

Planning Statement

Change of use of part of an agricultural building to mixed agriculture and log use – Re-Submission of Application SMD/2024/0538

Gorsty Hill Farm, Gorsty Hill Road, Upper Tean, Staffordshire , ST10 4EL

April 2025

Project	Gorsty Hill Farm, Gorsty Hill Road, Upper Tean
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1 Introduction

- 1.1 JMI Planning is a Midlands based town planning consultancy. Its directors are chartered town planners with over 30 years' combined experience in both the public and private sector.
- 1.2 The author of this appraisal, Jim Malkin, has worked as a principal planning officer in development control in local government, and more recently as a planning consultant in the private sector. He has extensive knowledge of the planning system and experience of the appeals process. He is a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.
- 1.3 This statement forms part of a re-submitted application following the refusal of application SMD/2024/0538.

2 Site and Planning History

- 2.1 Gorsty Hill Farm is located on the outskirts of Upper Tean and comprises of a modern portal farmed agricultural building, alongside the farmhouse and associated traditional barn. Whilst the surrounding land is predominantly in agricultural use, the site is bordered to the west by a disused quarry, and approximately 300 yards to the north lies an active sand and gravel quarry (Heidelberg Materials). The area includes woodland which serves predominantly as screening for the quarry pools, rather than being of notable ecological or landscape value in itself. The nearest residential property, other than the associated dwelling occupied by the applicant, lies approximately 160 metres to the north-east.
- 2.2 The farm has recently been inherited by the applicants Rob and Heidi Stevenson, having been a tenant of their late Uncle for more than 15 years. The farm has been a major influence on Rob's life, who has visited the farm, assisting his late Uncle and

Aunt since the age of 12. Rob and Heidi have embarked on a scheme of improvements to the holding to modernise the farm. This has ensured safer working practices, significantly improved animal welfare and the overall appearance of the farm. The improvements included the replacement of a range of dilapidated farm buildings which were replaced with the application building, alongside this, a new yard and cattle holding area have been created. In addition, consent has been granted for the replacement of the existing farmhouse. A list of recent consents is included in the table below:

SMD/2023/0180	Replacement of existing cattle sheds with new modern cattle building
SMD/2023/0185	Replacement of existing farm storage and cattle buildings with new farm storage barn and associated works
SMD/2024/0276	Proposed replacement dwelling

2.3 It is critical to the determination of this application that the yard and farm have been processing and selling logs from the site for well in excess of 15 years. The only change (and the only reason that consent is required) is that the applicants have utilised part of the recently constructed agricultural building for the processing and storage of logs.

2.4 The most recent application SMD/2024/0538 sought the *continued use of farm building for a mix of livestock housing, agricultural storage and in association with the log business*. This application was refused on the 28th March for the following reasons:

1. *The proposal fails to demonstrate an essential need to be located in the countryside and is therefore unacceptable in principle. The site has been found to be in an unsustainable location, and is not compliant with Policy in that regard. It would amount to unsustainable development in the countryside. The proposal is*

thus found contrary to Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan policies SS1; SS2 and SS10; and to the NPPF.

- 2. The building, is a large and visually intrusive agricultural building which is less than two years old and was originally granted planning permission on the basis that there was an essential agricultural need for the buildings, which clearly is not the case, the buildings having been constructed and used predominantly for industrial and storage purposes. As a result, the proposal is considered to be an unnecessary and unacceptable prominent intrusion into the countryside and is contrary to policies DC1 & DC3 of the adopted Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan*

3 The Proposed Development

- 3.1 Following the refusal of the previous application, whilst the applicant is understandably upset with the decision, following further consideration they feel that the provision of additional information, as well as revisions to the description of the development and the red-line application site plan will provide comfort to the Local Planning Authority that the scheme is acceptable in planning terms. It is also of concern that no response has been received to either the planning consultant's email to the Planning Manager dated 31st March or the applicants' own email dated 11th April, in which they sought assistance and consideration regarding a revised approach. This absence of engagement has left the applicants uncertain as to the Council's expectations or willingness to consider an amended proposal.
- 3.2 As set out above, a log processing and sales business has operated from the farm for in excess of 15 years alongside agricultural activities. This is no different to the current operations apart from the fact that parts of the building are utilised for log processing and storage. To provide context to this, logs have traditionally been processed outside the old range of buildings, then stored under the old haybarn to dry (a process that is required before it could be used as firewood) and distributed from the site by the applicants alongside associated agricultural activities.

