

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2025/0221
Valid 08/05/2025

LITTLE BLAKELEY LANE FARM
BLAKELEY LANE
DILHORNE

PROPOSED ERECTION OF AN
AGRICULTURAL BUILDING FOR
LIVESTOCK ACCOMMODATION

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Principle of development (Green Belt)
- Planning history
- Design and visual impact
- Amenity
- Highways
- Biodiversity / Ecology
- Coal (low-risk) development area

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The application site is Little Blakeley Lane Farm (Oakley's Farm). The site, including existing buildings are seen prominently from the closely adjacent Leek, Road (A522), Kinglsey Road (A52) and a minor road on higher ground overlooking from a short distance to the west. For the purposes of planning policy consideration, the application site is located within the Green Belt.

PROPOSAL

The erection of an agricultural building. The proposed building would measure 30.49m wide, 12.19m deep. The eaves would be 4.4m high with the ridge extending to 6.2m high. The building is designed to have a roof overhang, its overall dimensions being 13.77m x 31.01m. The building would be open sided, have 5 bays and a total of 10 roof lights (clear upvc - 5 within each roof slope). Fibre cement sheeting (anthracite grey colour) would be used for the roof covering. Walls would be constructed using Yorkshire Boarding above pre-cast, concrete wall panels. The half-height doors on each side of the building (adjacent to the open bays) would be galvanised metal sheets.

A new yard area would be formed to the front and southern side of the building. The new yard is shown to connect to the existing. Excavation would be required to level the land. A site sections plan and a Cut and Fill plan have been submitted to show the extent of excavation and the increased land level height. The cut and fill plan shows clearly the areas to be excavated and the areas where the land levels would be increased in height. A 1.2m high retaining wall is proposed to be erected.

In addition to the application plans, a Design and Access Statement, statement from the applicants, an Ecological Survey and Biodiversity Metric have been submitted.

The Design and Access Statement can be summarised as follows'

- Total land farmed by Oakley Farm Ltd is approximately 22.59 hectares (55acres),
- Land is farmed as an agricultural unit. All land is laid down to grass for grazing and the production of fodder for the farm animals.
- Principal enterprise is water buffalo for meat production.
- Animals kept at the farm are for corporate and family entertainment purposes. Events conducted off-site.
- Animals include reindeer, donkeys, Meercats, camels, and other small animals used in this farm diversification enterprise. Reindeer also produce antlers which are sold to customers.
- Livestock at the farm comprises 46 Water buffalo (including 6 calves), 12 Reindeer, 2 Donkeys and 2 Camels.

- Proposed building will provide secure and safe accommodation, and covered feeding area for livestock, primarily the water buffalo.
- Additional grazing land has been acquired.
- Existing livestock sheds are too small
- Agricultural storage building is unsuitable for livestock due to no natural ventilation. The building is required for secure storage of farming machinery and equipment.
- Drainage system will be installed to separate roof water runoff and ground water runoff.
- Outlines landscape and ecological enhancement measures.
- Grassland enhancement will provide Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Building materials will match those used elsewhere on the farm.
- Existing highway access will be used.
- Discussion of planning policy considerations
- Building will be unobtrusive within the established farmyard.
- Will not have an adverse impact on the visual appearance and landscape character of the area.
- Is sustainable, rural development.
- Building will be set in the hillside to reduce visual impact from public vantage points.
- Will not impact greatly upon the landscape or neighbours.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan

SS1	Development Principles
SS2	Settlement Hierarchy
SS10	Other Rural Areas Area Strategy
SD4	Pollution and Water Quality
DC1	Design Considerations
DC3	Landscape and Settlement Setting
NE1	Biodiversity and Geological Resources
NE2	Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
T1	Development and Sustainable Transport

Supplementary Planning Guidance

1. Design Principles for Development in the Staffordshire Moorlands

Supplementary Planning Document

1. Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide

National Planning Policy Framework

Including sections:

2	Achieving sustainable development
6	Building a strong, competitive economy
9	Promoting sustainable transport
12	Achieving well-designed places
13	Protecting Green Belt land
14	Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
15	Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

Much planning history relating to the wider site including the following.

