consequently held to meet the requirements of policy T1 of the Local Plan.

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 5.20 The development is exempt from statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements as no loss of habitat will arise as a consequence of the development.

6 Conclusion

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

- The proposal constitutes an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt.
- The proposal represents diversification of the applicant's established agricultural holding and will support the growth of an existing business on the site.
- The proposal will not result in harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
- The proposal is acceptable from a highway safety perspective and provides sufficient parking to meet the needs of the proposed retail uses.
- The development is exempt from statutory biodiversity net gain requirements.

6.2 The proposed development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policies SS1, SS10, E1, TCR3, DC1 and T1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020), and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.