- 3.3 The previous application sought the change of use of the whole barn for a mix of livestock housing, agricultural storage and in association with the log business. This scheme provides clarity on the areas that will be in mixed use, as part of the red-line plan and amends the description of development to confirm that only part of the agricultural building will be used for the processing and storage of logs.
- 3.4 The area of the building utilised for the log business will be limited to that shown in the red-line on the planning application, and the extent to which this is used for either logs or agricultural purposes will be seasonal with dry storage of and processing of logs being higher in Autumn and Winter, with agricultural activities taking precedence in spring and summer.
- 3.5 It is important to understand that the applicant seasons the logs in a sustainable manner without using industrial kilns for drying, thereby reducing the carbon footprint of their operations.

4 Planning Policy Context

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.1 Paragraph 11 of the NPPF establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, stating the following:

Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

For decision-taking 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 most important for determining the application are out-of-date⁸, granting permission unless:*
- i. *the application of policies in this 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 this Framework taken as a whole.*

4.2 Paragraph 85 of the NPPF states the following:

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.

4.3 Paragraph 88 of the NPPF states the following and seeks to support a prosperous rural economy:

Planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) *the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed, beautiful new buildings;*
- b) *the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*

- c) *sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and*
- d) *the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.*

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan

4.4 Policy SS10 Other Rural Areas Strategy (key sections below)

The other rural areas comprise the countryside and the green belt outside of the development boundaries of the towns and larger villages and the open countryside surrounding the smaller villages.

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. The Council and its partners will achieve this through the following actions:

- 2. *Sustain the rural economy 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*
 - *Supporting the development of appropriate ICT and new means of communications to enable homeworking and small businesses reliant on e-technology;*

5 Planning Considerations

Principle of Development - 1st Reason for Refusal

- 5.1 The application site lies outside of the Upper Tean settlement boundary. Policy SS10 of the Local Plan is therefore relevant.
- 5.2 Policy SS10 is broadly supportive of schemes that support the diversification of existing agricultural activities. It is entirely necessary for the log business to be undertaken alongside the agricultural activities at Gorsty Hill Farm, the holding extends to only 65 acres, and on the basis of the size of the unit an alternative income stream is required to support the operations.
- 5.3 Furthermore, Paragraph 88 of the National Planning Policy Framework supports business and enterprise in rural areas. It is clear, therefore, that the Government accepts this type of development can be appropriate in the countryside.
- 5.4 The processing, storage and drying of logs on a commercial scale is a land intensive use which tends to dictate a countryside as opposed to urban location, and it is one that can and has sat acceptably alongside existing agricultural uses at Gorsty Hill Farm for a significant period of time. It has therefore been a legitimate and appropriate diversification of the agricultural holding, supporting the wider agricultural operations on the holding.
- 5.5 As set out above, the log business has been operating, alongside agricultural activities, from Gorsty Hill Farm for in excess of 15 years. The only discernible difference is that now the processing and storage of logs takes place within part of the agricultural building. The extent of the areas of building used for each element is very fluid and depends on the number of logs in the yard / the need for animal housing and general agricultural storage at the time. It is also important to note that significant investment has been made in the agricultural operations of the farm, including the installation of a bespoke cattle handling system and the replacement of dilapidated buildings with modern facilities designed to improve animal welfare and safe working practices. The farm's participation in the Countryside Stewardship scheme, including tree and hedgerow planting, further demonstrates its long-term

agricultural focus and environmental responsibility. This application seeks to provide clarity on the area that will be used for mixed uses.

- 5.6 The use of the building for the processing and storage of logs removes them from the yard areas, where predominantly they have been previously, and still could lawfully be. This provides a significant benefit to the wider appearance of the countryside.
- 5.7 The first reason for refusal on application SMD2024/0538 states that *the proposal fails to demonstrate an essential need to be located in the countryside and is therefore unacceptable in principle.....it would amount to unsustainable development in the countryside*. The history of the use of the farm for the processing, storage and sale of logs has been completely overlooked by the Local Planning Authority. The use of the site for the log business is lawful and has formed part of the operations of the holding for a significant period of time, albeit it has not utilised the new building.
- 5.8 On that basis, the log processing operations will continue lawfully on the land regardless of the previous decision and will always be located in the countryside. It is therefore no less sustainable or appropriate to utilise the now defined part of the building for this purpose. The lawful fallback position of processing and storing logs in the open yard would likely be more prominent within the landscape. It is clear that the proposal, in principle, complies with the relevant requirements of policy SS10 of the Local Plan and the requirements of the NPPF in so far that it supports the diversified operations of the holding and supports the wider rural economy.