01/00471/FUL	Retrospective application for 1st floor extension, new pitched roof over existing bedroom and additional block and render skin to part of existing utility/dining room. Invalid application returned.
02/00057/FUL	First floor side extension. Approved.
02/00287/FUL	Single/two storey rear extension including animal shed/hayloft. Refused.
02/00647/FUL	Single storey rear extension. Refused.
02/0978/FUL	Single storey rear extension. Approved.
12/01346/FUL	Replacement agricultural building, extension to yard area and additional planting adjacent to the building to provide screening. Approved.
SMD/2017/0815	Erection of a poly-tunnel for rearing calves, retrospective. Approved.
SMD/2018/0249	Retrospective application for the erection of a barn. Refused.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice. Expired.

Neighbour consultation period. Expired

Public Comments

No representations received during the statutory consultation period.

Consall Parish Council

No representations received during the statutory consultation period.

Trees (SMDC)

No representations received during the statutory consultation period.

Environmental Health

No objections subject to conditions.

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Recommendation Summary: Conditional

Site Visit Conducted on: 14-May-2025

1. The development hereby permitted shall not be brought into use until the access drive rear of the public highway has been reconstructed and surfaced and thereafter maintained in a bound material for a minimum distance of 10m back from the carriageway edge in accordance with details to be first submitted to and approved in writing by the Local planning authority. The access shall thereafter be surfaced in accordance with the approved details.

Reason:-

To comply with NPPF Para 116; to comply with SMDC Local Plan policy DC1; in the interests of highway safety.

Notes to Planning Officer

Application is for an agricultural building. Access is existing and in current use for the wider site. Visibility is good and existing gates are set back from the highway. However, the access is unsurfaced. Loose material and mud is being brought onto the highway. As this proposal could increase the use of the access, condition is recommended to provide bound surfacing to reduce the likelihood of loose

material being brought onto the highway and to improve access from the highway to the site and vice versa. Site is in current use for a variety of agricultural and commercial activities. Proposed building will improve facilities. Current records show that there were no Personal Injury Collisions on Leek Road or Blakeley Lane within 100m either side of the property access in the previous five years.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust
Holding objection.

Date: 02.07.2025

Application Reference: SMD/2025/0221

Location: Little Blakeley Lane Farm , Blakeley Lane , Dilhorne , Staffordshire , ST10 2PT

Proposed Development: Proposed Erection of an Agricultural Building For Livestock Accommodation.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust has been asked to review the above application as part of a service level agreement with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council to provide ecology advice regarding planning and development management functions.

Documents Viewed:

- Application form
- Whilock ecological survey April 2025 Final- Chris Seabridge and Associates
- The_Statutory_Biodiversity_Metric_Calculation_Tool_-_Macro_enabled_tool_23.07.2024
OakleyFinal- Chris Seabridge and Associates
- 101860-001- Oakley Agricultural building DAS April 2025- Mid West Planning
- 101860_OAKLEY_001_PL01_R1_LOCATION PLAN- Mid West Planning
- 101860_OAKLEY_001_PL02_R1_EXISTING SITE PLAN- Mid West Planning
- 101860_OAKLEY_001_PL03_R2_PROPOSED SITE PLAN- Mid West Planning
- 101860_OAKLEY_001_PL04_R1_LANDSCAPING PLAN- Mid West Planning

Summary: We recommend a **holding objection** until the following information is supplied and our comments are resolved:

- Pending the results of a soil sample that show the other neutral grassland can be delivered.
- The metric is updated to reflect the strategic significance of the grassland habitats on the site.
- Clarification of why sparsely vegetated land is used in the report but not the metric
- We would also need to see details of S106 securing management and monitoring- see details below
- LEMP or plan detailing how ground conditions for habitats will be achieved

Further detail

Ecological Report:

When looking at the Net Gain Staffs website, the site is in a strategic area for grassland, this needs reflecting on the metric for the grassland habitats.

There is a difference in the report and the metric with the sparsely vegetated land. In the metric it has been referred to as urban- vacant or derelict land. Can an explanation to why this code has been used in the metric be given or match the habitat in the report to what is in the metric.

The seed mix chosen to create the other neutral grassland needs to ensure that the required condition can be met as per condition assessments which will be used for monitoring.

If the condition assessments can be provided that would be useful.

BNG

BNG is a material consideration, and we have insufficient information to consider whether the Biodiversity Gain Condition is capable of being discharged. To enable us to do this for this application, we require the following information:

Significant On-site Habitats

- Soil test showing conditions are suitable for creation of grassland (this is required after conditions have been created)
- Detail in the LEMP of the creation of suitable ground conditions and seed mixes for the habitats you are creating

- Details of S106 securing management and monitoring of the significant on-site BNG
- Draft HMMP detailing management to create desired habitat, timings of when you would expect to see certain conditions and remedial measures for if things do not go to plan
- You may wish to submit a draft Biodiversity Gain Plan to provide evidence that the trading rules / net gain hierarchy etc have been met
- Draft post development BNG metric and habitat plan

Conditions

Any works that could potentially cause disturbance to nesting birds including mitigation measures should be ideally conducted outside the main bird nesting season (March – August inclusive). If works are carried out during the nesting season, then a suitably qualified ecologist should make a check for nesting birds immediately before works commence

As per NPPF, government Planning Practice Guidance on the natural environment, it is requested that bird boxes are included in the design – we would recommend at least three Swift boxes (installed at least 5m high), at least one sparrow terrace and as the building is open, two Swallow nest cups should be installed, although we are happy for other types of nest box to be provided if deemed more suitable for the site/ structure. A plan showing location, type and number of nest boxes to be delivered as a pre-commencement condition and a further condition for their delivery.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

For the purposes of planning policy consideration, the application site is located within the open countryside, within an area that has a Green Belt designation. Local Plan policy SS1 sets out the development principles within the plan area where the expectation is for the development and use of land to contribute positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands. Local Plan policy SS10 'Other Rural Areas Strategy' supports development which has an essential need to be located in the countryside, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas and promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside. Policy SS10 also specifically refers to development in the Green Belt in 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 site is within the Green Belt and also within the Settled Plateau Farmlands Landscape Character Type.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) discusses Green belt developments within section 13 'Protecting Green Belt land.' NPPF paragraph number 153 states that 'when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness.' Paragraph number 153 goes on to state that 'Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.'

NPPF paragraph number 154 clarifies that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless it falls into one of the listed exceptions. One of the listed exceptions are buildings for agriculture and forestry.

NPPF paragraph number 143 outlines the five purposes that the Green belt serves, they are

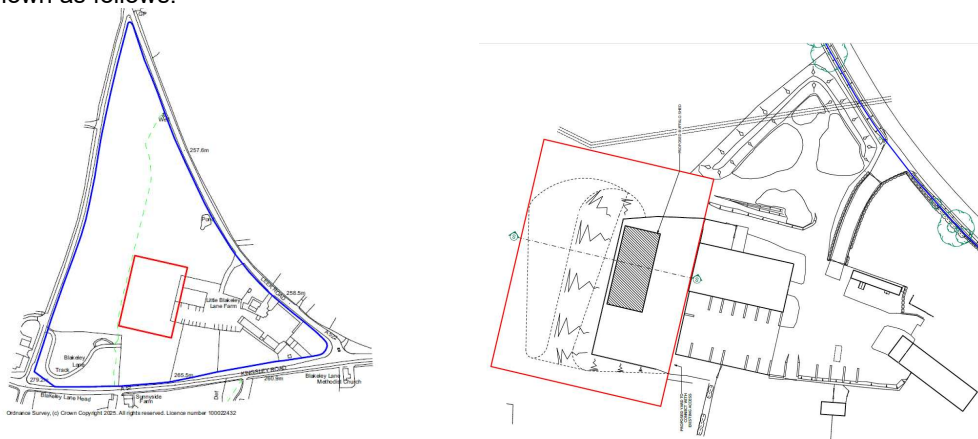
- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The application states that this is an agricultural livestock building. If this is found to be the case, then the building would not be 'inappropriate' and determination of the application would be based on other material planning considerations such as (but not limited to) design, visual impact, highways, amenity etc.