Character and Appearance of the Countryside - 2nd Reason for Refusal

- 5.9 The 2nd reason for refusal states the following:

The building, is a large and visually intrusive agricultural building which is less than two years old and was originally granted planning permission on the basis that there was an essential agricultural need for the buildings, which clearly is not the case, the buildings having been constructed and used predominantly for industrial and storage purposes. As a result, the proposal is considered to be an unnecessary and unacceptable prominent intrusion into the countryside and is contrary to policies DC1 & DC3 of the adopted Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan.

- 5.10 It is of critical importance to this re-submitted scheme to appreciate that the building and the use is always going to be on the land. Planning permission has been granted for the building, it is used for agricultural purposes and will continue to be utilised for such a purpose. It cannot therefore be considered an intrusion into the countryside.
- 5.11 It is not the case that the building is predominantly used for industrial and storage purposes. The log enterprise utilises a small part of the building, which has been clarified within the plans submitted with this application. The barn is predominantly in agricultural use, and whilst there are seasonal fluctuations it is never the case that more than 30% of the building is used in association with the logs.
- 5.12 The applicant can lawfully process and store logs within the yard. The existing building, being timber-clad (Yorkshire boarding) and in keeping with rural agricultural typology, is visually less intrusive when used in part for log storage than the alternative of uncovered stacks in the yard. This controlled indoor use improves the visual character of the site.
- 5.13 The scheme therefore has a positive impact on the character and appearance of the countryside and wider landscape.

Amenity of Neighbours

- 5.10 Gorsty Hill Farm is a relatively isolated holding with the nearest residential properties located some 160m away from the farm. The use of the building for log processing is not intrinsically noisy and will not result in any adverse impacts on the reasonable amenities of the occupiers of neighbouring properties.
- 5.11 It is also important to note that mixed agricultural and log operations have taken place on the farm for a significant period without any issues or concerns being raised by the occupiers of nearby properties.
- 5.13 The previous application received a single public objection. However, the applicants have been unable to verify the identity or address of the individual concerned. Despite consulting the local electoral register and nearby residents, no such property or resident appears to exist at the postcode provided.

While it is acknowledged that SMDC is not required to disregard anonymous or unverifiable comments, we respectfully suggest that limited weight be given to representations which cannot be substantiated, and which do not appear to come from a known local source. In any case, no specific material planning concerns were raised that have not otherwise been considered or addressed through this application.

Other Matters

- 5.12 The previous application received no objections from the County Highway Authority in relation to highway safety, nor were any concerns raised by any consultees in relation to biodiversity or protected species. It therefore follows that there are no technical matters that would preclude the granting of planning permission.

- 5.13 It is also pertinent to note that support for the application was received from Cheadle Town Council.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 The application is a re-submission of an application previously refused by the Council for the regularisation of the use of an existing farm building for a mixed use of agriculture and log processing, seasoning and storage. The holding has operated on the basis of its diversification into log sales for in excess of 15 years and the mixed use has been essential to the long-term viability of the farm, supporting and justifying the recent investment in modern agricultural infrastructure.
- 6.2 Policy SS10 of the Local Plan and Paragraph 88 of the NPPF establish the principle of development in rural areas to support the rural economy. It is therefore clear that the Council and the Government accept that such development is appropriate in the countryside.
- 6.3 The building is not intrusive in the countryside and is predominantly used for agricultural purposes, as was the case at the time of the original application two years ago. The clarification provided as part of this submission provides the Council with clear information on the extent of the use.
- 6.4 The use of the building does not harm the character or appearance of the countryside, nor will it impact on the amenities enjoyed by the occupiers of neighbouring dwellings whilst also not prejudicing the safe and efficient use of the highway network.
- 6.5 The proposal therefore constitutes sustainable development which accords with the relevant policies Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan.

- 6.6 In accordance with the presumption in favour of such development established by Paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and the significant weight attached to economic development prescribed by Paragraphs 85 and 88, it is therefore respectfully requested that the application be approved.