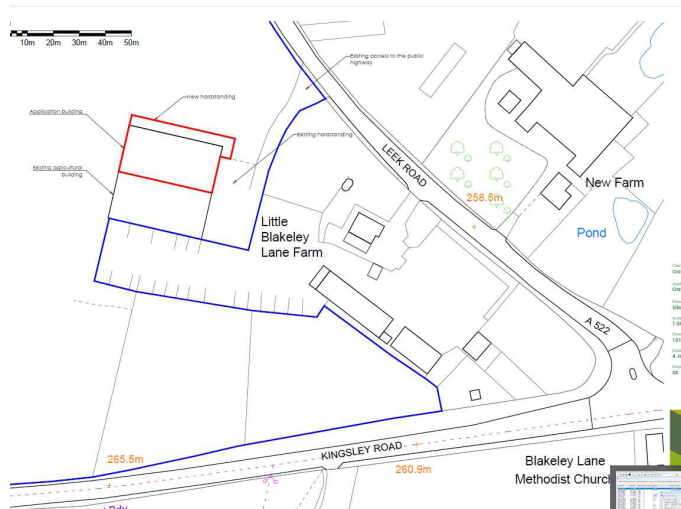
There is a wealth of planning history relating to this site showing refusals for proposed developments and retrospective applications/schemes. There is significant planning enforcement involvement due to unauthorised works. For the sake of brevity, it is not intended to repeat/duplicate the reports of previous case officer's (these are publicly available to view), but what is clear, is that the site has a history of planning refusals where issues of agricultural need are questioned. Dealing with the principle of development, application SMD/2019/0328 included the following reason for refusal;

- As the application premises are being used intensively for a wide range of non-agricultural enterprises taking up existing building space it is not appropriate to grant Green Belt exemption under NPPF 154(a) for a building for agriculture when there are existing buildings on the land which if freed of their non-agricultural (and unauthorised) uses could be utilised (subject to any necessary further consents) to fulfill the proposed needs under this application and the building proposed also does not therefore have an essential need to be located in this open rural area.

Very relevant are the following referenced, and very recent, GPDO Part 6 Prior notification applications which proposed (and refused) buildings very close to the location of the building the subject of the current application (SMD/2025/0221). The currently proposed building, yard and land levelling location is shown as follows.



DET/2024/0021 'Erection of agricultural building to house young beef cattle' was refused, it's location shown below



one of the refusal reasons are as follows;

- In order to qualify as Permitted Development under Schedule 2 Part 6 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order (2015) (as amended) the works for the

erection of the building proposed must be reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture within the agricultural unit. Already existing alongside (though without planning consent) is a building of equivalent size and similar form that is currently largely not in agricultural use. Within the holding's land title there are further buildings at Little Blakely Farm that are also not or not fully in agricultural use and without planning consent for the non-agricultural activities or usage. With existing buildings which could be made available if freed of their non agricultural usage the LPA finds the building proposed is not reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture within the unit and therefore cannot grant consent in response to this prior notice proposal.

DET/2024/0052 'General purpose agricultural building,' proposed a building in the location shown below, one of the refusal reasons was:

- In order to qualify as Permitted Development under Schedule 2 Part 6 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order (2015) (as amended) the works for the erection of the building proposed must be reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture within the agricultural unit. The application makes generalised submissions as to the agricultural need but without any clear correlation being drawn to justify the space requirements. The application follows a recent previous refusal (DET/2024/0021) when it was found that significant amounts of space within existing buildings at the premises were in use for non-agricultural storage on a significant scale. Against this background and in the absence of clear quantitative justification the LPA finds that the building proposed is not shown to be reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture within the unit.



The above referenced DET applications were determined on 30th August 2024 (DET/2024/0021) and 23rd December 2024 (DET/2024/0052).

The blue line of the current SMD/2025/0221 application surrounds all the buildings on the site. Crucially it is noted that this submission is for an agricultural building within a very similar location to the above referenced DET applications. However it does not deal with the questions of agricultural need which have previously been raised, in that there are buildings (including unauthorised buildings) on the site which (subject to securing the appropriate consents) might be suitable for the livestock housing currently proposed. This application informs the LPA that the proposed building will provide secure and safe accommodation, and covered feeding area for livestock, primarily the water buffalo. The LPA are also told that the building is required for the secure storage of farming machinery and equipment. The application does not provide any details about the use of other buildings and whether the unauthorised matters have been addressed/dealt with. For these reasons it is not possible to support an application under the Green Belt policy exemptions specified within paragraph number 154 of the NPPF. The application presents no very special circumstances.

Design and visual impact

The proposed building is large. The proposed footprint measures some 30.49m wide and 12.19m deep. The eaves would extend to 4.4m high and the ridge would have an overall height of 6.2m. The site is extremely visually prominent and can be seen from surrounding roads. Land levels rise towards the west. To construct the building there would have to be a significant amount of excavation to level the land. The submitted plans show that the land excavated to accommodate both the building and the yard, would be used to raise the land levels behind the proposed building to a plateau of over 7m higher than the floor level of the nearby building, and akin to the height of the building hereby proposed. The plans also show the significant extent of area where the levels would be raised. The proposed earthworks would have a significant and unacceptable visual and physical impact upon the undeveloped countryside and open landscape at this point, especially as there is no established support in principle for the development. The proposal also brings development further away from the more established cluster of buildings to the east, clearly representing encroachment into the Green belt not only by the building itself but also because of the large expanse of proposed hardstanding/yard area.

Amenity

There are properties within the surrounding area which are not connected to the application site. Due to separation distances there are no concerns relating to neighbour amenity in terms of the building being overbearing. The main consideration would generally be the impact of the use of the building for livestock accommodation upon the amenity of surrounding residents. The Councils Environmental Health officer has assessed the application and raises no objections to it subject to a number of recommended conditions. The recommended conditions cover matters including times in which building/demolition works can be carried out, manure management/storage, importation of fill material, unexpected contamination, and lighting. No representations from members have the public have been received.

Highways

The application does not propose any vehicular access alterations. The County Highways Officer does not raise any objections to the application but requests a condition relating to the surfacing of the access for a minimum distance of 10m rear of the carriageway edge, due to its current unsurfaced nature and resultant loose material and mud being brought onto the highway.

Biodiversity / Ecology

The application is subject to the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) regulations. In addition to the Biodiversity metric, the application is accompanied by an Ecological Survey, dated April 2025. Staffordshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) have lodged a Holding objection on the basis of insufficient information being supplied. Detailed comments from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust can be found within the Consultations section of this report. The SWT consultation response clearly outlines the reasons why the holding objection has been registered.

Coal (low-risk) development area

The application site lies within an area designated as a low-risk coal development area and as such this may be an area which contains unrecorded coal mining related hazards. In the event of planning permission being approved, that informative notes are added to the decision to remind/inform the applicant/developer of their responsibilities.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

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. In order for this proposal to be found acceptable as a matter of principle in this Green Belt location the LPA must be satisfied fundamentally that the proposal is for agriculture. If that is accepted, consideration can then be given to its landscape, amenity and design impacts with reference to policy DC1 and DC3 in particular. The LPA continues to have concerns that the site and its buildings are being used to a significant degree for non-agricultural activities. Unauthorised developments still exist. The application cannot therefore be supported in principle.

Furthermore there are concerns relating to the visual and physical impact of the development upon the open countryside / Green Belt at this point. The proposed building would be sited within an open setting

of former field land, which would be highly publicly visible from surrounding roads. There would be visual harm to the character and appearance of the area, as well as Green Belt openness harm, arising from the siting, design and appearance of the building, as well as the extent of proposed earthworks (including cut-and-fill) and construction of the large yard area. The landscape, visual impact and openness harm is unacceptable especially given the absence of justification for the building in the context of the pre-existing site

As per the consultation response from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, it is concluded that the application has not demonstrated the requirements for securing satisfactory Biodiversity Net Gain.

The application is therefore recommended for refusal.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : Refuse.

Case Officer: Lisa Jackson

Recommendation Date: 03.07.2025

X *B.J. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council